**No Eid for Sachal**

BY A B B A S N A S I R 2021-05-16

EID means different things to different people.  
  
Apart from a celebration of the successful end to the month of Ramazan, a period of abstinence, prayer and sacrifice, some identify it with `sheer khurma`; others, children in particular, with `Eidi` and yet others with new clothes and family congregations.  
  
I have heard the elderly in the family say `Eid to bachchon ki hoti hai (Eid is a festival for the children)` but what would you say to Sachal, just about four, who was six months old when his father went `missing` while on a trip to the mountainous north of the country? That was in August 2018.  
  
Sachal`s father filmmaker, poet, vocal human rights activist and journalist Mudassar Naaru was on holiday with his family in the picturesque north when he disappeared without a trace. The police were reluctant to even register a case but eventually did two months after his disappearance.  
  
Of course, after the commission on missing persons was approached. He went missing on Aug 20, 2018, the FIR was registered on Nov 22, 2018. This was all that the commission could accomplish as it failed to recover Naaru.  
  
Sadaf Chughtai, his wife, herself a rights activist and artist, campaigned tirelessly for three and a half years to find her husband but to no avail. Side by side with campaigning to find her missing husband, she also worked to provide for her son and herself. She finally told a friend she was losing heart after the Ministry of Defence told the Islamabad High Court earlier this month that Naaru was not in ISI or MI custody.  
  
This Islamabad High Court hearing took place on May 4, 2021, and four days later the young woman who, like her husband, could not have been more than 30 years of age, died of a heart attack; to me more of a broken heart with hope having been snatched from her.  
  
Now you tell me how anyone is supposed to wish little Sachal Eid Mubarak. Would you have the heart to? I can`t even begin to imagine the pain of the children who died as a result of Israel`s barbarity in the Gaza Strip nor am I able to visualise what fear andterror must fill the hearts and minds of the Gaza parents and the children this Eid with bombs and missiles slamming into their neighbourhoods.  
  
Or what torment the loved ones of those 85, mostly Hazara schoolgirls, who were 1(illed in the Kabul car-bomb were living through. The Hazara community has paid a hugely disproportionate price (to its size) for the strife in Afghanistan both before and after 9/11 and during the US-led Western military occupation.  
  
All this pain has been inflicted on man by man.When reason fails, this is what man resorts to.  
  
Naked barbarity. Look at our own intolerance, in society and within each one of us. As the majority among us celebrates Eid, spare a thought for those persecuted, hunted and hounded for the solitary crime of being born into a different faith or sect.  
  
Before you get upset I am not saying anything that makes you happy this Eid, let me share some good news too. Remember the resolute young woman who broke down after having remained stoic for months and said, while pleading that her brothers be imprisoned for as long as their `crime` warrants, that the pain of not knowing where they were was not bearable anymore? Haseeba Qambrani became a high-profile campaigner for Hassan and Hizbullah Qambrani, both of whom were taken away on Feb 14, 2020. She was heard and seen on TV screens during Maryam Nawaz`s last visit to Quetta.  
  
She was also vocal at the protest to press for thereturn of the missing in Islamabad and talked to the Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari and, if I am not mistaken, I also saw a picture of her as part of a delegation that was invited to present their demands to Prime Minister Imran Khan. Officials said the minister and the prime minister had assured Ms Qambrani of their help.  
  
Well, a day before little Sachal lost his mother, news broke that Hizbullah and Hassan Qambrani had been returned to their Balochistan home, some 15 months after having been `disappeared` without a trace. One of the first to congratulate them and thank the prime minister and the human rights minister was Naaru`s mother.  
  
She also expressed the hope that her son too would be found. The next morning tragedy struck her own family again as her daughter-in-law passed away. She now devotes all her time to raising her motherless grandchild. And her son remains among the many, many missing.  
  
Baloch activists insist the number of victims of enforced disappearanceisinthethousandsintheir province alone, and the affected families oscillate between hope and despair. One can derive a modicum of comfort from the return of the Qambranis to their home. Their family would have a good Eid aftertheirtravails overthe lastEid.  
  
A `high official` who briefed mostly TV anchors in Islamabad a few weeks back mainly on India, while responding to a question, complained that the security personnel who die battling terrorists also go `missing` for their families. But gratefully, he did acknowledge that some sort of a mechanism has to be found in cases where suspects `can`t be handed over to the police` (for unspecified reasons). Any mechanism that at least informs the families of the missing that they are alive and can hope to be returned one day must be better than not knowing and living constantly, fearing the worst.  
  
Grateful for small mercies. That`s what we have beenreduced to. The writer is a former editor of Dawn.  
  
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