

Interview 31: SRI LANKA: Chathuri Tharangani

Ms. Chathuri Tharangani is a 25-year old sociology graduate from the University of Kelaniya. This transcript is a translation of her interview.

What do you think of the policing system of Sri Lanka?

I think the policing system should be changed. We are all human beings and we all deserve equal treatment. Although we belong to different socio-economic classes, we all deserve good services from the state authorities. Otherwise this will turn into a crisis situation. In Sri Lanka, such a crisis already exists. Let us take some incidents as examples: the two killings in Angulana, both young boys, the assault of the student Nipuna Ramanayake, the murder of the youth Lalantha in Migahawela, the murder of Gerald Mervin Perera and the murder of Sugath Nishanta Fernando. In Sri Lanka, it is difficult to maintain statistics on the killings caused by motor accidents and police assaults. The police have become barbaric. But we have to talk this way when we consider the actions of the entire police force; there are police officers who are good, loyal and law-abiding, but there aren't very many of them.

What do you think of use of torture by police?

Before we had the legal system, society worked to maintain peace in their various tribes by punishing wrongdoers in a serious, barbaric way, like the 32 ways of torture, known as 'dethismahawada.' These types of punishment happened during the rule of the kings. Over time, such punishments have become less and less common. The policing system has been established to protect society. But it is difficult to say that they carry out this duty well, because they torture so many people. The people do commit wrongdoings, but there should be a more fair way of punishing them that does not involve physical violence. Offenders should be punished in courts, not by the police. In Sri Lanka, the role of the court and the role of the police is interchangeable because the police do what only the judiciary should be doing. I don't agree with police torture. The police should be a people's institution which works to ensure the protection of the people.

How is the relationship between the police and the people?

To answer this question, we need to divide people into two categories: one, the politicians and rich businessmen and two, the uneducated, poor people. The relationship between the police and these two categories are different. The police take action on behalf of the first category very quickly. For the second category, their actions involve the use of abusive language and demanding bribes. The relationship between the people and the police is not successful.

If you had a problem, would you go to a police station to make a complaint?

Before going to a police station to make a complaint, I would think about whether I should go, not just twice but three or four times. In Sri Lanka, we fear how many problems we have to face at the police station, along with the one problem we are going to the police for in the first place. Also, we don't know whether we will leave a police station in the same condition that we entered it in.

Is there a law against domestic violence in your country?

I do not have a clear understanding as to whether there is a law regarding domestic violence or not. But I have heard of various organizations which fight domestic violence through the media.