

Those left behind

Editorial

That the victims of human rights violation suffer is well documented and accepted. The sufferings of their families is both less well known, and less discussed. The following excerpts from the Human Rights and Culture newsletter document the thoughts of one father who lost his son, and two solidarity responses.

Human Rights and Culture, Issue 30: AHRC-ART-030-2008, 31 October 2008

A letter from the father

Baseer Naveed

Today (October 28) would have been the 24th birthday of my son Faraz Ahmed, who was kidnapped on 8 November 2004. His tortured body was found two days later outside the wall of my work place, Radio FM103. He had turned 20 just 10 days before.

He came to my office to collect his university fees from me as on that day I received the advance for his fees. I also asked him to do a program of one hour on the life of a famous poet Joan Elia who died just one year before on 2003 on the same day. My son was very fond of him and he remembered all his three books like a recitation of a holy book. His program was so good that the telephone calls started pouring into our office as people wanted to talk him. I told the callers that he had gone to the toilet and to call again. But after 30 minutes we found that he was not there. Somebody had called him from outside and since then he had been missing. Then after two days we found his mutilated and tortured body lying along the wall of my office.

On his last birthday he went with his mother and purchased books for his studies instead of birthday clothes. In his all life he was totally disinterested in good clothing. The first time in his life he was happy to have some western dress when he was invited in a youth peace conference in Canada, in 1998, he was only 15 years and had been selected from amongst 112 young men.

People tell me that my son still lives in my heart but I know the actual meaning of these words. He was a writer, poet, news writer, anchor person, a very good student, a very good son and a very good companion to his brother and sister.

It is a loss for the whole nation; such a brilliant and outstanding young man was murdered for no crime.

To whom shall I say Happy Birthday today. Anyhow, happy birthday to him.

Baseer Naveed is a Senior Researcher with the Asian Human Rights Commission. He now lives in Hong Kong with his wife, son and daughter. Baseer runs the Pakistan desk at the AHRC and is dedicated to finding viable solutions to the human rights problems being faced by his countrymen. In particular, Baseer campaigns on the issue of honour killings and the death penalty. Baseer is the recipient of several awards received for efforts to obtain housing for disadvantaged people in Pakistan.

My dear brother Baseer,
K G Sankara Pillai

We went through your touching note to your son on his 24th birthday.
went through every word of that note;
saw the depth and width of human suffering in times and spaces
of inhuman state of affairs.

We went through the deep silence in between your words;
It is the dark silence of the abyss of existential agony stretched over
the past the present and the future in your life,
in everybody's life.
In the sad life of a great nation, of all nations,
in the brutally injured history of democracy,
in the tortured ethics of power,
in the eternal tragic rift between crime and punishment.

We hear that silence in your expression as a greater language beyond words.
It is not a suppression.
It is a more powerful expression of love and hope.
A dissent against destiny.
That silence carries cry and criticism,
wrath and agitation.

It is a poignant statement against the fascism of brutal state power,
the blades of which are ployed against the innocence of the ordinary people .
Autocracy is always afraid of truth and youth and written word.
Autocracy is madly aggressive against
the youth gifted with high rate of creativity and brighter vision of history;
the real saviour saints of our time .

Dear Baseer, the silence in between your words
flows like a dark brown river of meaning
through the anxiety and sufferings of
true lives of thousands of innocent people ,
all over the world.

I could also experience the spiritual strength of a father, of a family,
in their patient revolt in transcending their unequalled pain
to sublime forms of humanness,
in rearranging their lives to strengthen the new social movements for the protection of human rights and
peace, which I believe is
totally relevant in a time of growing resistance against all kinds of kindless atrocities.

This day of great birth is now a great day of reminder of creativity,
culture , and human values.
Your sacrifice is among the greatest of its creed.

With love and respects to my dear Baseer Naweed and family,
KGS
Lakshmi;

Adityan

From Thrisur, Kerala , India.

K G Sankara Pillai, is a contemporary Indian poet writing in Malayalam. He has won the National Award for Poetry in India on two occasions. More about this author may be found at

http://india.poetryinternationalweb.org/piw/cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=8636

what are we

Basil Fernando

parents are finite
children are infinite
in the birth of a child
parents experience the infinite

when the state
becomes a death squad
against the young
nature is disturbed
profoundly,
out of the depths
humanity cries out and asks
“what are we?”

when the shadow of Herod
falls on humanity
state versus parents
death squads against parents
profoundly disturbed humanity asks
“what are we?”

when the seed is destroyed,
the tree asks
“what am i?”
if god destroyed the seed
the tree will ask
“what is he?”
when the State destroys the young
“what is it?”

when seed-destroying death squads
move against humanity
one parent's pain
is the cry of all that is human
left in humanity
manipulating language

media supports the death squads
attempting to drown the voice

of humanity that asks
“what are we?”

parents' cry of protest
the cry of pain
in the face of the death of the young
is the pure stream of humanity
that still flows
while death squads and the media
murder the infinite.

Basil Fernando is a Sri Lankan poet and has published several collections of poems. An anthology of his poems entitled, *Sundramaithry*, has been translated into Malayalam by Dr. Dhanya Menon, and published in 2008. This is the first anthology of Sri Lankan poetry translated into any India language. His writings may be seen at www.basilfernando.net under literature.

In the spirit of focusing on the loved ones of human rights abuse victims, two other articles in this issue of *Ethics in Action* tell of family suffering. The first article on Bangladesh narrates the obstacles and fear felt by the wife and families of two human rights defenders detained by the police on fabricated charges. The second article on India consists of first person narratives of two victims of army and police abuse respectively, and their lives afterwards.

Without addressing the difficulties and needs faced by the victims and their families, no human rights work is genuinely complete or effective.