

Creative writings in wretched times

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In the 1960s and 70s there was a group of Sri Lankan writers who wrote in English. Many of them have ceased to write since the later 1980s. One of them who was teaching abroad, once wrote to me around the year 2000 stating that with the changing circumstances in the country many who were writing earlier have ceased to write.

The evil that takes place in society when it is so widespread has its impact on everyone, even though there may be so many who are not directly affected by the violence, the fraud and the deceit that becomes so common. However, all human beings who see and hear these things are deeply affected by what they see as wrong and evil around them.

For many, silence comes not as a result of direct fear but due to disgust. They develop contempt for the type of despicable behavior that they see around them. They see how life is being mocked. They see how humor disappears in their society.

In the small disputes under the normal circumstances of life, people intervene. They bring some humor to their neighbors or even strangers who may engage in some sort of quarrel. This type of normal human intervention helps to bring down tempers and calm people.

However, when social evils are so deep and so common, people cease to intervene. In fact, internally they withdraw from a society that they cannot cope with.

In such times what do you write about?

Charles Pierre Baudelaire wrote *Les Fleurs du mal* ("The Flowers of Evil"). Many other writers living under such circumstances gave expression to the wrath against the widespread degeneration that is part of wretched times. And in the circumstances of Sri Lanka and other countries like Cambodia and Burma, it is the writers that can reflect on the evils of their time that can keep the creative discourse going.

In these times those critics who say that issues of justice and injustice are not suitable topics for such writings are themselves engaged in deception. In societies where murder has become so common and is even legitimized by the state, where life is trivialized by propaganda agencies, not to be angry, not to express disgust, not to express wrath is humanly demeaning. To expect creative writers to demean themselves by contributing to the deception of their times is itself a reflection of how deep the degeneration has crept in.

In such wretched times, human commitment to others lies in trying to write about the wretched of the earth who suffer the brutality of such cruel times.

A country like Sri Lanka which has allowed large scale murder by the state as well as by its opponents for almost four decades now, has created in the minds of its citizens a disgust for the type of society they are being forced to live in. Whether some will admit this openly or not is not the issue. The natural disgust for murder, fraud and deceit are such inherent qualities of human beings, that it would be strange if it were to be said that Sri Lankan society is an exception to this.

This deeper inner mind of the Sri Lankans needs to be given expression too. This is a challenge that the creative writers are facing under these circumstances.

Oh, you miserable pen pusher

Oh, you miserable pen pusher
Trying to kill the dead the second time

Your sword cannot hurt the dead
It hurts the living which includes you

To those who are killed
We need to apologize
To remove the pain of the living
To prevent the living rotting alive

You poison your drink
And of not others
Dead do not die again
You and other living ones do all the time.

We should apologize to dead
For their murders
To save ourselves
From our collective death

You rotting pen pusher
Look in the mirror and smile
In the mirror you will see
Something worse than death

A Son's Tale

It was a crowd of twenty or so
Many not so young and some old
One among the not so young rose
This tale he told

Blame not for what I say
I am worried and this I thought
I should be loud say
For years now it bothers me

My father had father
Him my father dearly loved
Humble gentle a man was he
I was told

To a landlord's family
A tenant farmer was he
Working hard earned but little
With respect he served the masters

Hurt in his heart he hid
To his son he said
Never a tenet father be
Get away from here and study

To a distant place my father fled
With someone's help books he read
To make my story short
After study some fortune he amassed

During that long time
Of his father he did hear
That the master revenging son's departure
Had beaten his father dear

Some revenge my father had in mind
Brought lands next to the masters
Furious was this landed lot
Seeing servant's son their equal

This way some years had fled
A day when we all were gone
He was left alone
In the big house now he owned

Some from the old master house
Like wolf had enter and pounced
Beating him hard shouting words so foul
Thinking him dead had happily left

Returning home I saw my father dear
Thinking him dead was full of tears
With neighbours help to hospital went
Found him unconscious but not dead

Doctors did him well treat
His heart did better beat
All the story he did with names repeat
Police and lawyers were upbeat

Here my friends my worries start
My father in fact were my breath his last
In court three were sentenced to death
I must say, I had my revenge

Now do not blame when you this hear
Give me your forgiveness ear
When my father was still not dead
Here is something that doctor said

It is possible to prolong father's life a little
But a serious surgery he need
Risk there is that his memory
He may fully lose

I loved my father and his father too
Wanted him alive with memory or not
But with honestly let me say
A lawyer I did consult

Briefly this is what he said
Your father had told what happened
If he dies or live to tell his tale
To death or jail those villains will go

If he lives but cannot tell his tale
I asked this lawyer and this he said
Then these villains will free go
A profound problem in me arose

Whole night sleepless I thought
Justice to him, his father, I did want
But to let him go
That I did not want

Tell what you wish or forgive if you can
The risk of loss of his memory take
I did not
Soon peacefully he was gone

Now my secret I have said
Not so old man said and sat
There was silence all around
No word any one uttered.

More of Basil Fernando's poetry and prose can be found at www.basilfernando.net under literature.