

Ethics in Action

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Ethics in Action



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Cover photo:

A little girl assists her mother to look after the house and sell things, Cambodia.

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Manifold forms of culture-based unkindness and cruelty

Basil Fernando

People who do not have a public voice often still make themselves heard in private groups and small circles. Many of them do this through poetry and other forms of expression. No matter the size of the audience, the individual poet and writer finds fulfillment in the very expression of an issue important to her. There is a need to tell, regardless of whether or not an audience is there to listen.

This telling is not the same as that of an accomplished artist who is aware of his audience. He is likely to know why he is doing what he does; he may be trying to entertain or educate or both. Those who write without expecting an audience however, do so because of a need to tell whatever they feel so strongly about. The writings in this volume of Ethics in Action mostly belong to this category, written by people who feel a strong sense of injustice and who want to register a protest even it is not going to be heard by anybody. Not only does this writing then represent the sigh of the oppressed, it also represents that aspect of human dignity which even when suppressed to the utmost, still needs to protest.

Take the case of a girl who records her painful thoughts about being treated by her father as someone of no significance, while her brother is showered with demonstrations of love, in I am a girl:

*My father says: "She does not belong to us,
She is a daughter, a shadow who is with us for a fleeting time only."
My mother says that when I go to sleep at night,
And wander carelessly in the wonderful world of dreams,
My father comes and fondles my head
Smiling softly to himself.*

*How I wish that one such day I wake up
To see and feel my father's love.*

Or a woman's painful memory of genital mutilation in The Cut by Maryam Sheikh Abdi, which describes how older women pretend to be strong while mechanically participating in this horrendous act of cruelty against womanhood and a little child.

*Obediently, I sat between the legs of the woman
 who would hold my upper abdomen,
 and each of the other four women grasped my legs and hands.
 I was stretched apart and each limb firmly held.
 And under the shade of a tree...
 the cutter begun her work...
 the pain... is so vivid to this day,
 decades after it was done.
 God, it was awful!*

This poem is not just about revealing a horrible ritual forced upon women in certain cultures; it is a poem of defiance. A woman speaks out about what she is supposed to keep quiet, what she should accept with resignation as a virtuous woman. She cries out loud so that all can hear the vulgarity and inhumanity that goes on in the name of culture. When the oppressed creature acquires the capacity to break the silence and expresses what is not expected to be expressed, it is defiance. In the face of such defiance oppression is challenged; this is the moment the seed is broken to give way to a new life. The poet is engaged in this creativity, directed towards causing shock and even pain so that conscience buried under the ashes can rise again. Women by Frederico Mayor is about a new song of a woman to see things differently. “*Woman, Your eyes Saw the world in another way.*” It calls for women to have no other masters and to live equal and free, “*as companions.*”

Other poems look at social practices that undermine women. Sue Silvermaria writes of how religious sanctions subject women to brutality:

*Before the flogging they buried me to my waist in mud
 One hundred times and one, they beat me with a cane
 Because I was wearing a burqa
 the mullah was spared the sight of my blood.*

Similarly, Sita Agarwal writes about the treatment of women under in Hinduism, from dowry related cruelty to female infanticide:

After 50 years of Independence, cases of female infanticide, sati, dowry-related murders and crimes against women are on the increase, and in many cases are at their highest levels seen since the birth of the Indian Republic. I soon realized that the reason is that Indian feminism has not tackled the core of the evil, but has only squabbled about superficial aspects of the problem. Western feminism was merely transplanted onto the subcontinent, and like many plants, had been unable to thrive in its new environment. It is only by tackling the root of the problem that this plant can grow. I hope that this book shall enlighten all Indian women as to the

true reasons for the abject state of subjugation we are in.

The experience of women living in cultures that design various schemes to deny them their humanity is common to many others throughout this volume. Various essays and poetry on Dalits and caste discrimination share the same theme of a denial of humanity, as do poems by Mahmoud Darwish.

In one poem a father confronted with racial violence steps out of his car that has been set alight by a mob, takes his two children in his arms and walks back into the burning car to be burned alive together. This is the ultimate protest of a human being trapped in the insanity of his society, who does not want his children to be left to relive the trauma of their parents being burned alive. The type of violence that exists today places many people in such circumstances.

All the writings in this volume demonstrate a state of injustice that is legitimized. The injustices narrated are not accidents or rare occurrences; they are the routine of a perverse society.

Any creative writing within such a society would necessarily have to deal with this actuality. For this reason, the writers in this volume have moved away from any romantic or nationalist perspectives. Rather, humanity is at the center of their concern. In fact, justice and humanity are manifested in these writings as two sides of the same reality. A society that denies justice cannot be romanticized simply because it is 'our society'. In fact, such a society is not and cannot be our society. It can only appear to be ours through propaganda and the creation of the 'other' (whether in colour, gender, race or language). In these writings, the only 'others' recognized are those who deny justice. Everyone else is embraced as 'ours'. Poverty and other forms of deprivation do not serve to exclude; rather, they offer greater reason to be included as 'ours'. Humanity is no exclusive group.

This volume of Ethics in Action is a compilation of poetry, prose and pictures taken from past issues of the Asian Human Rights Commission's Human Rights and Culture newsletter (<http://www.ahrchk.net/pub/mainfile.php/hrculture/>).

The newsletter publishes various cultural expressions based on the pivotal theme of justice, the search for which is at the very essence of being human. Human beings are part of nature and part of each other. Perhaps the lines of John Donne are most relevant: "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind."

Contemporary mass culture promotes violence and destruction. There are those who are opposed to mass culture and want to reclaim the best traditions of human culture within which justice remains a core issue. The newsletter provides space for those who wish to share their creative initiatives.

Woman and girls

I am a girl . . .

(Poem by a girl child, part of the Pakistan Girl Child Project)

My father does not love me;
Perhaps he does, but he doesn't express it.
My brother is younger than me,
But, because he is a boy,
He is the apple of my father's eye.

When my father comes home from work in the evening,
"My son, my son, my son!" is all he has to say.
Every word of my brother is like the order of a king.
He is my father's identity, my father's future.
It is my brother's doll's wedding tomorrow.
But my doll is still at home, alone and friendless.

No matter if my brother misses school,
No matter if he makes fun of me,
No matter if he raises his hand at me,
No matter if he breaks something.

But if I make even a small mistake,
My father immediately scolds me:
"You are 17 and still so useless!!
Perhaps you may get some sense when you are an old woman!"

My father says: "She does not belong to us,
She is a daughter, a shadow who is with us for a fleeting time only."
My mother says that when I go to sleep at night,
And wander carelessly in the wonderful world of dreams,
My father comes and fondles my head
Smiling softly to himself.

How I wish that one such day I wake up
To see and feel my father's love.

Women

Federico Mayor

Woman
You brought with you
A new song.
But we did not let you
Speak out
Although yours
Is the voice of half the earth.

Woman,
Your eyes
Saw the world
Another way.
But we did not want
To know the meaning
And warmth
Of your vision.

Woman,
You carried under your skin
Of all colors
The seed
Of the future,
The light
Which could illuminate
Different paths
Rebellious
Yet peaceful ways,
Woman-bridge
Woman-bond
Woman-root
And fruit of love
And tenderness.

Woman,
Your hands outstretched
And your open arms
Enfold the immensity
Of refuge

And of comfort.
 But we have not understood
 The strength of your embrace
 Nor the cry of your silence
 And we carry on
 With neither compass
 Nor relief.

Woman,
 With no other master
 But yourself,
 Live from now on
 Equal and free,
 Now as companion
 Sharing
 The same dream FOREVER.

If only our Prophets were Women

Cecil Rajendra

(For Zainah Anwar & SIS)

If only our Prophets were Women
 the History of our World
 would have been so very different.

Abraham, Moses
 Muhammad, Jesus —
 good men, all of them
 who preached Peace
 Love & Universal Brotherhood.
 But MEN, nonetheless

Still, it must be admitted
 (Message of Love, aside)
 men who boldly flaunted
 a strong feminine side
 in choice of kaftan & coiffure...
 Not by chance opting in favour
 of soft sandals over jackboots;

billowing ankle-length dresses over armour suits & khaki shorts;
& long flowing tresses over crewcuts.

Yet, despite their best intentions
our prophets' entire experience
of the Milk of Human Goodness
was culled wholly from infancy;
unlike their mothers & sisters
none of them suckled a baby;
all, ALL were Takers not Givers.

Likewise, their unforgiving followers
— men, for the most part—
who chose to ignore the soft
warm message of the heart
& focus more on the hard
macho precepts of their Masters.

Abdicating Love for the Sword
to spread the Word of God;
preferring summary execution
(of enemy, infidel & Saracen)
to gentle persuasion
& the art of subtle seduction.

If only our prophets were women
consider how the history/herstory
of war would have been written
Instead of being fought
years on end in trenches,
the First World War
would have been slugged
to a standstill in minutes
between a broad Scottish lass
& a buxom Bavarian fraulein
in a mud-wrestling rink
somewhere on the Maginot Line.

In the Second World War,
would we ever have found
a woman willing to dump

that atom bomb on Hiroshima?
 And not only because of their
 legendary fear of flying,
 but can anyone sane imagine
 any lady, dropping from height,
 A-Baby nicknamed 'Little Boy'?

Women would have converted
 the Crusades to Masquerades
 (complete with funny hats
 silver-masks & sequins);
 the Seven Years' War
 into a seven-year-itch.
 The Battle of the Bulge
 into a Baffle of Boobs
 & resolved the War of Roses
with roses!

Can anyone sober picture
 even for a single second:
 Mary Magdalene hoisting a rifle?
 Ibu Fatimah with an AK-47?
 or, Mother Theresa with a bazooka?

If only our prophets were women
 the Herstory of our World
 would have been so different
 for starters, we would have been
 bequeathed Universal Motherhood
 not bloody Brotherhood or Martyrhood.

If only ALL our Prophets were Women.

The Cut

Maryam Sheikh Abdi

I was only six years old
 when they led me to the bush, to my slaughterhouse.
 Too young to know what it all entailed,
 I walked lazily towards the waiting women.

Deep within me was the desire to be cut,
as pain was my destiny:
it is the burden of femininity,
so I was told.
Still, I was scared to death . . .
but I was not to raise an alarm.

The women talked in low tones,
each trying to do her tasks the best.
There was the torso holder
she had to be strong to hold you down.
Legs and hands each had their own woman,
who needed to know her task
lest you free yourself and flee for life.

The cutting began with the eldest girl
and on went the list.
Known to be timid, I was the last among the six.
I shivered and shook all over;
butterflies beat madly in my stomach.
I wanted to vomit, the waiting was long,
the expectation of pain too sharp,
but I had to wait my turn.
My heart pounded, my ears blocked;
the only sound I understood
was the wails from the girls,
for that was my destiny as well.

Finally it was my turn, and one of the women
winked at me:
Come here, girl, she said, smiling unkindly.
You won't be the first nor the last,
but you have only this once to prove you are brave!
She stripped me naked. I got goose pimples.
A cold wind blew, and it sent warning signs
all over me. I choked, and my head
went round in circles as I was led.

Obediently, I sat between the legs of the woman
who would hold my upper abdomen,
and each of the other four women grasped my legs and hands.

I was stretched apart and each limb firmly held.
 And under the shade of a tree . . .
 The cutter begun her work . . .
 the pain . . . is so vivid to this day,
 decades after it was done.
 God, it was awful!

I cried and wailed until I could cry no more.
 My voice grew hoarse, and the cries could not come out,
 I wriggled as the excruciating pain ate into my tender flesh.
 Hold her down! cried the cursed cutter,
 and the biggest female jumbo sat on my chest.
 I could not breathe, but there was nobody
 to listen to me.
 Then my cries died down, and everything was dark.
 As I drifted, I could hear the women laughing,
 joking at my cowardice

It must have been hours later when I woke up
 to the most horrendous reality.
 The agonizing pain was unbearable!
 It was eating into me, every inch of my girlish body was aching.
 The women kept exchanging glances
 and talked loudly of how I would go down in history,
 to be such a coward, until I fainted in the process.
Allahu Akbar! they exclaimed as they criticized me.

I looked down at myself and got a slap across my face.
 Don't look, you coward, came the cutter's words;
 then she ordered the women to pour hot sand on my cut genitals.
 My precious blood gushed out and foamed.
 Open up, snarled the jumbo woman, as she poured the sand on me.
 Nothing they did eased the pain.

Ha! How will you give birth? taunted the one with the smile.
 I was shaking and biting my lower lip.
 I kept moving front, back, and sideways as I writhed in pain.
This one will just shame me! cried the cutter.
Look how far she has moved, how will she heal?
 My sister was embarrassed, but I could see pain in her eyes . . .
 maybe she was recalling her own ordeal.
 She pulled me back quickly to the shed.

The blood oozed and flowed. Scavenger birds
 were moving in circles and perching on nearby trees.
Ish ish, the women shooed the birds.
 All this time the pain kept coming in waves,
 each wave more pronounced than the one before it.

The women stood us up but warned us not to move our legs apart.
 They scrubbed the bloody sand off our thighs and small buttocks,
 then sat us back down.
 A hole was dug,
malmal, the stick herb, was pounded;
 The ropes for tying our legs were ready.
 Charcoal was brought and put in the hole,
 where there was dried donkey waste and many herbs—these were the cutter's
 paraphernalia.

The herbs were placed on the charcoal,
 and we were ordered to sit on the hole.
 As I sat with smoke rising around me,
 I could hear the blood dropping on the charcoal,
 and more smoke rose.
 The pain was somehow dwindling but I felt weak
 and nauseated.
 Maybe she is losing blood? my sister asked worriedly.
 No, no. It will stop once I place the herbs, cried the cutter impatiently.

The malmal was pasted where my severed vaginal lips had been,
 and then I was tied from my thighs to my toes
 with very strong ropes from camel hide.
 A long stick was brought and the women took turns
 showing us how to walk, sit, and stand.
 They told us not to bend or move apart our legs?
 This will make you heal faster, they said,
 but it was meant to seal up that place.

The drop of the first urine,
 more burning than the aftermath of the razor,
 passed slowly, bit by bit,
 one drop after another,
 while lying on my side.
 There was no washing, no drying,

and the burning kept on for hours later.
But there was no stool . . .
at least, I don't remember.

For the next month this was my routine.
There was no feeding on anything with oil,
or anything with vegetables or meat.
Only milk and ugali formed my daily ration.
I was given only sips of water:
This avoids "wetting" the wound and delaying healing, they said.

We would stay in the bush the whole day.
The journey from the bush back home began around four and ended sometimes at seven.
All this time we had to face the heat
and bare-footedly slide towards home . . .
with no water, of course.
We were not to bend if a thorn stuck us,
never to call for help loudly
as this would "open" us up and the cutter
would be called again.
Everything was about scary dos and don'ts.

I stayed on with the other five
for the next four weeks. None of us bathed;
lice developed between the ropes and our skin,
biting and itching the whole day and night.
There was no way to remove them,
at least not until we healed.

The river was only a kilometer away.
Every morning the breeze carried the sweet scent of its waters to us,
making our thirst more real.

The day the cutter was called back
each of us shivered and prayed silently,
each hoping we had healed and there would be no cutting again.
Thank God we were all done
except one unlucky girl
who had to undergo it all again,
and took months to heal.

Our heads were shaved clean.
The ropes untied, lice dropped at last.
We were showered and oiled,
but most important was the drinking of water.
I drank until my stomach was full,
but the mouth and throat yearned for more.

It was over.
All over my thighs were marks from the ropes,
dotted with patches from the lice wounds.
Now I was to look after myself,
to ensure that everything remained intact
until the day I married.

Abandoned Woman

SipakV

“What man would stay?”
No, but he is the one who left
Wouldn't he leave
You are an abandoned woman
Shaming us
Shaming our family
Look at your hair
Look at your face
Look at your cooking
Look at your unkept house
What man would stay?

I did my best
I cut my hair, straightened it
I put perfumed cream on my face
I tried my best cooking every day
I straightened the house
But Ikoto and Ikala
Wanted love and care
He did not even notice
He came home late every night
Drunk on women and alcohol
Dumb with rage

Because our life sucks
 Our kids misbehave
 His wife is ugly
 And he wants to beat up his loss
 Erase it on my face and body
 Erase it every night with no luck
 Last time the neighborhood committee came
 And gave me advice
 You are a woman
 Resign yourself
 Tough it out until the end
 When the sky comes crashing down on you

And the Reverend Father came by
 Remember Victoire Rasoamanarivo he said
 But I am not looking for happiness in the next world
 But peace for Ikoto and Ikala is what I seek
 You came today mother and said
 He is my lot
 Violence my destiny
 Prison my fate
 Because where am I to go
 Jobless woman
 So mother let me
 Look at your hair
 Look at your face
 Look at your cooking
 Look at your unkempt house
 What man would stay?

The stone & the woman

Dr Carole R Fontaine

How is a stone
 Different from a woman?
 Just the right size,
 One makes death;
 Woman,
 Made to give life,
 Cruelly dies.

Her age? No matter.
 Her crime? Look at her:
 Defence against a rapist?
 Peddler of her flesh?
 Just choose the crime
 That looks the best
 As index of social morality,
 And pile up the stones
 Of brutality.

Not too big:
 She will die too soon.
 Not too small:
 She must bleed and swoon
 From the pain
 All gather to see.

O, Defenders of Morality!
 You soil the Qu'ran
 With impunity,
 So eager to make your world
 Safe from sin,
 You re-enact it again and again.

* *In the Islamic Republic of Iran, stones used for public executions must be neither too large, nor too small; proper stoning requires that the stone must be just the right size in order to cause serious pain and injury without killing the victim too rapidly.*

Twisted ballerina

Jayne Sachs

Little girl
 Little twisted ballerina
 Little steps
 Little twisted ballerina pirouettes
 across the floor
 to the window where her
 daddy watches from the corner of his eye
 and her uncle watches her thighs

Little girl
 Little twisted ballerina
 Dance

Well her mom's at work down at the hospital today
 and her daddy decides to cash his paycheck today
 and her uncle says "Sure, I'll watch your ballerina... dance."
 Well she's heard those words before
 She's seen that look before
 She's smelled his breath before
 She's felt his weight on her before
 This ballerina
 And when her daddy leaves
 and when they're alone he's says
 "I just bought a ticket to your show."

Little girl
 Little twisted ballerina
 Dance

Dance dance dance dance
 Got to dance got to dance got to dance got to dance got to dance got to dance
 Dance

And she dances out the bedroom
 And she dances down the hall
 And she dances down the steps
 And out the front door
 And she goes up to the clouds
 that's where she find her stage
 And she does the dance that's twice her age

How did he get here?
 Who let him in up here?
 Who let him in down there?
 I was dancing here
 I was dancing here

Little girl
 Little twisted ballerina
 Little steps
 Little twisted ballerina pirouettes
 Little twisted ballerina pirouettes

Genocide of women in Hinduism

Sita Agarwal

“In memory of my late sister, who died as a result of the inherently anti-woman religion of barbarian Hinduism.”

Introduction

I dedicate this book to my late younger sister, who was murdered as a result of a dowry-related incident while in full blossom of youth. Like most sisters, we were very close to one another, and her early death had a deep impact on me. This tragedy inspired me with the will to join the Indian feminist movement, and to eventually write this book. I hope that this work may save the lives of some of my Indian sisters and help reduce the suffering of Indian womankind. The reason for writing this book is purely humanitarian, so I have made this book available in the public domain. The more widely this book is read, the more innocent lives shall be saved. Please distribute it freely, and help save Indian women. Thank you in advance for your efforts.

After my sister's death, I joined the Indian feminist movement. I read the usual feminist literature, took part in the usual demonstrations in support of women's rights, and attended the usual women's rights conventions. However, it soon dawned on me that the movement was quite hollow, and, despite several decades of existence, had failed miserably in its objectives. At the time I write this book, in June 1999, the status of women in India has sunk to its lowest ebb. After 50 years of Independence, cases of female infanticide, sati, dowry-related murders and crimes against women are on the increase, and in many cases are at their highest levels seen since the birth of the Indian Republic. I soon realized that the reason is that Indian feminism has not tackled the core of the evil, but has only squabbled about superficial aspects of the problem. Western feminism was merely transplanted onto the subcontinent, and like many plants, had been unable to thrive in its new environment. It is only by tackling the root of the problem that this plant can grow. I hope that this book shall enlighten all Indian women as to the true reasons for the abject state of subjugation we are in.

Real reason for oppression of Indian women

Everyone has heard the Brahmin male propaganda that the customs of sati, dowry, female infanticide and all other social suppression of women in India is the result of 'social degeneration', 'corruption', or still worse, 'foreign Christian or Muslim influence'. This is all one big lie designed to fool women. The reasons are far more deep-rooted, and are fully the result of Brahmin male conspiracies.

The real reason for the sad state of Indian women is the continuation of the Vedic and Vaishnava religions, collectively referred to as Brahminism or 'astika' Hinduism. These

religions clearly and unambiguously justify and prescribe the crushing of women to the status of sub-humans. Rather than being due to some kind of 'corruption', the ghastly practices of sati, female infanticide, dowry and related acts are actually enforced by Vedic and Hindu scriptures. Although this may sound like some Christian or Muslim propaganda, it is not. I have backed up my research with quotations from Vedic and Vaishnava scriptures, and have shown that these religions, and nothing else, are the main culprits behind the most anti-woman system the world has ever seen. Far from being 'enlightened' and 'progressive', Brahmanism is in fact the very fountain of the evils of sati, female infanticide, devadasism and dowry.

Future of the women's movement

The result of my research is far-reaching. Instead of wasting time attacking trivialities, the Hindu religion itself must be attacked by Indian feminism. If Indian women are to become free, it is this faith that must tackled, and nothing else. No other religion, not even Islam or Christianity, burns its women, or slaughters one-tenth of all women each generation except Hinduism. Indeed, Brahminism is nothing but the legitimized genocide of women. In this book I have performed calculations showing how Brahminist men, and not Communists or Nazis, have been responsible for the greatest genocide (namely that of women) in the history of the world. The worst holocaust in human history was not that of the Jews or Africans, but was that inflicted on women by Brahmins. A significant part of this holocaust occurred in India during thousands of years of Brahmanic tyranny. Even in the modern era, Brahmin-enforced laws lead to the deaths of more people each decade than Hitler killed during the entire Second World War. To stop this ongoing holocaust, Indian women must unite with all those who oppose Hinduism, for an enemy's enemy is a friend. Indian feminism must unite with Islamism, Communism, Sudra Nationalism and Christianity in order to fight a form of savagery known as Hinduism. By necessity this strategy shall have to vary according to region. In South and Central India, Sudra Nationalism promises to uplift Dravidian, Dalit and Adivasi women on a healthy platform of anti-Brahmanism. This pan-Negroist philosophy is thus a natural ally of Indian feminism. In North India, the allied Islamist ideologies of pan-Islamism and Mughalstanism have proven a potent forces for womens' liberation, witness the Mughal emperors' restrictions on Sati and female infanticide. Indian feminism should hence ally itself with these movements. Communism has helped women in West Bengal and Kerala, and is another natural ally for Indian feminism. Hence, by means of judicious realpolitik, the status of Indian women can be bettered.

No copyright

Since I have written this work for humanitarian purpose, I hereby make it free of any copyright. You may freely distribute this book, in part or in whole, via any means you desire, whether by internet, www, email, newsgroup, usenet, or any electronic means. You can also print out this book and translate it, and distribute it in pamphlet form.

Help Indian women

Please help Indian women. By distributing chapters of this book via the internet or as pamphlets, you shall be saving innocent lives. Each person can do his little towards this noble cause. By taking a little time to post this to a newsgroup, by hosting this book at your internet site or by adding a link to this book from your page, you shall be doing service towards a valiant movement. This doesn't cost any money; it just takes a little effort. Please help, and prevent further young and beautiful Indian women such as my sister from premature death at the hands of Brahmin tyrants. Help end the genocide of women in India.

Thank You,
Sita Agarwal

I am a woman

Somia Sadiq

I am a woman, and I will stop by,
To crush you to dust, to drown your pride.

All those dreams you took away,
My life, my soul, you took away
In the name of honour, in the name of pride,
You consumed my tears, with every stride.
But I am a woman, and I will stop by,
To crush you to dust, to drown your pride.

You took away my right, my right to be free,
You stole my youth, you raped my innocence,
You taught me to shush, freeze my tears,
So I could stay your slave, lost forever,
Lost for the shattering of my bones,
Lost in the sound of you quenching your thirst,
A thirst to suppress, a thirst to oppress.

But I am a woman, and I will stop by,
To crush you to dust, to drown your pride.

How long did you think it'll be?
Oh you stupid, stupid man!
I am a woman, fear my power,

I am the rain, a rain of fire,

I am awake, I will stop by,
To crush you to dust, to drown your pride.

No longer will I remain a slow silent procession,
Of suppressed wailings, of quiet agitation.
The spark of freedom that I tucked away,
Is now a fire, a storm, a wrath so powerful,
Fueled by the obsession for emancipation,
The obsession for freedom, obsession for love,
Obsession to wipe out the system that breeds you,
Obsession to eradicate all those like you,
Who suppress, oppress and antagonize.

Yes, I am a woman, and I will stop by,
With my comrades, standing as one,
Red flags in our souls, red dawn in our hearts,
To crush you to dust, to drown your pride.

I stand by your ear unseen

Sue Silvermaria

I stand by your ear unseen.
Before the flogging they buried me to my waist in mud
One hundred times and one, they beat me with a cane
Because I was wearing a burqa
the mullah was spared the sight of my blood
When my family took me home I was unconscious
They were forbidden to seek treatment
When I died the next morning no one was surprised.
It was three days after my 18th birthday.

I stand by your ear unseen.
When I was 14 I wanted to be a teacher. I remember laughing with my friends on
the way home from school I remember writing poems about the future
daydreaming at the window into velvet sky
Impossible, then, to believe what would come
after the Taliban took our town.

I stand by your ear unseen.
When I was 15 they came. The wide world choked shut
Collapsed to a point of fear, hunger. Constant
My sisters and I ate what brothers left. Little.
They could leave the house for classes, for work
My mother's office job was taken away
When my uncle would accompany her
she took her turn wearing a neighborhood burqa
so she could look for food. She sold our books

I stand by your ear unseen.
Three years. My youngest sister sickened
My father carried her to the hospital but
they told him to throw her away. She died at the door
That's when my anger endangered all of us
In her name I started a secret school. To read
to write, five little girls and I risked our lives
I would do it again. It was a way for ghosts
to have hands and voices for awhile.

I stand by your ear unseen.
When another decree was issued,
that houses with women have all windows painted black,
we had no funds
My father was gone, forced into the militia
My mother had nothing left to sell
They marched in to bully us
found the hidden school slates behind my bed
Hauled to the mullah, I told nothing
He shut the door and raped me.

I stand by your ears unseen
Famine and depression make periods scant
I didn't know about the baby at first
My aunt had the right herb in a hidden pot on her roof
She stayed while my baby bled out
A new decree, forbidden to make sound when we walk,
caught her when she left.
She didn't have shoes that were silent
They beat her on the street until her accompanying son in his panic tried to shield
her by sacrificing me. The mullah learned everything.

I stand by your ear unseen.
He announced my offense of having an abortion
which proved I was promiscuous
My crimes cloaked his and no one
could do anything but pray I might survive
That prayer was not mine. I was ready to depart
I do not ask for personal mourning.
Twelve million living women and girls require your outrage
Lift your veil! Open your ear.

How would it feel

Lydia Brackett

How would it feel
To walk down the streets of your country and not be known
How would it feel
To be enslaved by your own husband
To be beaten
To be raped
To be tortured to death
With meaningless cries for help.
How would it feel
To be imprisoned from the outside
Forbidden to work
To have an education
Feeling life is not worth living for.
How would it feel
To feel unworthy of your own name.

Humanity

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas (If I love you Philippines)

Fr Roberto Reyes

Kung Mahal Kita Pilipinas,
Dangal ko pagpapahalagahan.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Kalusugan iingatan.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Pamilya pagbubuklurin.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Kapwa tao mamahalin.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Kabuhayan pagsisikapan.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Kasayasayan pagaaralan.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Kultura sasalaminin.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Sariling Wika gagamitin.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Kapaligiran lilinin.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Pulitika aayusin.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Hustisya paiiralin.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Kapayapaan palalaganapin.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Kahirapan wawakasan.

Kung mahal kita Pilipinas,
Panginoong Diyos pakikinggan.

Fr Roberto: A friend and author Alex Lacson wrote a small book entitled, “12 Things That Every Filipino Can Do To Help Our Country.” With Valentine’s Day coming, his 12 Things inspired me to write *Fourteen Ways Filipinos Can Show Love for the Philippines*. I enumerated fourteen fundamental values: 1) Dangal (Dignity); 2) Kalusugan (Health); 3) Pamilya (Family); 4) Kapwa tao (Neighbor); 5) Kabuhayan (Livelihood); 6) Kasaysayan (History); 7) Kultura (Culture); 8) Sariling Wika (Mother Tongue); 9) Kapaligiran (Environment); 10) Pulitika (Politics); 11) Hustisya (Justice); 12) Kapayapaan (Peace); 13) Kahirapan (Poverty); 14) Diyos (God). Each line begins with “Kung mahal kita Pilipinas” which means “If I love you Philippines,” and continues with a phrase that expresses a commitment to promote or pursue a particular value.

Why these fourteen values? The fourteen are core Filipino values which are both cherished but at the same time threatened. Likewise, we can focus on one value everyday from the first to the fourteenth of February (Valentine’s Day) to reflect, discuss and promote it. Thus, Valentine’s Day becomes richer and broader in meaning.

Yet another incident in July 1983

Basil Fernando

Burying the dead
being an art well developed in our times
(Our psychoanalysts having helped us much
to keep balanced minds—whatever
that may mean)
there is no reason really
for this matter to remain so vivid
as if some rare occurrence. I assure you
I am not sentimental, never having
had a ‘break down’, as they say.
I am as shy of my emotions
as you are. And I attend to my daily

tasks in a very matter-of-fact way.
Being prudent, too, when a government says:
“Forget!” I act accordingly.
My ability to forget
has never been doubted. I’ve never
had any adverse comments
On that score either. Yet I remember
the way they stopped that car,
the mob. There were four
in that car: a girl, a boy
(between four and five it seemed) and their
parents, I guessed, the man and the woman.
It was in the same way they stopped other cars.
I did not notice any marked

Difference. A few questions
in a gay mood, not to make a mistake
I suppose. Then they proceeded to
action. By then a routine. Pouring
petrol and all that stuff.
Then someone, noticing something odd
as it were, opened the two left side
doors; took away the two children,
crying and resisting as they were moved
away from their parents.
Children’s emotions have sometimes
to be ignored for their own good, he must have
thought. Someone practical
was quick, lighting a match
efficiently. An instant
fire followed, adding one more
to many around. Around
the fire they chattered
of some new adventure. A few
Scattered. What the two inside
felt or thought was no matter.
Peace-loving people were hurrying
...towards homes as in a procession
Then, suddenly, the man inside,
breaking open the door, was
out, his shirt already on

fire and hair, too. Then, bending,
 Took his two children. Not even
 looking around, as if executing a calculated
 decision, he resolutely
 re-entered the car.
 Once inside, he closed the door
 himself—I heard the noise
 distinctly.

Still the ruined car
 is there, by the roadside
 with other such things. Maybe
 the Municipality will remove it
 One of these days
 to the capital's
 garbage pit. The cleanliness of the capital
 receives Authority's top priority.

Indifference

Vanessa O'Dwyer

My name is Indifference
 And I travel 'round.
 I've traveled the
 World so much!

I lived in the South
 When the black man
 Was beaten and treated
 Worse than an animal
 But I saw no man beaten!

I was just outside the gates
 Of Auschwitz as the ashes of men
 Of women and children
 Rained down like snow.
 But they were so inferior!

I was there as young girls
 Were made wives

And forced upon
By their elders
As their “faith” dictates!

I was there for certain
As a young girl was sold
So that another may
Please himself with her.
She was such a burden!

I was there in Zimbabwe
When some were threatened
And not allowed to vote
Ah yes, I was there
But when does it count, anyway?

I have been there, but you’ll not find me
I can read, but I know nothing
I watch the news, but am not involved
I watch videos, and comment freely
I socially network, but sit on my ass

Yes, I’ve been around
The world you can see
And that world knows me as
Indifference

Dear Che

K G Sankarapillai

Dear Che,
you came to our university campus
in mid sixties
with a comrade and a modernist friend
with visuals of jungles past and present
with a vision of a new battle for justice.

Like a fresh wind of October
you joined us
moved us

renewed us
and smoothened our entry into history
with love, dreams and plans.

You told us about the sleeping rebel powers
of mountains and forests of the new minds;
quite often you talked of the day when
'the Andes would become
the Sierra Maestra of America.'

Our modernist friend said:
you are the red star over the world
tarnished by America;
you are the future of the world
crippled by America;
you are the Jesus of the modern age
crucified by America.

Although you remained evergreen in us
showed us the exit to the oceans
from the lyrical ponds of our
post Independent Indian youth;
the exit to the storm from the water lily breeze
of our weeping romantic poems;
dear doctor, you redefined us
living with us
living for us
living in us
passing the confidence of torrents into our deserts
weaving sunlit paths into our prodigal nights.

You brought world into our words
and future into our past.
You opened blast-furnaces for our ore.

Translated from Malayalam by A Lakshmi.

Oh, you miserable pen pusher

Basil Fernando

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 rooting alive

You poison your drink
And of others
Dead do not die again
You and other livings 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

What Moves Us

Shailja Patel

Some moments, history comes to us and says:
What do you truly want?

We tremble.
Often we run.
From the terrifying possibility
that we could choose

movement.

That we could begin
exactly where we are
in all our screwed-up imperfection.

Some days we stand before our world
and the question
vibrates the air around us:
What do you choose?

This day?
This moment?
This heartstopping glorious adventure?

There's strong like patriarchy
strong like institutions
strong like two-billion dollars a day
military occupations, spiked
with genocide, anchored
in neoliberal greed, buttressed
by terror, designed to deliver 200-volt shocks
on contact.

Then there's the strength of what flows.
Tears, grief, memory.
Blood, energy, breath.
Collective action.

The strength of what moves us
opens our throats, ignites our hips
unleashes our voices.
Puts the move
back into movement, distills the motion
from emotion.

Movement strong as a river.
Current of joyful resilience.
Wave and curl, crash and swirl
patterns that constantly change.

Movers who channel each day

the courage of divers
to plunge again
into this churning water.

Thankful
for what yields results, curious
about what does not.
Building lung capacity to finally embrace
the wholeness of our struggles
exactly as they are.

Some moments, life asks of us:
What do you hope?

There's hope like a battleground
hope that's all soundbites
hope that rehashes a thousand manifestos.
What we intend, believe, imagine
what we plan, propose and dream
what we say, expect, pretend, how we think
things should look.

Then there's the truth on the ground.

What we show up for
each day
with our fearful, angry,
tired, clumsy selves.
With our complex, brilliant,
wounded, kickass selves.

And we grapple with the chasms
of all that's gone before.
We negotiate the heartbreak
of decades of betrayal.
We push ourselves to replace
but with and,
no with how,
steel ourselves to listen
to what enrages us most.

We stretch our brains and wills
until we feel it,
to hard analysis
until we get it
unpack systems, structures, models
mine the stories, map the data
'til we know
what works and what does not.
What truly moves us.

Some years, life comes to us and says:
What do you know?
Why we kept at it, for forty, fifty years.
Why we have never regretted it.

That this movement
still moves us
in our guts, our hips, our hearts

That this laughter
this trust
this earned and tried and tested respect
is a house we have built,
brick by brick
and it will hold.

Some mornings life wakes us up
sets our hearts beating
sets our nerves thrumming
warns us
we're about to leap
into our iciest fear
our largest growth
our most piercing joy.
Some mornings,
We take a huge breath, say
Yes
to it all.

Some evenings, life wraps us round
in the softness of twilight,
asks:

What are you waiting for?

Truth. Justice. Reparation. Healing.
In our lifetimes. In our lifetimes. In
Our
Lifetimes.

Each day, love comes to us and says:
What will you show up for?
What, in the end, is the truth of your heart?
We answer with our bodies.

We show up
for the struggle.
We show up
for each other.
We show up
just as we are.
Precious, flawed
limited, magnificent.
Human.

We show up
for history.
We choose
the power of movement.
We love
by showing up.

Somewhere a donkey has died

Aditya Shankar

Have you ever admired things without names?

Those easily misplaced and rarely fetched back,
Deeply observed but never loved for their strangeness.

Their singular existence has hardly convinced strangers,
Their Ululation like the silent prayers for the absent.

But somewhere a donkey,
The last of our nameless heroes,
has died.

After an attempt to outgrow epoch and time,
Myth and reality,
Place and name,

It lies unidentifiable among the components of the garbage heap,
Doing neither the royal nor the common place act,
seeking neither revival nor resurrection to a
distinct meaning,
achieving neither success nor failure
in the nonchalant protest on tracks to freedom.

Now,
It assembles into itself only in photographs, memories and doubts;
Strangely leaving behind in all of us,
A gaze, wide and dreamy,
Especially when waiting turns everything
to a bit of expectation.

Meditations and merchandise

M I Kuruwilla

Carry a message to your own people, my friend,
Which will be well understood by your people,
Not ours- the creed of the material, phenomenal
World as an illusion, you call it, Maya, don't you?
Concealing but also symbolically revealing
A deeper order of reality. Do I sound philosophical?
You must excuse me. I cannot help it.

This view of things with a deeper reality
At a deeper level is intriguing. I am myself affected
To the extent of thinking of blood and terror
As fantasies, symbols. Isn't it intellectually
Consoling to think that violence, blood and terror
Are not real but only symbols of a deeper
Reality. Although I live in a firm word, I move

On two planes of reality- the mundane level,
And a deeper level of mystical yearnings and insights.

Yet the mystique of blood and terror is terrifying
Thing, not consoling at all. Passion and the craving
For power at a deeper level are murderous things.
Call it spirituality of blood and terror, if you
Like. But it is no joke to allow your face
To be blasted. No taking you first by the scruff
Of your neck even.

But I speak of none of those things here, the fear
And dread in the pursuit of Passion and Power.
Let them be. I would rather tell you of other mystical
Properties of violence and bloodletting. Although
We perpetuate violence to see an end to what we hate,
Violence is endless. Like Time. Though Time
Must have limit, time is endless, eternal.

Besides, our relationship with our enemies is
Of both love and hate, in which note a deeper
Dimension. Hatred is in the desire to exterminate
Our caemies. Our love for our enemies is in the care
We take for the continuance of violence.....

2

Symbol and blood, blood and symbol. Why only
Symbols, you are asking. What about emblems?
You are right. They are there, when we often
Look at things horizontally, on the surface,
Not seeing the wood for the trees, if there is
Any wood to see. Look at the emblems of our culture
Which we are apt to overrate, but worth
Something, the surrogate and substitute fantasies,
The flotsam and jetsam of this our modern life.
Ponderous definitions! Let us have some model samples.

Yes the toothbrush, the sanitary towel- the tampon,
That covering for the female back under certain
Conditions. Don't your Dakshina ladies in their

Shopping expeditions go in search of it – two
 To three thousand miles? We may call them universal
 Symbols, being so ubiquitous.... Nonsense!
 We will stick to them as nothing but emblems.
 But what is covered, is it at least universal...
 Appetites are universal, passions urges aren't
 They? Possessing uniqueness, individually too?

What universality, uniqueness in a word
 Of throw- away tampons and throw-away condoms!
 Emblems will always be emblems, But in the rotund
 World, baubles too have their place,
 Looked at representationally.

All these- dilettantish nonsense! Commodity
 Rules the world, someone truly said. The spilling
 Of blood is profitable. Next of kin to blood
 Is arms - for an orgiastic embrace, the buying and selling
 Of which is profitable.

How we forget the realities of life!
 Farewell, fantasy symbols and emblems. Yesterday's
 Shopkeepers are now the most expert gunmakers.
 The descendants of those who stormed the Bastille
 For the Brotherhood of Man are the manufacturers
 Of deadly missiles. Three hurrahs for Gallic Socialism,
 And four for their Socialist President. Thou shalt
 No kill, said the great Jehovah to prophet
 Moses. Thou shalt kill, kill and kill again
 In Jordan and Gaza. That is the new dictum
 Which replaces all of Hammurabi and Moses.
 Christ and Gautama. Arms have to be sold,
 Blood has to be spilt.

Look! Can great powers survive without arms
 And arms-trade? And if they can't survive,
 If they collapse, what is the future of mankind?

And your terrorist gangs- call them guerrillas
 Or freedom-fighters- where do they get their arms
 From? From the sources controlled by us. We know

The extent of their sources and resources.
We have prescribed the rules and the game
As to who wins, who loses. But the game
Must go on. It is such fun-and so profitable.

To replant the earth with tears

Basil Fernando

What do we live for?
but to let roses grow
and birds to sign
if earth grows dry
flowers do not grow
birds disappear
What is there to live for?
then we should
with our tears
create the rivers
sustain the plants
for flowers to grow
and birds to rest.

If you must pray...

K G Sankarapillai

I remember the day
When the loudspeaker first
Came to the village.
We children reached home late
From school that day.

On the banyan tree before the temple,
Below the tricolour, the flower
Of the loudspeaker bloomed.
High as the head of the single bull
At the temple festival,
With challenging gaze
That ploughed the fields of the mind.

'Bob Bharatmata Id Jal
Bob Mahatma Gandhi Id jai...'

It was as though the omnipresent sound
Had entered the ears
Of the plantain groves and
The sunken roads.

The deaf man too
Heard the shadow of a sound.
The poor cripple sat up.
The children danced
In the garden of sound.

The grandmothers had not heard the news.
They still lit the lamps
At the old doors,
And listened for the nadabrahma
In the rhythm of the flame's dance.
They only heard the lament of their own stars.

TWO

Red flags roared on the banyan tree.

'Inquilab zindabad,
The fields we reap
Are our own, my little bird.'

Hearing the thunder speak Malayalam
The crow and the dove and the jackdaw
Koran arid Neeli and Mate
Jerked awake and spread their feathers.
The peacocks came out of the past
Aid flung rainbows into the future of the village.
It was spring on the tongue
Of the dumb village.
in the graveyard of forgetfulness
Removing the shroud of silence,
Screams rose as long swords.
Memories and dreams

Became ritual swords and ankle-bells.
Martyrdom sounded
Deeper than legend.

The sea of souls roared as loud as loud could be.

The deaf man woke at the sound of the world.
The cripple walked out into the yard.
Oh! Brave new world!

The history of bare-chested elders,
Silent and foolish as the village pond,
Limited and motionless.
The palm leaves that they had treasured,
Old, moribund.
Now...

The cock does not crow
Or the serpent go back
Or the haunts leave
Or consciousness awaken
Or marriage bond tighten
Or music keep its beat
Or sacrifice resound
Without a loudspeaker.

Sound is victory
Sound is ability
Sound is Brahma.

The leaders bathed
In Cambridge or Paris
In Volga or Niagara,
Came back with firm voices.
Sounds of commands in suits and coats
Foreign sounds which stun the ear
Sounds in machines
Sounds worn as weapons.
Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite.
Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram.
Art for art's sake.

The echo was greater than the sound.

With the shouts of the children
With the exhortations of the comrades
On the other side of the hill,
In the temple,
In the netherworld where the day vanishes,
On the knives discarded by the assassins
Droplets-of Rama's name.
The city-shaped anthills
Hold no sages.
The lament of the evening prayer,
The chant of the pilgrim.

The temple became one of forgetfulness,
The temple of forgetfulness, a tower of ghosts.

THREE

Modernity came to the village
As Innumerable loudspeakers,
As processions and meetings
As degrees and supermarkets.
Noise-decked desires came
In newer and newer designs.
They shrieked and sang, danced and sobbed,
Screamed and roared, louder
Than the possessed woman.
The sounds of the mother were forgotten
The trees and the ploughed fields
Stopped singing.
The cuckoo and the jackal left.
The pots of the market
Filled with sunlight and moonlight,
The beautiful men of the sound
The beautiful women of the sound
Came with their beckoning nakedness.

The neighbour is envious
Here is the best TV
Here is the soap

That keeps old age away
The nostrum that gives
Eternal and increasing youth
Here is the policy which keeps
The wrinkles away from your forehead
The super-power-colour-guard
To keep the colours of the flag fresh
Or..
To protect forever the four castes and seven colours.
Here is the teak farm
That makes your future tension-free
And here is the gospel according to Dunkel
That gives you the underwear that leaves you free
Here is...here is?here are
The mad flames of sound.

'Did you hear my voice?'
Did she ask that?
But I have only seen her,
Never heard her.

FOUR

Oh lord!
Please take from our ears
The demonic noise of tempting civilization
Remove from us this search for shelter
In the forests of Sound.
Do not grant us again the trick
Of covering the truth
With golden sound.

We want to hear
The footsteps of the wind
The gurgle of children's laughter
The sigh of the mother
The evening murmur of the grandmother
The voices of dreaming brothers
The quiet flutter of truth
In the silent nerves of the prison
The struggle of the victim

The alarum of the mate
 The soliloquy of the ant
 Which carries the great weight of the grain
 The drums of home-coming

The concert of the cicada
 The warning of the friend
 The stories that night tells
 As she comes with bath-cool body
 And the star of sound in her sky of sound
 The distant band of the future
 We wish to hear, to hear
 Ourselves.

Murmured by the sun to the moon
 By the moon to the sorrow-laden cloud
 By the cloud to the trees
 By the trees to the birds
 By the birds to the rhythm of the seasons,
 And by you, mind, to me,
 That silence, as wide as the world
 The thin sound of consciousness
 That perfume of a new thought
 We wish to hear, to hear
 The symphony of life.

Translated by Prema Jayakumar

Emotional Overload

David Ronald Bruce Pehrul

How high can our emotions rise,
 And how low can they fall?
 How far until they cease to exist,
 And there's no emotion at all?

When a tree falls in the forest,
 And there's no one there to hear,
 When someone dies in a foreign land,
 And we do not shed a tear.

Although we try to share the grief,
We know it is not the same,
And though we feel a little guilt,
We're tired of taking the blame.

When kids in Brazil are shot in the street,
And Romanian orphans die,
And so many go without shelter and food,
We pretend it is just a big lie.

We're caught in emotional overload,
We cannot react; we just stare,
As news of disaster is spoken of,
And people are homeless somewhere.

Don't tell me I'm speaking of others,
I know we have all done the same,
We say it is none of our business,
Because we do not know their names.

A lack of emotions? It's overload,
"I'm helpless; it's useless to try",
Let's muster our strength and our courage,
And once again learn how to cry.

Women dancing humanity into the future

Jane Evershed

Women dancing humanity into the future
Our essential selves
Will not be ripped from us,
We shall not morph into a sot
Drunkenly parading
As half human,
Half robot,
We shall not.

We remember
Our deep earth roots
And from where

Real life shoots up

My umbilical chord
To this earth
Shall not be cut
By those who seek,
To sow discord
My soul is not theirs
To hoard.

I shall not be separated
From nature's solid rhythm
By a synthetic value system
Constantly pumped into me
By globally integrated radio and TV.

And more than that,
I seek to use my higher powers
Which I brought with me at my birth
Which allow me amazing capabilities
To serve the higher purposes
Of this earth.

And more than even that
I have a universal law on my side,
To readily arm myself with
Day and night,
Which states that darkness
Can always be lit,
And where there is light
Darkness fails to penetrate it.

This brotherhood in evil I reject

Basil Fernando

You say we are brothers
And we have a common enemy
You come with blood in your hand
To prove to me you are fighting for me
As brothers we must jointly hate the other
You tell me

In hate what brotherhood
Can there be
Must I teach my child to hate
The way you say you do
This brotherhood in evil I reject
This I will not teach.

I'm Not Involved

David Ronald Bruce Pekrul

Yes, I was there, but not involved,
I never said a word,
When they were tortured for their Faith,
My life of ease, preferred.

I stayed inside my Comfort Zone,
And did not make a move,
I did not have a thing to say,
And not a thing to prove.

Religious leaders said, "They're wrong,
And everyone must die,"
They asked me what I thought of it,
But I had no reply.

I didn't want to state my view,
Although I had a choice,
I should have chosen right from wrong,
And spoke up with my voice.

But I just stood there very mute,
And didn't say a thing,
When they were sentenced to their fate,
My conscience felt a sting.

And now I live with what I've done,
And when they come for me,
I will not have a thing to say,
Nor have a place to flee.

Just Society*Basil Fernando*

You burned the buildings
And put me in prison.
You threw their infants into fire
And called me inhuman.
You murdered in open daylight
And blamed me for wanting blood.
You turned my neighbour into a refugee
And said I was responsible.
You looted his hard-earned property
And called me a thief.
You imprisoned him and killed him
And named me a brute.
You befriended thugs and I their victims,
But you made me the accused.
I who was grieved
At my schoolmate,
My neighbour, my friend,
My guru and fellow worker,
When he died, when he went into hiding,
When he fled to escape the mob,
Suddenly departed to other lands
Empty handed—I, who cried holding his hand
At the harbour bidding him farewell,
Am now to bear this insult.

You say it's peace
When you put the blame on the innocent.
You say its stability
When you protect the culprits.
You say it's honesty
When you hide the reports,
And hush the inquiries,
Spreading falsehood among the nations
Having a laugh at a restless land,
Divided and wounded.
You sleep well
But I cannot sleep.

You eat well
I have lost all appetite.
You think you are successful
I know wounds of defeat
Will long live with me,
And the memory
Of this insult.

The Lessons Of Another Time

David Ronald Bruce Pekrul

The lessons of another time have visited today,
(Let's listen well and maybe we will learn),
As history repeats itself and leaves us in dismay,
(Let's listen well and maybe we will learn).

For wars have always been around and never go away,
(But we are deaf and dumb, and cannot see),
And many are the innocent caught up inside the fray,
(But we are deaf and dumb, and cannot see).

The children are the innocent, the elderly the weak,
(How long will this abuse be theirs to bear?),
As nations fight with nations, but their leaders only speak,
(How long will this abuse be theirs to bear?).

The lessons of another time are rarely ever learned,
(We stumble on and very often fall),
And when we think that we have won, we find that we've been burned,
(We stumble on and very often fall).

We grieve and bow in mourning for the children of our youth,
(A legacy of hate is what we leave),
We tell them of the world around, but seldom tell the truth,
(A legacy of hate is what we leave).

And so the scene is played again and circles one more day,
(They listen well, but they are deaf and dumb),
And elderly and innocent are still the ones who pay,
(They listen well, but they are deaf and dumb).

A holy man was having a conversation

Anonymous

A holy man was having a conversation with the Lord one day and said,
“Lord, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like.”
The Lord led the holy man to two doors.

He opened one of the doors and the holy man looked in. In the middle of the room was a large round table. In the middle of the table was a large pot of stew, which smelled delicious and made the holy man’s mouth water.

The people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles that were strapped to their arms and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful.

But because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths. The holy man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering.

The Lord said, “You have seen Hell.” They went to the next room and opened the door. It was exactly the same as the first one. There was the large round table with the large pot of stew which made the holy man’s mouth water. The people were equipped with the same long-handled spoons, but here the people were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking. The holy man said, “I don’t understand.”

“It is simple,” said the Lord.
“It requires but one skill. You see
they have learned to feed each
other, while the greedy think only
of themselves.”

60 Years

Vanessa Dwyer

60 years
Have lessened
Tears
But not
Dried them
Away

60 years
Allayed some
Fears
Why can't
We make them
Stay

60 years
Celebrate
Peers
Offering
A better
Way

To treat a man
A woman
Even
A child, too

Because
Human Rights
At 60 years
Exist to
Celebrate
You

Vengeance Is Mine

David Ronald Bruce Pehrul

He rode into town in the back of a truck,
A man on a mission, who, hoping with luck,
Would find the young zealots who murdered his Dad,
And vowed he'd take vengeance with all that he had.

Was late in the evening, and chores had been done,
He'd gone to the bedroom to tuck in his son,
His father was sitting there, out on the porch,
When Klansmen came 'round with a cross and a torch.

Without any feelings, they shot the man dead,
They lit up the cross and then watched as he bled,
A small band of cowards, they started to run,
When out of the door came the shots of a gun.
He rode into town in the back of a truck,
To look for those Klansmen, who, running amuck,
Had caused so much heartache and caused so much pain,
The ones who found pleasure when someone was slain.

He found them encamped on the side of a hill,
The look on their faces, it gave him a chill,
The sight of pure evil is all he could see,
There, hid in the bushes behind a large tree.

He cried to the wind and to God up above,
Who spoke to the mountain and gave it a shove,
As boulders rained down like a God-given sign,
He heard a loud voice, saying "VENGEANCE IS MINE!"

Now all is so quiet, and all is so still,
No more will those Klansmen be able to kill,
The only voice now is the sound of the wind,
Like tormented souls of the ones who had sinned.

Oppression and injustice

Someone Else's Crime

Anna Vera Williams

I will grow tomatoes
When you've set me free.
I will live at home in peace
Where all will let me be.

I will wake up cheerful
In the morning to the sun.
I will feel at peace at last,
Once my Freedom's won.

I have been imprisoned here
For someone else's crime.
I have lived my life in fear,
And I have done my time.

All I want, is to feel safe -
Relaxed and calm and free.
I have been good, to fellow men.
Why aren't they good to me?

I try to keep my head up high,
Imagining the day
When I will be allowed to fly,
When I will go away,

And wrap myself in someone's arms
Who knows me as I am.
I try to think about that day,
As hard as try I can ...

I will wake up smiling,
In the morning sun.
I will kiss the one I love, and
Once this battle's done ...

I will grow tomatoes in
 My garden in the grass,
 And tie my hair behind my head ...
 And when this storm has passed,

I will sit up late at night
 With cats and cups of tea,
 I will live no more in fright
 Once I have been set free.

I only want this misery
 And fear and pain to end.
 I only want a life at peace
 Surrounded by my friends.

But that will be another day.
 Today I must remain
 Within the madness of this place
 In fear, and hope, and pain.

But always, I hold up my head,
 Imagining the day
 When I will be allowed to go,
 When I will fly away ...

Not now. It isn't over yet
 I must sit out my time,
 As I have done, for all these years,
 For someone else's crime.

God is Dead

Faraz Ahmedr Naveed

What is GOOD? What is BAD?
 Who is HAPPY? Who is SAD?
 What is LOVE and what is HATE?
 Who is IDIOT, who is MAD?

Who is crying? Why is this fight?
 What is justice? MIGHT is RIGHT!

I am happy so others go to HELL
The others should yell that's what I can tell.

My God is right, the others' are wrong.
I can say that 'coz I am strong.

But let us just, get rid of this God
Who can bring no peace but fraud, fraud, fraud.

We will live like harmless worms
Developing the world into wonderful forms

We can bring the peace ourselves
There is no need of God's seat belts!

In the Name of God

Bharat B. Trivedi

Spineless slaughterers-
planting bombs,
blowing up innocents
in cold-blood,
inflicting casualties
making rivulets flow with blood
weaving a web of conspiracy
spreading terror
to perpetuate fear in minds,
all in the name of God!

Callous cowards-
preaching hatred and practicing violence
singing dreadful lullabies
of sleepless nightmares
dancing in the rain of bloodshed
they quench their scarlet appetite
with human lives and
blood of the unfortunate victims
all in the name of God!

Brutal butchers-

slaughtering the poor civilians
 spitting venom of vengeance
 brutally annihilating bodies and souls
 painting the verdant land crimson
 with blood-stained brush from the palette of
 caste, color, creed, race and faith,
 all in the name of God!

Ruthless ravagers-
 stabbing brotherhood in the back
 burying humanity deep down
 the grave of dead heart,
 slashing the secular souls
 with deadly daggers and
 savage scimitars of religion
 without a grain or remorse
 all in the name of God!

Mindless murderers
 of mankind, peace and harmony
 turning cities into graveyards,
 sowing fatal seeds of hatred and
 harvesting crops of contempt
 Don't burn the roses for the sake of vicious thorns
 for helpless tears I can see in Mother India's eyes
 seeing her children die!

For God's sake
 stop this madness, reprisal and carnage
 in the name of God!

The fear in Lhasa

Woeser

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
 Now a city of fear.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
 Where the fear is greater than all the fear after '59, '69, and '89
 put together.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
Where the fear is in your breathing, in the beating of your heart,
In the silence when you want to speak but don't,
In the catch in your throat.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
Where constant fear has been wrought by legions with their guns,
By countless police with their guns,
By plainclothesmen beyond counting,
And still more by the colossal machinery of the State that stands
behind them night and day;
But you mustn't point a camera at them or you'll get a gun pointed at
you,
maybe hauled off into some corner and no one will know.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
Where the fear starts at the Potala and strengthens as you go east,
through the Tibetans' quarter.
Dreadful footsteps reverberate all round, but in daylight you won't
glimpse even their shadow;
They are like demons invisible by day, but the horror is worse, it
could drive you mad.
A few times I have passed them and the cold weapons in their hands.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa,
Where the fear is now minutely scanned by the cameras that stud
avenues and alleys and offices,
and every monastery and temple hall;
All those cameras,
Taking it all in,
Swiveling from the outer world to peer inside your mind.
"Zab zab chi! They're watching us"--among Tibetans this has become
a byword, furtively whispered.

A hurried farewell to Lhasa:
The fear in Lhasa breaks my heart. Got to write it down.

On the road out of Lhasa - August 23, 2008

The court house*Basil Fernando*

In a land called Injustice
In a place called City of Fear
There was a court presided over
by a man called Mr Absurd

The court sergeant was Mr Drunkard
The Mudilier was Mr Bribery
There were many clerks and peons
Who had no names

The Litigants were the ordinary folk
Who thought they came to seek justice
About which
They had no notion

Some thought it white
Some thought it black
Some as liquor
And others as bribery

Summons were never written
But issued
Fines were never paid
But consumed

Mr Absurd said
He held the balance
Holding on to the shoulders
Of Mr Drunkard and Mr Bribery

In the appeal court
Mr Absurd was held in high esteem
The wisdom of Messrs D and B
Received nation's applause

Who else is there to come?

K G Sankarapillai

Summer.
Sunday.
The married are all at home.
Alone in the deserted lodge
I am waiting for someone.
Is there anyone else to come?

The water-jug has a hole.
It lies in a corner of the verandah
with the long neck of a camel.
Is there anyone else to come,
Tired, sweating thirsty?

The fortune-teller with his parrot is gone.
The villager looking for the house of the
E.N.T. Specialist is gone.

Everyone comes here with a thirst;
Along the same road yesterday came
The prophets and the messiahs
Sacrificing man to fate.

Gone are the emperors who
Tempting us with shady trees and wayside wells
Robbed us of our human lives.
Gone are Huen-Sang and Vasco da Gama.
And Gandhi with the old time on his watch,
Gone too are the lip-revolutionaries
Dancing their tiresome plenums,
Draining the jug to its final drop.
Gone are all the minor characters
That I knew would come.

But from our train
Dalhousie still waves his green flag.
American wheat leers at our hunger:
Long live free India.
Is there anyone to come?

Those who have once entered
Refuse to quit.
They linger on in disguise,
A mind, a face.
Banners, rallies, maxims, people's ministers:
How soon they were all turned into
Oppressors masks!
As if the hand that supported the head
Suddenly rose to bit; like a serpent
our sleep breaks into delirious sobs.
Is there anyone else to come?

The seminar of crows
on the neem over the yard
The future is as dark as themselves, they believe.
No crow announces the arrival of a guest
Yet I leap up, sure that someone will turn up.
Who is to come at this mid-day hour
When flowers droop on the banks of the lake?

My dear friend?
My future bride?
A new ship in the harbour with
Answers to all the questions?
A Red Star over the land?
The liberation army?
Who is to come at this mid-day hour
Who, tell me, who?

It is Sunday.
May be the church is dispersed
Or the morning show over.
A herd of sheep passes along the Bannerji Road:
They are, all of them, lame.

The summer-path is blazing hot like a butcher's knife.
Let not poor Buddha appear flow.
What can he do if he does come?
Which one of these lame creatures
Can he choose to save
Upon the mercy of his mere ten Lingers?

Voices of the oppressed

K G Sankarapillai

‘Dalit’ means broken, oppressed, untouchable, downtrodden, and exploited. They come from the poor communities which under the Indian caste system used to be known as ‘untouchables’. They constitute nearly 16 percent of the Indian population; about 160 million.

The caste system, with a history of more than 3000 years in India, is a shameful system of social segregation, which works on the principle of purity and impurity. Purity is rich and white or whitish, impurity is poor and dark. Hidden powers of wealth can be easily traced in every feudal Brahmanical concept of the ideal. Material milieu of purity and beauty and prominence and command and comforts is also wealth. Economic division is reflected in the social classifications. But it should not be registered that caste is racial or economic. Dr Ambedkar says that the caste system came into being long after the different races of India had commingled in blood and culture. To hold that distinctions of caste are really distinctions of race and to treat different castes as though they were so many different races is a gross perversion of the historical facts. Ambedkar asks: What affinity is there between the Untouchable of Bengal and the Untouchable of Madras? The Brahman of Punjab is racially the same stock as the Chamar of the Punjab and the Brahman of Madras is the same race as the Pariah of Madras. The caste system does not demarcate racial division. (*Annihilation of caste – in writings and speeches vol.1 .p.49 Dr .B.R. Ambedkar*)

Historically the caste system is a socio-cultural menace of Hinduism. But it is followed by Muslims, Sikhs and Christians in the country. The traditional Hindu society is divided into four main hierarchical caste groups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Beyond this fourfold caste structure, there is a category of ‘ati-shudras’ or Dalits (as they are now called), which is forced to occupy the lowest position in this abhorrent social order. A devilish and disgraceful residue of the very long history feudalism in India.

The practice of untouchability was formally outlawed by the Constitution of India (by the mastermind Dr B R Ambedkar) in 1950. But in practice, the Dalits are still subjected to extreme forms of social and economic exclusion and discrimination; physical and mental torture. Their attempts to assert their rights are often met with strong resistance from the higher castes, resulting in inhuman torture, rapes, massacres, and other atrocities. Dalit reality in India today is not a mark of national pride –

- As per official statistics, an estimated one million Dalits are manual scavengers who clean public latrines and dispose of dead animals
- 80 percent of Dalits live in rural areas and 86 percent of Dalits are landless.
- 60 percent of Dalits are dependent on casual labour.

- Only 37 percent of Dalits are literate.
- Three Dalit women are raped every day.
- At least one crime is committed against a Dalit every day.

Independent India has witnessed a considerable amount of violence and hate crimes motivated by caste, even though the law of the country doesn't permit it.

First used by Jyotiba Phule, the term 'Dalit' was later popularized by Dalit leader Dr B R Ambedkar to reflect the situation of the millions of Dalits within south Asia, who are systematically and institutionally deprived of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in every aspect of life. But the Dalits are now redefining the word, and with it their identity—Dalits are those who practice equality, believe in equality and fight for equality!

2

The Dalit movement is an anti-caste movement fighting for the construction of a modern secular and democratic Indian identity.

The term 'Dalit literature' can be traced to the first Dalit literary Conference in 1958 in Maharashtra, in India.

There are numerous theories about the origins of Dalit literature. Buddha (6th c. B.C.), Chokhamela (14th AD), Mahatma Phule (1828-90), and Professor S M Mate (1886-1957), are hailed as its originators by various activists/ideological groups. These great men were deeply concerned about the plight of the untouchables. They fought against all the unjust divisions in society. A huge mass of literature is created in the light of their teachings and visions.

But it was Dr Ambedkar, a great modern visionary, renaissance leader, the architect of the constitution of India and an ardent critic of the caste system, who demolished the myth of divine origin of caste hierarchy. He inspired and initiated the creative minds of India to enforce the socio-cultural upsurge for the total emancipation of the Dalits.

Dalitism is the ideological habitat where various socio-cultural sensibilities and politico-economic groups co-exist. Opposition to the Hindu intellectual traditions in general and the oppressive caste hierarchy in particular is the central concern of the movement.

The Dalit Literary movement started in Maharashtra, the home state of Dr Ambedkar. A collective endeavour of the Neo-Buddhist elites to create a new culture of social equality, it is based on wider socio-cultural, political ideas to transcend the narrow space of the

old concepts of culture and social hierarchy to new and open space. Uttam Bhoite and Anuradha Bhoite have described it as a protest movement organized against the traditional Hindu social theories of life and liberation. A sense of collective identity and solidarity are seminal for a protest movement. Dalit literature was evolving in a dialogic structure towards this direction as a communication system for various segments of the movement, the Dalit writers and Dalit intellectuals. Dalit writing is addressing the oppressed, the untouchables, the victims, and the oppressors. "It is not our wish that what we write should be read only by the untouchables. Our writers strongly desire that it should be read by the touchable as well." (Raosaheb Kasbe in his essay 'Some issues on Dalit literature').

Dalit poetry became popular mainly through poetry readings and alternative media like the little magazines and posters and hoardings and creative collectives.

Birds of the same feather from other states of India were inspired by its liberative spirit, straight and strong style, and poignant poetic images. Great poets like Narayan Survey, Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Arun Kamble, Josef Macqwan, Saran Kumar Limbale, Arun Dangle, and many other poets wrote stunningly new Indian poetry in the sixties and seventies. They portrayed the life and struggles of the lowest strata, the low caste. The prominence of Dalit poetry in modern Indian poetry is undoubtedly great. It could consolidate numerous socio cultural and ecological movements in post colonial India. It remains powerful even though some of its leaders were hijacked into power games by India's ruling political parties.

A contest

Basil Fernando

An army I command
Fear me, says the chief.
At my command the flesh bleeds
Bones appear, disappear and reappear.

I bear only the pen
Ceaseless streams of thought
appear, disappear and reappear within me
Without any promptings, says the victim.

Fear me or you shall die,
Says the chief.
The stream of my thought
Knows no fear and does not stop, says the journalist.

Identity card*Mahmoud Darwish*

Record!
I am an Arab
And my identity card is number fifty thousand
I have eight children
And the ninth is coming after a summer
Will you be angry?

Record!
I am an Arab
Employed with fellow workers at a quarry
I have eight children
I get them bread
Garments and books
from the rocks..
I do not supplicate charity at your doors
Nor do I belittle myself at the footsteps of your chamber
So will you be angry?

Record!
I am an Arab
I have a name without a title
Patient in a country
Where people are enraged
My roots
Were entrenched before the birth of time
And before the opening of the eras
Before the pines, and the olive trees
And before the grass grew

My father.. descends from the family of the plow
Not from a privileged class
And my grandfather.. was a farmer
Neither well-bred, nor well-born!
Teaches me the pride of the sun
Before teaching me how to read
And my house is like a watchman's hut
Made of branches and cane

Are you satisfied with my status?
I have a name without a title!

Record!
I am an Arab
You have stolen the orchards of my ancestors
And the land which I cultivated
Along with my children
And you left nothing for us
Except for these rocks..
So will the State take them
As it has been said?!

Therefore!
Record on the top of the first page:
I do not hate people
Nor do I encroach
But.. if I become hungry
The usurper's flesh will be my food
Beware..
Beware..
Of my hunger
And my anger!

War only means absence of love

Basil Fernando

War only means absence of love
On my side of the fence
I have put up the white flag
And grown araliya plants
In the house there are rooms
With beds for two
Clean towels
And a rice cooker
The boy downstairs
Can make kites.

Bombs confused as apples we eat*Basil Fernando*

There is this confusion
And lack of solution

Passers-by confused as foes
We fight

Bombs confused as apples
We eat

Simple destruction
Becomes the solution

What is it all for?
“Do not ask such silly questions”
Says the common opinion
Everyone lives by such

At the junction you meet Hemapala
A common man, as they say
He chews betel, spits red on the road
And says, “Me no soldier, I no kill”
Who kills then? So many are killed
Someone must

“Do not ask such silly questions”
Says the common opinion

Skeletons in everyone’s backyard
No one admits murder
To live in confusion and deny a solution
Absolves every one, no?
Who can keep backyards clean, anyway
When burials take place after midnight

Dogs bark no doubt
Whatever you may see, can you shout

“Who, who is there,
Whose body is it that you bury?”

Of course you can't help dreaming
About these things
But can you tell anyone
About your dreams?

That's absolutely subversive
It is wise to be silent, no?

Reckoning a tyrant

Layad Kasiyanaphi

Alas, what have you done
Glorious tyrant, Oh lonely queen
The land bleeds, tears overflow
Your sheepskin can not conceal you now
Martyrs, orphans and widows
Have soaked with blood and tears
Your magnificent robe that now stinks.

Alas, where have you sent
Innocent civilians meek as lambs
So frightened and fled their homes
Upon the sight of your pack of wolves
Yielding weapons of death and terror
With smirk on their faces that rejoice
Upon the death of gallant fathers and mothers
In mockingly and treacherously murderous means.

Alas, how did you become
Bersek ruler of unparalleled greed
Begging for pity and piety
Amidst the chaos you brought to this land
Robber of dreams, thief of hearts
Slayer of angels, cause of turmoil
I did not ask for your bloody sacrifices
Nor the bridges and towers you chose to build.

Alas, why did you steal
Lives, dreams and laughter from homes
In capricious ways and whimsical manners
Your pledge to kill, maim and punish
So called terrorists and destabilizers.
With your command of terror and deathly silence
As you so desperately hold on to poisoned power
That you even brazenly invoke the Holy God's name.

Come now, I have no other will
But to let you know of your disdainful works
For I have heard the cries of my people
I have known of your blasphemous acts.

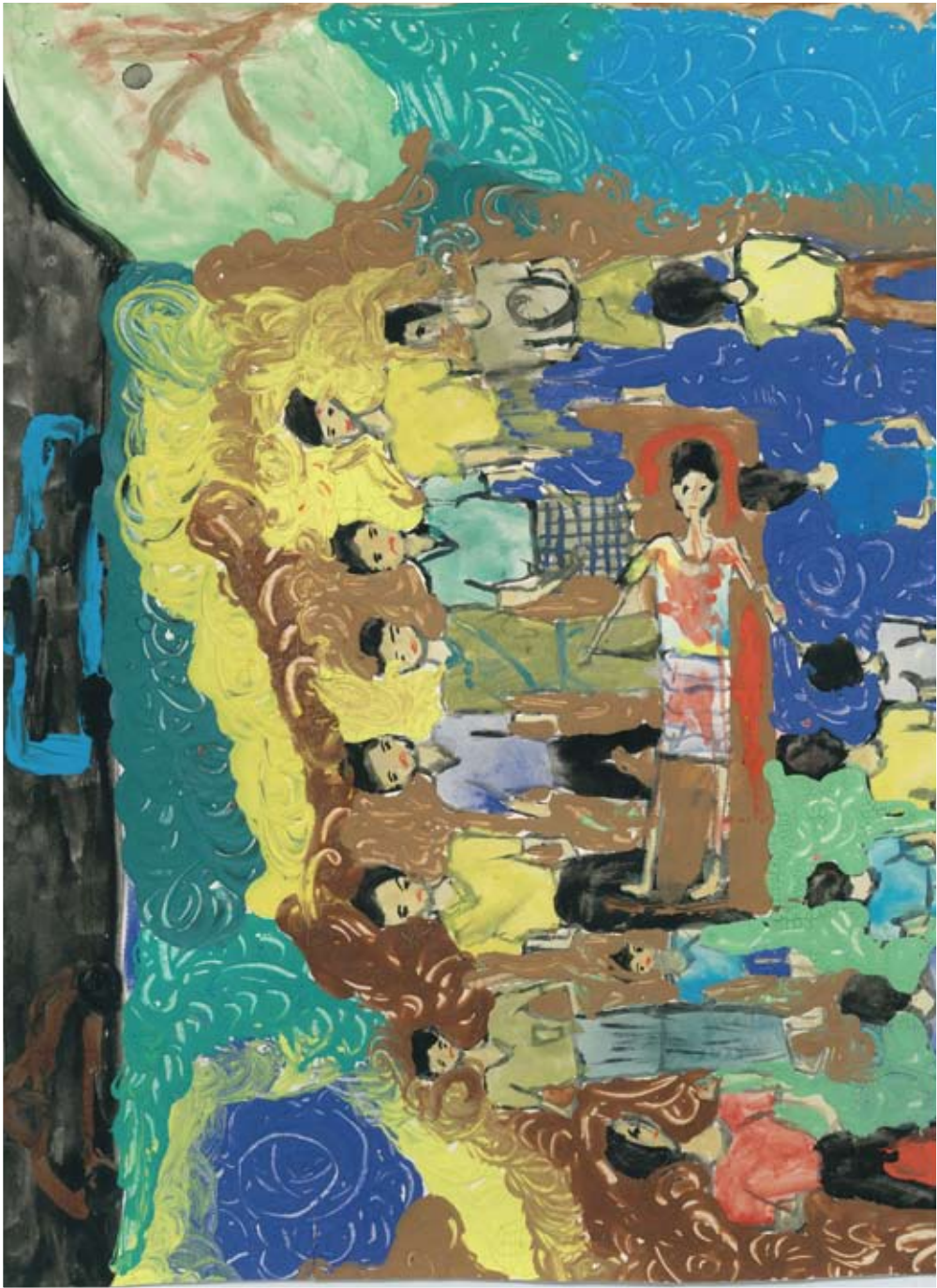
Go now, for you are but doomed
Walking straight to the path of hell
In your beginning you must have been born
Attached with minions of demoniac nature
Obsessed with power, prestige and vengeance that blinds
Assuming pretense so thick that renders you incomplete
Calling upon wealth and stealth up to the heavens.

Now is the time to reckon you and your kind
For it has been written, it has been said,
it has happened long before time
Remember the age-old stories and great mysteries
and don't you forget The Writing on the Wall
"Mene mene tekkel upharsin"
God has numbered the days of your queendom
He has brought it to an end.

Artwork and photographs

Children's paintings from Sri Lanka depicting forced disappearances

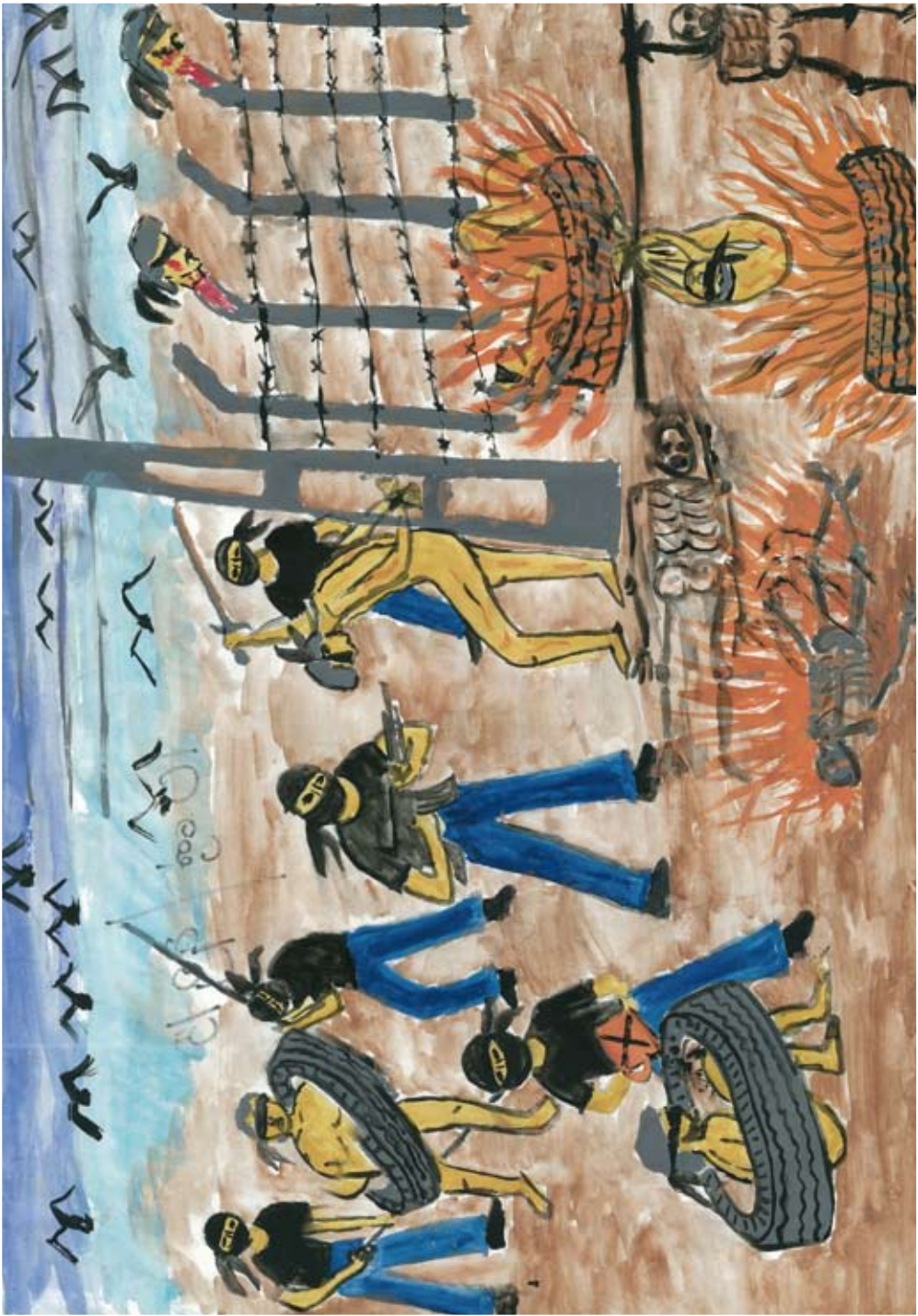












Painting by Hong Sung-dam



Photography exhibition entitled 'True face of Asia'



Creative writing

Activism is art applied in future tense

Aditya Shankar

I love the concept of ghosts. There is nothing quite like it, as a creative manifestation that influences my mind as *an experience of the uncertain*. Sitting alone in my hostel room, I have felt the pinch of fear on some nights when you switch off the lights immediately after watching a horror movie. Looking at it in another way, fear is a terrifying dream (or nightmare) about the future. It is an uncertain futuristic experience where you are unable to predict the impending future, though you know it is bound to be distasteful either immediately or somewhere within a longer span of time.

Approaching it from a parallel perspective, I would like to analyze my experience of listening to news. It is an experience that all of us (at least in theory), believe to be an act of reaching out to what is new and relatively realistic. Though, news often is a new deviation into myth from what you thought was the real, those that are believed to have an influence on your life either in the macro or micro level. 'This is a bad, bad world' is a common summary of experience for most of us; especially when you view something as horrendous as the repeated visuals that are aired on the TV channel about how *adivasis* were dragged into the city centre, circled and then beaten up brutally in Guwahati. This I feel, is somewhat related to my dream of ghosts; the common connecting point being my worry of the future. This experience though very apolitical and selfish, probably applies to the cross section of the masses today.

The viewpoint to be discussed here is that future is probably experienced mostly through reality itself, not through plain imagination. The fact that no one is absolutely impartial/unbiased/objective in their experience probably extends the scope of reality into imagination. This extension, either as an imagined continuation of news that you hear or a piece of art/literature that you experience, is what makes you feel that you are thinking of the future or even ever so slightly touching it. This is not entirely a false experience either. In fact, it is vital to the way the whole world plans itself and moves forward.

This becomes more important when a group of people plot their extended realities/imaginations together to see the dreadful reality that they think is the future. An environmental protection initiative, for example, provides a striking example of how important it is to see your terrifying dream. They constantly see a nightmare where the world is a place too hot and polluted, stripped off rivers and lakes; a place where all the

surviving species live underground. Rather, they extend the possibilities of the currently existing rude reality and showcase them in front of the world so that it corrects itself.

Any form of activism then, is not just reality but art applied in the future tense. Also, of all the collective dreams that a society can see, imagine or recollect, the dream that an activist sees thus becomes the most vital dream. Probably, it is also the ugliest due to its striking depiction of a possible continuation of the ugly real. If the world is imagined to be a series of infinite, ever dynamic canvases, theirs is the most brilliant canvas and probably the most worrying depiction of the possibilities of experience.

2

I need a pencil, a drawing board, probably a geometry box; I need a white chart that is pinned against a board; probably I need to imagine that there is sea ahead of me when looking out through the window. Because, I am trying to make an interesting drawing here to prove that I am quite incapable of plotting any futuristic event/moment. I am calling the drawing 'Ahead-a behavior experiment'; probably meaning a realistic depiction of what lies ahead of me. I am going to plot the points within the axis of a chart on this page. On one hand I have the actions that I might perform in the future. They have to be derived from an inner chart that has the history of my thought and its interaction with my physiological evolution that may lead into my possible actions. Within that inner chart lies the evolution of the behavioral traits of my ancestors against their own time. So my inner chart to derive my actions goes back until time and action existed. Then this time and action has to be relatively compared at each instant with all those actions in the rest of the universe that were happening parallel to the particular chain of action that formed my behavior. This would mean I would need to plot the entire history of time against the history of all the actions that has ever been performed. This left alone, I would also need to trace back my physiological evolution to arrive at my physical status to perform an action and this has to be derived beforehand by comparing it to all the possible elements that might have shaped the physique.

Let me get back to the back seat of my taxi in this bustling city. It is much more definite here than anywhere else. I am on a by-road now. It is like a minor vein of a leaf and I could say with surety that we move forward not knowing what is happening in the other road, forget future.

Because I plotted all this while just to reach my present. It is better enjoyed this way; from the back seat of the taxi where you know just the chaos outside. I experience this chaos as noise. Every space has its own sound/noise. I experience and probably recognize my space through sound; my space is dynamic and moving forward like the taxi; my future is an ever increasing noise that I fail to quantify.

I am in one of those moments. I am thinking about future. This is when you dispel your doubts and start to reassure yourself that poetry as a way of thinking and as an attempt of expression is an active element in the minds of the people; though unknowingly. The noise will increase and I am willing to listen.

I come from there

Mahmoud Darwish

I come from there and I have memories
Born as mortals are, I have a mother
And a house with many windows,
I have brothers, friends,
And a prison cell with a cold window.
Mine is the wave, snatched by sea-gulls,
I have my own view,
And an extra blade of grass.
Mine is the moon at the far edge of the words,
And the bounty of birds,
And the immortal olive tree.
I walked this land before the swords
Turned its living body into a laden table.
I come from there. I render the sky unto her mother
When the sky weeps for her mother.
And I weep to make myself known
To a returning cloud.
I learnt all the words worthy of the court of blood
So that I could break the rule.
I learnt all the words and broke them up
To make a single word: Homeland.....

Who I am

Bulleh Shah

I know not who I am,
I am neither a believer going to the mosque
Nor given to non-believing ways.
Neither clean nor unclean,
Neither Moses nor Pharaoh.

I know not who I am.

I am neither among sinners nor among saints,
Neither happy nor unhappy,
I belong neither to water nor to earth.
I am neither fire nor air,
I know not who I am.

Neither do I know the secret of religion,
Nor am I born of Adam and Eve.
I have given myself no name,
I belong neither to those who squat and pray,
Nor to those who have gone astray.
I know not who I am.

I was in the beginning; I'd be there in the end.
I know not any one other than the One.
Who could be wiser than Bulleh Shah
Whose Master is ever there to tend?
I know not who I am.

Strange are the times!

Bulleh Shah

Crows swoop on hawks
Sparrows do eagles stalk
Strange are the times!

The Iraqis are despised
While the donkeys are prized
Strange are the times!

Those with coarse blankets are kings;
The erstwhile kings watch them from the ring.
Strange are the times!

Its not without reason or rhyme,
Strange are the times

Says Bulleh, kill your ego
 And throw away your pride.
 You need to forget yourself
 To find Him by your side.

Justice and literature--Introduction to the collection of poems, 'Chi-na Gedara Kirilige Githaya'

Basil Fernando

Sometimes it is asked as to whether justice can be a subject for creative literature. The reasons for such a question may be the ingrained habits in the country (Sri Lanka) about what may be and what may not be subject matter for creative literature. These ingrained habits are based on various types of literary theories propagated in the country for centuries which were developed by Brahmanic masters in India. Martin Wickramasinghe wrote about the continuing influence of literary traditions which arose in a period of cultural decadence.

The few cultural achievements of the ancient Sinhalese which will stand the test of critical examination are confined to this classical period that produced those statues and tanks. The so-called classical Sinhalese literature will hardly stand the test of modern critical examination. It is the imitative product of a decadent period that began after the tenth century. The real and genuine classical tradition of the Sinhalese culture was lost and forgotten. A tradition that began with the decadent period of literature alone survived until the advent of the Portuguese. Because of this decadent and imitative literary tradition, Sinhalese scholars failed to appreciate their genuine older culture which survived in architectural and sculptural remains and tanks of ancient cities buried under the jungle tide. [From Martin Wickramasinghe's Complete Works, Volume 10, Essays in English pg 67.]

Still there is not much discussion about this period of decadence which started around the tenth century and has continued ever since. Perhaps the absence of this discussion may be due to the sort of crazy nationalism that is promoted by interested parties and the admission of such a period of decadence may contradict the historical interpretations promoted for the purpose of creating an artificial national pride.

When we look at this period of decadence with an open mind then we find that not only in Sri Lanka but also in India there was a period of a colossal cultural counter revolution during this period. As the roots of the political, social and cultural decadence both in India and Sri Lanka can be found in this time it would be useful to look into this period more closely.

The spread of Buddhism in India and the period of Ashoka brought about a period of enormous progress in India but the cultural counter revolution which developed later was able to devour and to destroy these developments. The golden age of India and the period known as the Anuradhapura period in Sri Lanka happened more or less within the same time period. During this period the Brahmin caste of India and the associated higher castes suffered severely. The ideas of equality which were quite widespread during the period in which India was under the influence of Buddhism and Jainism resulted in creating difficulties in finding slave labour and cheap labour. This created a crisis for those who control land, agriculture as well as the earning of wealth through ritual religious exercises which were all under the tight control of the Brahmin caste.

There was the need to destroy the influence of new social impulses created by Buddhist religious ideas and Emperor Ashoka's political reforms. The intellectual efforts that were made in order to achieve the displacement of this new situation created a massive storm which destroyed the very cultural foundations which were challenging the Brahmanistic social control. This counter revolution took the form of religious movements and was able to wipe out Buddhism from India altogether. Theologies, liturgies, music and hymns developed on the basis of accepting the hegemony of Brahmanism and the re-imposition of the caste system. A characteristic of the religious rituals of the time was the repetition of phrases, either as hymns or mantras. The place that existed for thinking was removed and replaced with such repetitive exercises. The Buddhist universities and other places of Buddhist gatherings were reclaimed by the Brahmins and made into places of worship for Brahminism.

In Sri Lanka it was not possible to wipe out Buddhism as in India. Instead while the external aspects of Buddhism were retained, internal doctrines and thoughts were replaced with Brahminist content. Politically the introduction of a mental state which would accept a draconian form of ruling was also introduced during this time. This helped to create a powerful and a repressive monarchy. The Buddhist temple and the Hindu Kovil were brought to a close connection. Almost always, the Buddhist shrine and the place of worshipping the Hindu gods were built side by side. Among the ordinary folk, habits of timid subjugation, cowardice, habits of subsistence living and patriarchy became entrenched. Even to-date, this mindset is quite visible among Sri Lankans. It is not difficult to understand in the literature that was created during this period there was no place for justice.

The value of human society however, depends on the place justice has in the society. Genuine humanism and justice are inseparable. When literature and art is nourished by conceptions of justice they become the greatest achievements of humanity. When the Sri Lankan literature disconnects itself from the traditions of this period of decadence it will experience a new life. By the enlightenment of the intellect the ingrained habits of

hypocrisy and violence that prevails can be replaced if justice finds the place it deserves in society.

There have been writers in the recent past who have tried to expose and to attack injustice. Vimalaratne Kumaragama, wrote many poems highlighting the suffering, the powerlessness and the injustices faced by the rural folk. 'Arrachirala' was one such poem. The Tibetan monk, S. Mahinda, also boldly attacked the hypocrisy and injustices and wrote about the villages 'who suffer from the evil of sexually perverted and hypocritical big people.' G.H. Perera also wrote angrily about injustice. In many writings of P.B. Alwis Perera also, there is a tone of sadness about what the ordinary local people has to suffer. Siri Gunasinghe also wrote about the 'terrible foul smell' of hypocrisy.

Creative writings in wretched times: Giving expression to the deeper inner mind of people facing wretchedness

Basil Fernando

In the 60s and 70s there was a group of Sri Lankan writers who wrote in English. Many of them have ceased to write since the later 80s. One among 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 behaviour that they see around them. They see how life is being mocked. They see how humour disappears in their society.

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

However, when social evils are so deep and so common the people cease to intervene. In fact, internally they withdraw from a society that they internally 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 legitimised by the state itself and life is trivialised 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 all the people in the country 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.

Dalits and Negroes: The same blood of pain and poetry

K G Sankarapillai

The condition of the Dalits in India is as bad as ever.
 this reasserts the truth of wrath and pain in the Dalit poetry;
 the truth and relevance of a poetry for justice and human dignity.
 see the sources of the themes and images in Dalit poetry are not any land of
 dreams;
 they are still the raging veins , the burning soil , and the flaming feet.
 words spill out of the wounds like blood with stormy life in.
 forms of their poetry is determined not by any divine call,
 but by the bitterness of the sunlight

and by bursting the suffering silence of the nights.
 it seeks the truth and possibility of the untold history of the man unkind.
 it is not an experiment with the compassionate alternatives;
 it is the explosion of the agonized soul with an insatiable quest for freedom and justice.

creating a new breed of poetic art.
 creating a new aesthetics of resistance.
 rediscovering the jungle of fear , pain , and protest in between words.
 and rediscovering
 the silence and desert lying in between two responses/two opposite actions.
 a move towards a counterculture , creating a new one,
 questioning the old and inhuman values of the ruling class.

lives of many poets in the Dalit poetry movement
 are central forces of the dalit's struggle for justice.
 (life of Namdeo Dhasal, one example).

they have to be studied in close comparison with the
 lives and works of the Negro poets of 20th century.
 they range from self awareness to self sacrifice for the cause of justice.
 (Aime Cesaire ,Leopold Sedor Senghor, Dennis Brutus, Langston Hughes,
 Kearsy Viva , and many others)

they have added a new sense of meaning and beauty to poetic art;

a new politico-spiritual strength of humanness to the ideology of the aesthetic
 and to the agenda for cultural action.

redefining tradition and modernity in reclaiming a democratic culture.

We Indians have an Africa in our hearts when we are tortured and murdered.
 We Indians have an Africa in our expressions when we resist injustice.
 this kind of a deeper parity is there in the histories of the Negroes and the Dalits.

Dalit poetry

Dalit poetry is a poetry of deep, anti romantic, anti nostalgic
 Cultural memory of the lower/oppressed castes-dalits- poets .
 These poems are written in colloquial dialects of the poets.

They are dialogic in imagination
 and in its patterns of expression.
 Their poetic ancestors are the folk poems of their grandpas,
 Who burned their lives in the open fields and roads and jungles
 For the minimal livelihood.
 Dalit Poetry is straight poetry.
 'Personal is political' is true to the core in the following poems:

Which language should I speak?

Arun Kamble

Chewing trotters in the badlands
 my grandpa,
 the permanent resident of my body,
 the household of tradition heaped on his back,
 hollers at me,
 'You whore-son, talk like we do.
 Talk, I tell you .!'

Picking through the Vedas
 his top-knot well-oiled with ghee,
 my Brahmin teacher tells me,
 'you idiot, use the language correctly!'.
 Now I ask you which language should I speak ?

Translated from Marathi by Priya Adarker

The search

W Kapur

What bird is this that sings a song
 Filled with such sorrow
 Such aching notes
 In the dead of night
 When my hut in its yard of densest dark
 Is drenched to brim of its heart ?
 Nor can I,
 Wanting to follow him ,

Find my voice
 Or his direction
 Will some one tell me his name
 And the branch where he makes his home?
 Or are you all like me, strangers?
 have you like me, lost your light?
 Atleast my hut holds its warmth
 Perhaps I could give him some,
 Put embers in his voice.

Translated from Marathi by Santha Gokhale

Mother

Waman Nimbalker

Daylight should die. Darkness would reign.
 We at our hut's door. No single light inside .
 Lights burning in houses around.
 Kitchen-fires too. *Bhakris beaten out.*
 Vegetables gruel s cooked .
 In our nostrils the smell of food.
 In our stomach darkness.
 From our eyes , welling up, streams of tears.
 Slicing darkness , a shadow heavily draws near.
 On her head a burden . Her legs a- totter .
 Thin dark body.. my mother.
 All day she combs the forest for firewood.
 We await her return.
 When she brings no firewood to sell we go to bed with hungry.
 One day something happens .How we don't know.
 Mother comes home leg bandaged, bleeding.
 A long black snake bit her, say two women.
 He raised his hood.
 He struck her.
 He slithered away .
 Mother fell to the ground.
 We try charms.
 We try spells.
 The medicine man comes.

The day ends. So does her life.
We burst into grief. Our grief melts into air.
Mother is gone.
We, her broods , thrown to the winds.
Even now my eyes search for mother..My sadness grows.
When I see a thin woman with firewood on her head,
I go and buy all her firewood.

Translated from Marathi by Priya Adarker

Memories

My sister

Bashir Sakhatwarz

Through the thickness of distance,
Through the walls of mountains,
Through the depth of oceans,
Last night I touched you
I touched your pain
They became mine.

There is no meaning in children smile
Flowers grow, but are they flowers?
Children smile, but are they smiling?
Without your children
Without your garden
Flowers and smile do not grow
Without your hand,
Life delivers emptiness

When I departed
You whispered "take care"
Have you taken care?
Have you built a dream?
Have you not seen crashed hopes?
Have you avoided disasters?
Disasters are in the air
They grow in your garden
They fall off the trees.

The murder of a writer

Basil Fernando

(A tribute to Lasantha Wickramatunga, a well known Sri Lankan journalist and editor who was assassinated on January 8, 2009.)

I do not cry
for Lasantha
my tears are for you
Lanka, Lanka

Of the real ugliness
he wrote
his death
told it all

Surrounding a car
gunmen and guards
hunted a man
and revealed the nation

speech connects citizens
silence kills the nation
Lanka, Lanka
death now is your game.

Mahawweli, Kelani, Walawe
polluted rivers
carries to the seas
your shame

Shed not Lanka
crocodile tears
have remorse
for letting your children die.

You held the gun
you killed the pen
Lanka, Lanka you made
the land go barren

I do not cry
 for Lasantha
 my tears are for you
 Lanka, Lanka

Tearful poems of a mother

W M Gayathri Priyakari Gunasekara

The day you were conceived in my womb as my first
 A thousand flowers bloomed in my mind, my son
 The first day your milk-mixed eyes saw the world
 In my mind the Poson full moon appeared
 When with childish smiles you were walking in front of the house
 And in my warmth you cuddled and dived into the dream world,
 There was no one so fortunate as myself on the earth
 Hundreds and thousands of times my mind murmured in joy
 My son grew in intelligence and good habits
 Who did not see my golden son's value?
 Though not rough and hard, you, my son, appeared a hero
 Who then didn't see my son's value?
 As the Asela moon was rising, murderers entered my home
 Despite thousands of pleas to the heart, away they took my son
 Hearing the fire of the gun's barrel, my mind went far away
 To which world was my golden son taken away?

Translated by Basil Fernando

A Son's Tale

Basil Fernando

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 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 breathed 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 forgiving 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 honesty 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
I did not take
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.

Is my son also sleeping under the mara tree?

W P Ruwani Wanniarrrhchi

My little son,
I can wait
Till I am tired, seated at the doorstep of the house
Inside the lonely mind,
Kiri kokku (white storks) are crying
Come back home again,
My little son
It is to erase the tears of the leaking roof
Of the wattle and daub home from which my son flew
To the field of letters
Who there, aney (Oh, my goodness), told my son
To break mahamera (heaven's) walls?

In the midst of fires,
The irony I do not feel in the world
Of the milk pot that moved in the river
Is my son also sleeping
Under the mara tree?

Warm tears fill both my eyes
Now, son, who am I to feed
The warm rice cooked on the three cooking stones?

Come, even in a dream,
And wave your hand
I still have more tears in my eyes
To shed

Translated by Basil Fernando

List of contributors

Many of the poems and writings in this collection were kindly submitted by the Women's UN Report Network (WUNRN), <http://www.wunrn.com>.

Right to Life, a Sri Lankan human rights group, kindly submitted the collection of untitled children's paintings depicting the experience of forced disappearances, which were part of an art competition in 2000.

Maryam Sheikh Abdi is a program officer for the Population Council's Frontiers in Reproductive Health program, based in Nairobi, Kenya. Abdi works on a project that aims to accelerate the abandonment of female genital mutilation/cutting in the Somali community of North Eastern Province of Kenya. Her poem "The Cut" was submitted by the WUNRN.

Sita Agarwal wrote the book *Genocide of Women in Hinduism*, which can be found at the Internet Ambedkar Library.

Lydia Brackett is a RAWA supporter from the USA. She wrote the poem "How would it feel" after trying on the burqa.

Mahmoud Darwish (15 March 1941--9 August 2008) was born in al-Birwa, Acre, in what is now Western Galilee. Darwish published his first book of poetry, *Asafir bila ajniha*, at the age of nineteen. He subsequently published over thirty volumes of poetry and eight books of prose. He has received numerous awards, and his work has been translated and published in 20 languages. He has been called the 'quintessential poet of anomie and loss, and of the Palestinian cause'.

Jane Evershed's work may be found at <http://www.evershed.com>. Her poem "Women dancing humanity into the future" was submitted by the WUNRN.

Basil Fernando is the director of the Asian Human Rights Commission, as well as a poet. He has published several collections of poems. His writings may be seen at www.basilfernando.net under literature.

Dr Carole R Fontaine is the John Taylor Professor of Biblical Theology and History at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton, MA, where she is also Resident Artist. She is an expert in wisdom traditions and women in the Ancient Near East, and a Human

Rights Defender sitting on numerous NGO boards dealing with the religious rights of women and girls. Her poem 'The stone and woman' was submitted by the WURN.

W M Gayathri Priyakari Gunasekara is a Grade 12 student in Sri Lanka. 'Tearful Poems of a Mother' is one of the poems from a collection of Sinhalese poems by children of grade 3 – 12 from the anthology *Kadulu Mathakayen Obbata (Beyond the memory of tears)* by an organization called Kalapeya Api (We of the free trade zone) based in Negombo, Sri Lanka.

HONG Sung-dam was born in 1955 and graduated from the faculty of drawing, Chosun University. In 1979, he joined the "Gwangju Free Painters' Meeting" and worked as a propaganda agent during the Gwangju Democratic Uprisings Movement. In November of the same year, he held his first individual art exhibition. In 1983, he established a 'people's art school'. Starting with his first Hengsch Gallery Invitational Exhibition in 1988, Germany, he has had several overseas exhibitions. His work addresses issues of violence, protest and rehabilitation.

Layad Kasiyanaphi is a Filipina artist and musician. Layad's husband was a human rights activist who was killed in November 2005 in the ongoing extrajudicial killings taking place in the Philippines.

M I Kuruwilla (19 January 1918—17 November 1993) was born in India, and migrated to Sri Lanka. He was among the founding staff at the Aquinas University College in 1954, and was Head of the English Department till his retirement in the late 1980s. He is known to many as a great teacher of literature, who also contributed literary criticisms to newspapers and radio, for which he won the award for non-fiction prose (literary criticism) in 1985. One of his strongest ideas was that "the most enduring and universal art is that which has the deepest national and local roots".

Federico Mayor is the former Director General of UNESCO. Her poem "Women" was submitted by the WUNRN.

Faraz Ahmed Naveed, a student at Karachi University and young peace activist was kidnapped, tortured and killed on November 8, 2004. It is suspected that Faraz—son of prominent human rights activist and journalist Baseer Naveed—was targeted because of Baseer's vociferous campaign against the construction of the Lyari Expressway near Karachi. Little or no action has been taken by the police or government to investigate Faraz' death, leaving the killers at large.

Vanessa O'Dwyer has written several pieces on human rights, which can be found at <http://poetsforhumanrights.ning.com/profile/VanessaODwyer>.

Shailja Patel is an award-winning poet, playwright, theatre artist, and creator of *Migritude*. Her poem “What moves us” was submitted by the WURN.

David Ronald Bruce Pekar is a Canadian poet who started writing in 2004. His work can be viewed at <http://www.myhiddenvoice.com/>. According to David, “The pictures that my words paint may not always be pretty, but I hope they are pictures worth viewing, for I write about what I see in the world around me, whether it be good, bad or otherwise.”

Cecil Rajendra is a Nobel nominated poet. He is much respected for his pioneering work as a human rights lawyer and environmental activist as well as his poetry, which has explored the cultural, spiritual and material values of Asian society and critiqued both industrial development and development aid. In 2005, Cecil Rajendra was the first ever recipient of the Malaysian Lifetime Humanitarian Award for his legal aid work and his inspirational poetry. That same year he was also nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Fr Roberto Reyes, also known as the Running Priest, currently lives in Hong Kong where he works for human rights. He travels frequently to the Philippines where he is involved in many different aspects of human rights.

Jayne Sachs wrote the words and music for “Twisted Ballerina”, which was submitted by the WURN. More information on Sachs’ work can be found at <http://www.jaynesachs.com/>.

Somia Sadiq is a member of the Nepalese Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party (CMKP).

Bashir Sakhawar is an Afghan poet who writes for the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). Bashir’s work may be found at <http://www.rawa.org/bashir.htn>. In the introduction to the poem “My sister” Bashir writes, ‘I have not heard from my sister for many years. I do not know if she is alive.’

K G Sankarapillai is a contemporary Indian poet writing in Malayalam, and has won the National Award for Poetry in India on two occasions.

Bulleh Shah (1680 to 1757), a renowned Muslim spiritual leader of the sub continent of Indo-Pakistan, was a Punjabi Sufi poet. Bulleh Shah’s poetry and philosophy strongly criticizes the Islamic religious orthodoxy of his days. Bulleh’s lifespan was marked with communal strife between Muslims and Sikhs; amongst the violence, Bulleh was a beacon of hope and peace for the citizens of Punjab, maintaining that violence was not the answer to violence.

Aditya Shankar is a young Malayali poet and writer.

Sue Silvermarie is an American supporter of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). Her poem “I Stand by Your Ear Unseen” is about Bedi Begum who was murdered by flogging at the order of the Taliban in July of 1999, one of 60 women to die as a result of flogging that year. This narrative combines the elements of several true stories about various Afghan women.

SipakV is a coordinator of the FOKO Project in Madagascar, who prefers to go by the pseudonym SipakV. She wrote this poem “Abandoned Woman” in Malagasy and English. Bharat B Trivedi is a Commerce Graduate from Bombay University and a budding poet. His poem “In the Name of God” was forwarded by Hasni Essa of Islam for Pluralism and the International Human Rights Organisation (IHRO).

W P Ruwani Wanniarrrhchi is a grade 10 student in Sri Lanka, whose poem ‘Is my son sleeping under the mara tree?’ is published in the anthology Kadulu Mathakayen Obbata (Beyond the memory of tears).

Anna Vera Williams is a poet who writes on a wide variety of subjects. She kindly makes her work available at <http://freepoemsonline.blogspot.com>.

Woesser, a Tibetan poet and writer, was compelled to move from Lhasa to Beijing, where, even under constant harassment by the authorities, she has continued to write.

Book review:

Prisons... Manila Pen and Beyond

Fr J Hurley SJ

The Prison Journal of Fr Roberto P Reyes includes narrations and reflections of his fellow detainees. Published by the Asian Human Rights Commission. Printed in the Philippines. 127 pages.

Many, many years ago as a pupil in an Irish village school, one of our textbooks was a prison journal by a famous Irish patriot. It was a gripping tale which we read with the greatest of interest. This was my first encounter with prison literature. More recently I read Bishop Domingo Tang's, "How Inscrutable His Ways", another gripping story told in very simple, direct language. Still more recently I accidentally came across a book by Rita Nightingale, an English girl who was wrongly imprisoned in a Bangkok jail for allegedly being in possession of drugs. Originally a less than enthusiastic Christian, Rita, while in prison, became a very highly committed Christian, and could cry out, "I thank the Lord for bringing me to this prison". Her book is entitled, "Free, True Release in Christ in a Bangkok jail". Rita was eventually released and returned to England, where she worked directly for the welfare of prisoners.

So it was with considerable anticipation I approached Fr Roberto's journal, and let me assure you dear reader, I was not disappointed. Fr Roberto was accidentally associated with the attempted Manila coup on November 29, 2007. He was arrested, spent 15 days in jail, and was subsequently discharged.

In his journal he describes his experiences day by day. Physically it was a rather relaxed regime. He was able to celebrate Mass each day, practice yoga, and undertake his daily run in the company of a fellow prisoner, talk with visitors and sympathisers (of whom there were many!). One of his major irritants was the very noisy conversation of his prison guards at night when he was trying to sleep. Nonetheless it was prison, he was behind prison bars, and was deprived of his freedom. At the same time I was reading another prison memoir, this time by a man who had spent some months in a Nepalese prison. His journal is entitled, "258 Dark Days", and I can assure you, dear reader, they were dark, very dark days! The prisoners were blindfolded, not allowed to converse with one another. And torture was frequent. Yes, there was a world of difference between the Nepalese and Manila prisons. But let us not forget-both were prisons.

Fr Roberto's reflections on his prison experience are of considerable interest; in my opinion, the most interesting part of the book. He describes prison as an opportunity to "revisit another prison, the prison inside each one of us". He also speaks about the prison "out there", the unfriendly structures often built into the life of many organizations, and which inhibit progressive action. Fr Roberto describes his own prison experience as helping him to grow in his "priestly commitment and identity". He goes on to say that it was "an investment with immeasurable returns". And he sums it all up with that astounding phrase, "prison is peace". Each year a priest is obliged to make a retreat of 4-5 days. I have no doubt that Fr Roberto's 15 days inside this Manila prison was a very fruitful, if highly unconventional, retreat!

At one point in his reflections Fr Roberto raises the question of "God's name for me?". He is often referred to as "the Running Priest ". I humbly suggest he be called 'prophet'. He is one of the prophets of our time. We are gradually rediscovering the prophet and his role. One author has described the prophet as the person who "comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable". This description aptly describes that Old Testament prophet Amos, and many of our more contemporary prophets, Archbishop Romero, Father Dan Berrigan SJ. The mission of the prophet is most certainly not an easy one. He sometimes has to endure suffering, negative criticisms, misunderstandings, and even prison. In saying all this we must also accept the fact that the prophet is also human, fallible, and most assuredly has no prior claim on perfection. But undoubtedly we need the prophet. And Fr Roberto is one of them.

A few minor criticisms of this journal:

There is an abundance of photos, but no indication of where the photo was taken, or who the people in the photo are.

There are also some Tagalog extracts. However there is no accompanying translation or, at least, a short English summary, for the benefit of the non-Philippine reader.

There are also some occasional misprints.

A second edition will correct these minor imperfections.

But, overall, Fr Roberto's journal is undoubtedly gripping, very well worth reading, and will leave the reader with much to reflect on.

Congratulations, Father Roberto.

Practicing Ethics in Action

Ethics in Action begins with the realization that both law and morality have failed the people of many countries, who are today facing incredible forms of cruelty that they have little power to eradicate. Despite all the rhetoric of empowerment, the reality witnessed in most Asian countries is desperation and powerlessness. The two ingredients necessary for any real empowerment of ordinary people are law and morality. If living conditions are to improve, defective legal systems and the failures of upholding ethics and morality cannot be ignored. *article 2*, a publication of the Asian Legal Resource Centre, sister organization of the Asian Human Rights Commission, is devoted to discussing matters relating to defective legal systems obstructing the implementation of human rights. *Ethics in Action* will be devoted to discussing how movements and leaderships claiming to uphold ethics and morality have failed to promote and protect human rights.

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