**In the end we are all ordinary people**

[**Atle Hetland**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/atle-hetland)

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This year’s holy month of Ramzan has been quieter than usual due to the corona restrictions, affecting the rich and poor alike. The lockdown from last weekend made many people who work in Islamabad and other cities, but come from other places, arrange their bus tickets and other transport before the restrictions kicked in. That meant that the last week of Ramzan, leading up to this weekend’s Eid-ul-Fitr celebrations, has become a longer and more pleasant family event than usual, although still a bit sombre.

I shall take the opportunity to write a bit more about Astrid Lindgren (1907-2002), the Swedish children’s writer, whom I drew attention to last week—and she should be promoted in Pakistan, too, not to overshadow Roald Dahl (1916-1990), who is so popular. Incidentally, Roald Dahl’s parents were from my home country Norway, but he grew up in the UK, so we think of him as an English, well, Welsh children’s writer. Does it matter where writers come from? No, not really, and the great ones always take up themes and topics that we can identify with anywhere in the world. That also pertains to the comedian Mr. Bean, played by Rowan Atkinson, b. 1955; his messages are fun everywhere even though he hardly uses any words. His fun stories are harmless and fun, without many moral lessons behind.

[Gaza death toll from Israeli attacks hits 227, including 64 children](https://nation.com.pk/20-May-2021/gaza-death-toll-from-israeli-attacks-hits-227-including-64-children)

When Astrid Lindgren writes, there are often some lessons to learn about how we should live together, children and adults, too. She writes about social class, fairness, gender issues, and more; we all get to love her strong characters in her stories and often the girls are stronger and more prominent than the boys. She writes about ordinary people, mostly of lower classes, living in the countryside, and she writes about tradition and culture, and about religion and faith. About one of her most famous workers, ‘The Brothers Lionheart’, she said when asked about faith, “I believe in God when I really need him”. In her books, religion and moral behaviour are key undertones; doing the right thing becomes essential. Astrid Lindgren said that to talk about faith in children’s literature is important in order to make it a natural, everyday thing, and also so that children may have less fear for death, less worry about losing their parents, grandparents, siblings, or others in their neighbourhood.

[KP reports 28 death, 186 newly infected cases of COVID-19](https://nation.com.pk/19-May-2021/kp-reports-28-death-186-newly-infected-cases-of-covid-19)

Since we now have begun celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr, and since we therefore think more about religious issues, and since Islam also teaches us about fairness and justice, then I thought it relevant to draw special attention to a unique song by Astrid Lindgren, notably ‘A Poor Farm Worker’ (‘En fattig bonddräng’ in Swedish). Anywhere in the world, poor people and even rich people, and everyone in-between, can identify with, or at least understand the situation of the poor farm worker, a day labourer, a house made, or someone else low on the social ladder. The holy books teach us to help the poor and others whom we should share with, either it is from our surplus and wealth, or it is our time and care. Ramzan and Eid give special attention to such deeds.

In ‘A Poor Farm Worker’, most of the poem, turned into a popular song, is about the hard workdays of somebody who toils day out and day in on a farm, or he could have been a day labourer with less secure employment, a place to sleep and food to eat. The farm worker doesn’t feel that he always does the right thing. But then in the last verses, Astrid Lindgren imagines her beloved character standing at the Gate of Heaven, feeling quite worried and miserable. But then God says: “Poor Farm Worker, come here, I have seen your daily struggle and never-ending hard work. Therefore, you are welcome in, and you shall stay near me.” The poor Farm Worker becomes still before God. But then he is given the most snow-white dress. And God says: “Now, poor Farm Worker, your work is now over. Finally, you can rest.”

[PSL 6 likely to be postponed indefinitely](https://nation.com.pk/19-May-2021/psl-6-likely-to-be-postponed-indefinitely)

The song was performed at Astrid Lindgren’s funeral in February 2002, first in the folksy, commonly known style of the song, performed by the popular singer Tommy Körberg, and then as a postlude on the grand organ at the end of the service in the magnificent Stockholm Cathedral. The humble labourer, the Poor Farm Worker, who could just be any of us with all our shortcomings, becomes the one we should strive at being and learning from. Throughout his life he has been doing his best, or at least trying against all odds. He has felt that it may not be good enough, only to be told that in God’s eyes, he had done as good as he could. No, he hadn’t been perfect, but he had tried, as we all should try, every day, knowing that God will forgive our sins and shortcomings if we ask for it.

And then I should tell you that it was a group of day labourers who reminded me of my topic for today’s article. They were sitting on the roadside between the F-7 Post Mall and Rana Market in Islamabad, well, that is before going home last weekend to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr.

[Russia voices concern over civilian casualties in Jerusalem, Gaza](https://nation.com.pk/19-May-2021/russia-voices-concern-over-civilian-casualties-in-jerusalem-gaza)

Dear reader, may I wish you all a blessed Eid Mubarak, especially if you are a farm worker, a day labourer, a maid or helper, now at home in your village or town, with relatives around, knowing that God sees you and is with you, as he is with each and all of us.