THE WILDEST BEAST IN THE WORLD

Narrative Nonfiction / Social Commentary

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Biography of Abdulbasir Shafaq



Abdulbasir Shafaq, son of Abdulsamad, was born on 4 March 1953 in a poor yet enlightened family in the village of Baqa Baraki Rajan, Logar Province, Afghanistan.

Shafaq is married and has seven children. He currently resides in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, where he sought refuge.

He has received higher education and possesses extensive knowledge in various fields. Further details about his life and activities are available on his personal website.

Abdulbasir Shafaq is a writer, poet, and seeker of spiritual truth. In addition to writing nineteen works of fiction exploring philosophical, literary, and mystical themes, he has authored five poetry collections that reflect his profound and introspective understanding of life and humanity. All these works have been published.

Three additional books, titled Forty Nights of Solitude, The Inner Retreat, The Travelling Man, and End Point, are awaiting publication.

He is currently working on a book entitled The Shadow That Breathes.

Shafaq is also a member of PEN Nederland, the Dutch branch of the international writers' association dedicated to freedom of expression and literary rights.

Outwardly, he is a calm and reserved person; inwardly, however, he possesses a gentle, sincere, and compassionate soul. Getting to know him takes time, but once a friendship is established, it develops into a deep and lasting bond.

In his journey of spiritual exploration and self-discovery, Shafaq has drawn inspiration and guidance from the works of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi and Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi, the great Persian mystic and poet.

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Humanity's Crime in the Twenty-First Century

Nearly a century ago, Rabi Ansari, a well-known writer of Greater Iran, wrote a book titled The Crime of Humanity, or The Slave Traders of the Twentieth Century. In its day it was, for its readers, one of the finest novels available.

But the twentieth century came to an end, and humanity entered the twenty-first, a century in which, it was hoped, the spread of knowledge, growing awareness, scientific and technological progress, and a deeper understanding of the world would reduce violence and crime.

In this century, the human race has reached what earlier generations could hardly have imagined. We have traveled into space, crossed the borders of the Earth, reached the depths of the oceans, brought many diseases under control, and covered great distances in the shortest of times. With the help of technology, we have turned the world into a small, closely linked home.

Today a person can reach someone on the other side of the world in seconds, view images of the most distant corners of the Earth and of space, and investigate many of the universe's mysteries.

Yet amid all this progress, one question still stands without an answer:

Has humanity come to know itself as well as it has come to know the world outside?

The answer is not hopeful.

For as science and technology have advanced, crime has taken new forms. War on a vast scale, the killing of ordinary people, mass killing, terrorism, harsh rule, modern slavery, human trafficking, the abuse of children, violence against women, the forced removal of millions, poverty and need, and the destruction of the environment are only some of the faces of crime in today's world.

Even knowledge and technology, which could have served human comfort and happiness, have in some cases become instruments of power, rule, control, destruction, and killing.

Here another question takes shape:

Does scientific and technological progress necessarily mean the progress of humanity?

Perhaps people today are far more powerful, in knowledge and scientific ability, than people a hundred years ago. But have we advanced as much in good values, sense of right and wrong, and humanity?

If one day we were asked,

“What is the most savage animal on Earth?”

we might first think of fierce and wild beasts. But when we turn the pages of human history, we meet scenes that make the question difficult to answer.

War, massacre, torture, slavery, mass killing: the destruction of human beings at human hands has been repeated again and again. People have killed their own kind not for survival but for power, wealth, fame, revenge, bias, and rule, and even in the name of religion and the sacred.

A hunter usually hunts to survive. But a human being can on purpose destroy the life of another for power and profit, for belief and bias, and sometimes for reasons far smaller than a single human life.

Perhaps one of the greatest sad events of human history is exactly this: that our knowledge and power have rushed ahead of our good values and humanity.

This book is an attempt to look at that dark face of humanity in the twenty-first century; an attempt to ask, to reflect, and to remember.

I do not wish to blame all human beings. Alongside crime and violence, human history has also known love, sacrifice, kindness, the search for justice, and unselfish giving.

But I want us to ask ourselves:

What has happened to humanity, that a being with such a vast capacity to build has gained an equally vast capacity to destroy?

Crime is not always committed with weapons on a battlefield. A lie, an unfair decision, a bias, an act of abuse, a political decree, poisoned false messages, or silence in the face of cruel treatment can each be the beginning of a disaster.

In this book I will try, as far as my ability and means allow, to look at some corners of humanity's crimes in the present age: crimes that sometimes occur before the eyes of the world, and sometimes in silence, far from public view, destroying the lives of innocent people.

Perhaps the purpose of looking into darkness is not to remain in it.

Perhaps we must know the darkness in order to value the light.

Perhaps we must remember crime in order to think again about humanity.

And perhaps the greatest question of the twenty-first century is not

What has humanity built?

but rather

What has humanity done, with what it has built, to its own kind and to this world?

This book is an attempt to answer that question.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter One: The Human Being, Angel or Savage?

Why does a being gifted with reason, language, and sense of right and wrong sometimes commit acts beyond imagination? The difference between animal violence and aware human violence.

Chapter Two: When One Human Being Made Another His Enemy

The roots of bad feeling, hatred, revenge, and violence, from arguments between two individuals to ill will between nations and societies.

Chapter Three: War, the Factory of Human Death

The wars of the twenty-first century: civilian victims, children, women, the displaced, and the ruin of cities.

Chapter Four: Children Who Never Had a Childhood

Children as victims of war, poverty, trafficking, forced labor, abuse, and violence.

Chapter Five: Woman, the Silent Victim of Violence

Domestic violence, forced marriage, trafficking, need, and other forms of violence against women, told through human suffering rather than statistics alone.

Chapter Six: Slavery Has Not Died

Historical slavery and its new forms: human trafficking, forced labor, and the abuse of the poor and helpless.

Chapter Seven: Crime in the Name of God

A historical and critical look at cases in which people have justified violence in the name of religion and the sacred, distinguishing religion and faith from their wrong use.

Chapter Eight: When Power Eats up the Human Being

Harsh rule, one-man rule, crushing of freedom, torture, and the elimination of enemies: how power without responsibility becomes an instrument of cruel treatment.

Chapter Nine: Crime Without Bullets

Lies, trickery, false messages, hate speech, shame, and rumor. A single word can be the beginning of great violence.

Chapter Ten: Wealth and Poverty

Why, in a world of such wealth and progress, are some people still without life's most basic needs? This chapter looks at structures and human behavior rather than accusing any one group.

Chapter Eleven: Technology, Gift or Weapon?

How technology has improved human life and how it can be abused: from modern weapons to watching, digital trickery, and the wrong use of information.

Chapter Twelve: Crime in the Virtual World

Lies and hatred on social media, cyberbullying, fraud, the abuse of public trust, and the change of cyberspace into a new arena for hurting human beings.

Chapter Thirteen: The Human Being Against Nature

Deforestation, pollution, the destruction of homes, and the careless abuse of resources. Is humanity destroying its own home?

Chapter Fourteen: Migration and the Homeless

Forced removal, asylum, war, and poverty; and, alongside the suffering, the stories of people who seek safety and a new life in new lands.

Chapter Fifteen: The Borders Humans Drew Between Humans

Nationality, language, race, ethnicity, social class, and other labels that become instruments of scorn and bad feeling, and the idea of the "mental selves."

Chapter Sixteen: The Crime Within

The book turns from the outer world to the inner: greed, envy, anger, selfish behavior, pride, bias, and the thirst for power.

Chapter Seventeen: Can Humanity Still Return?

After all this darkness, the book must not end without hope. Can awareness, education, love, justice, and self-knowledge change humanity's course?

Chapter Eighteen: The Last Question: Where Is Humanity Going?

We return to the question at the beginning of the book: What is the most savage animal on Earth? And we deepen it: Is the problem humanity itself, or a humanity that has not yet come to know itself? The book ends not in blame but in an invitation: the return of the human being to humanity.

Chapter One

The Human Being: Angel or Savage?

From the day the human race first looked at its own reflection in the water, a question may have taken shape in the depths of its being:

Who am I?

Am I only a creature that eats, sleeps, reproduces, and struggles to stay alive?

Or is there something in me beyond this body?

From the earliest days, human beings have tried to understand the world around them. They have looked at the sky and counted the stars, thought about death, searched for meaning, and finally built advanced societies whose remains surprise us today.

They built cities, invented language, composed poetry, played music, painted, wrote books, and reflected on God and existence.

But this same being, alongside all this beauty, has shown another face, at times so dark and frightening that it forces us to ask:

Is the human being truly the best creature on Earth?

Or perhaps we should put the question differently:

Can a human being, with all these capacities, also be the most savage creature on Earth?

The Animal Kills, but Why Does the Human Being Kill?

When a lion hunts, it is usually to feed itself and its cubs. The wolf hunts out of hunger, and many animals fight to defend themselves or their territory.

But what of the human being?

Sometimes people kill not out of hunger, but for wealth.

Sometimes not for survival, but for power.

Sometimes not for defense, but for revenge.

Sometimes not to save their own lives, but to prove their superiority over another.

And most painful of all, sometimes a human being kills another merely because that person belongs to a different people, language, religion, land, or idea.

Here the difference between animal violence and human violence becomes clear.

An animal does not usually build complex tools to destroy its own kind. But a human being can devote years of knowledge, capital, and genius to building a weapon that in moments takes thousands of lives.

He can build a factory to make life easier, yet put the same knowledge and the same factory to work producing instruments of death.

So the problem is not merely human power.

The problem is that power, when cut off from good values, can become the most harmful force in the world.

Two Humans Within One Human Being

Perhaps within every person two faces dwell.

One can love, forgive, sacrifice, take the hand of the fallen, bring bread to a hungry child, and weep for another's suffering.

The other can grow very angry, hate, lie, betray, oppress, and even destroy another's life to get what he wants.

These two faces are always at war.

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Sometimes man moves toward the light, and sometimes toward the dark.

Perhaps one of humanity's greatest battlefields lies not on national borders, not on the field of war, and not in politics, but within man himself.

Before fighting another, a person must face the anger, greed, envy, anger, and selfish behavior within himself.

But the trouble begins where, instead of recognizing this inner darkness, man projects it onto someone else.

He says:

"The problem is with him."

"He is my enemy."

"He is beneath me."

"He does not deserve to live as I do."

And from here, a small bad feeling can grow into a great hatred, a hatred that may later swallow up a family, a society, even a whole nation.

Advanced society Outside, Cruelty Within

Today, when we look at the great cities of the world, we are amazed at humanity's progress.

Tall buildings, high-speed trains, airplanes, satellites, the internet, smartphones, artificial intelligence, and spacecraft leaving the Earth are all signs of humanity's surprising ability.

But in another corner of this same world, a person goes hungry for a small bite of bread.

A child searches the ruins of war for his mother.

A migrant has lost her home and homeland.

A woman has become a victim of violence.

A child works instead of going to school.

And another person is shamed simply because of a difference in language, religion, ethnicity, or belief.

So we must ask:

Is building tall cities, without building people of high character, truly advanced society?

If man can reach Mars but cannot reach the heart of a hungry person, what has he defeated?

If he can see the image of a distant galaxy but cannot see the suffering of his neighbor, is he truly able to see?

If he can speak with someone thousands of kilometers away through a small device, but cannot treat the person beside him with kindness, has his communication truly advanced?

These questions may seem simple, but their answers are not easy.

Man: Builder and Destroyer

Man is a strange creature.

The same hand that puts bread in a child's mouth can also pull the trigger.

The same tongue that sings poems of love can, with a single speech, spread hatred among thousands.

The same mind that creates a medicine to save lives can also design a weapon to destroy them.

The same science that could protect nature, if placed in the hands of greed and profit, can help destroy it.

This clash may be man's greatest mystery.

Man is both builder and destroyer.

He can act like an angel, and a moment later show a face more frightening than even he could have imagined.

But should all people be blamed for the crimes of some?

Never.

In this same world there are millions of people who, without anyone knowing them, help others.

A mother who gives her whole life for her children.

A doctor who works day and night to save a patient.

A teacher who, on a small salary, builds the future of children.

A person who shares his food with the hungry.

Someone who gives up his own right so that another is not treated badly.

These too are the true face of humanity.

So this book does not wish to say that man is only a criminal and a savage.

Rather, it wishes to ask:

Why does a being capable of love also carry within him the chance of hatred and crime?

The Moment Man Steps Away from Humanity

Perhaps crime begins the moment we no longer see another human being as “human.”

When we see the other only as an “enemy,” a “foreigner,” an “infidel,” a “stranger,” an “inferior,” an “obstacle,” or a “burden,” the distance between thought and crime gets smaller.

For as long as we see another’s human face, his suffering means something to us.

When we see his child, we remember our own child.

When we see his mother, we remember our own mother.

When we see his tears, perhaps we recognize our own.

But when one person strips another of his humanity, the road to violence is paved.

Perhaps the greatest danger to the human race is not that it will build more powerful weapons;

the greatest danger is that the human heart will grow so hard that it no longer sees the suffering of another.

So Who Is the Most Savage Beast?

Now let us return to the first question.

What is the most savage animal on Earth?

If we mean a creature that fights to survive, many animals could be named.

But if we mean a creature that can, on purpose, with planning, plotting, technology, and sometimes with moral or religious reason, destroy its own kind, the answer becomes far more difficult.

Perhaps the most savage being is not the person who has flown into a rage.

Perhaps the most savage person is the one who considers his own crime as justice.

The one who calls his cruel treatment a “right.”

The one who makes up a thousand reasons to kill another, yet accepts not a single reason for that person to live.

And perhaps the most frightening moment in human history is when man no longer feels ashamed of his crime.

For as long as a person feels shame at his own cruelty, something of humanity is still alive in him.

The Beginning of a Journey

This book is a journey into some corners of that same darkness.

In the pages ahead we will not speak only of war and killing. We want to see how crime begins with an idea, how it turns into hatred, and how it sometimes ends in human disaster.

We will speak of war and harsh rule;

of children who have lost their childhood;

of women who have fallen victim to violence;

of people who have been turned into commodities;

of poverty and unfairness;

of the abuse of religion and power;

of technology that can be both a savior and a destroyer;

and finally, of man himself;

of the being who has defeated the world, yet still walks around lost in knowing himself.

Perhaps at the end of this journey we will not find a clear answer to every question.

But perhaps we will understand one thing better:

To save the world, before changing the world, we must change man.

And perhaps this change begins where every person, once, in his own solitude, asks himself:

If I were in the victim's place, what would I expect from others?

And then asks:

Am I today the kind of person I would want others to be toward me?

Perhaps the answer to these two questions is the first step in humanity's return to humanity.

But before we think of the way to rescue, we must know the darkness.

And the next chapter will take us to one of the oldest and deadliest faces of that darkness.

Chapter Two

War, the Factory of Human Death

War is one of those words that, when spoken, brings with it the smell of gunpowder, the sound of explosions, a mother's crying, a child's terror, the ruin of homes, and the deaths of human beings.

But war is not merely the sound of shooting and blasts.

Before it destroys a house, war destroys people's peace of mind. Before it reduces a city to ashes, it takes security from the hearts of the people. And before it kills a person, it kills his hope.

For this reason war may be called the factory of human death: a factory whose product is not only dead bodies, but having no home, being an orphan, poverty, lack of trust, migration, fear, and hidden wounds that sometimes remain for years, even for generations.

Where Does War Begin?

No great war falls suddenly from the sky.

Before the first bullet is fired, hatred is sometimes built up over years.

Before the first bomb bursts, people have already been divided in their minds into “us” and “them.”

Before armies enter the field, lies, false messages, bias, fear, and the thirst for power may have prepared the way for war.

Sometimes it begins with a political argument;

sometimes a fight over land;

sometimes an ethnic or religious division;

sometimes a competition over resources and power;

and sometimes the decision of a few powerful people draws millions of ordinary people into a war they never started.

In such circumstances, an important question arises:

Why are those who start wars so often not the ones who die on the front lines?

The order may be issued from a single room, yet death may arrive at a house far away.

The Soldier: A Human Being Among Commands

On the battlefield, the soldier too is a human being before he is a soldier.

He may be a father, a son, a husband, a brother, or a young man who had a simple dream for the future.

Before leaving for war, perhaps his mother embraced him and said,

“Take care of yourself.”

But a few days later, that same mother may face the news that no mother ever wishes to hear.

On the other side of the field there is another mother too.

She too is waiting for her child.

This simple truth is sometimes forgotten in the noise of war.

Behind every soldier there is a family.

When one person is killed in war, not just one person is lost; a part of his family’s life is changed forever.

The Child: A Victim Who Did Not Choose War

But perhaps the most painful face of war is the child.

The child has drawn no borders, signed no political treaty, given no order for war, and decided nothing about the arguments of adults.

He only wants to be a child.

He wants to play.

He wants to go to school.

He wants to fall asleep in his mother’s arms.

But war can take all of these simple wishes away from him.

The sound of explosions may replace the sound of play.

Ruins may replace the school.

A refugee camp may replace the home.

And sometimes a child learns the meaning of “death” before he has understood the true meaning of the word “war.”

This may be one of war’s greatest crimes:

War takes childhood away from the child.

The Mother: The One Who Feels War with Her Whole Being

If we want to see the real face of war, perhaps we do not always need to go to the battlefield.

Sometimes it is enough to go to a mother's house.

A mother whom every ring of the telephone scares.

A mother whose heart shakes every time there is a knock at the door.

A mother who waits for years for her child to return.

And a mother who perhaps does not even know whether her child is alive or dead.

Sometimes war does not make death the end of suffering; it turns waiting into endless suffering.

Cities That Grow Old Overnight

A city, like a person, has a soul.

The soul of a city lives in its houses, its narrow streets, its bazaars, its schools, and the memories of its people.

When war comes, it is not only buildings that fall.

Memories too remain under the broken stones.

The school where, for years, the laughter of children was heard falls silent.

The bazaar where people used to meet is destroyed.

The house where several generations lived side by side suddenly becomes a heap of dust.

And a city once full of life may become a city whose people, instead of looking to the future, can only look at the past.

War Continues After the War Ends

One of our mistakes is to imagine that war ends with the signing of a peace treaty.

The shooting may stop, but a person's wound does not always close on that same day.

A child who has heard explosions for years may, years later, still be afraid of a sudden noise.

A person who has lost members of their family may live the rest of their life with the memory of them.

A person who has lost their home and homeland may, even after reaching a safe land, still have a part of themselves remaining in the ruined country.

For this reason, the end of war is not necessarily the end of suffering.

Sometimes war ends outside, but goes on inside the human being.

War and Forced removal

Another bitter product of war is forced removal.

A person who has struggled for years to build a home may be forced, in a single day, to leave everything behind.

They take a small suitcase and set out on an unknown road.

The house remains behind them.

The memories remain behind them.

Sometimes even their loved ones remain behind.

They go to another land carrying only a few clothes, a few photographs, and a heap of memories.

Perhaps one of the saddest questions in the world is this:

Who has the right to pull out a human being from home and homeland?

Technology: When Science Is Placed in the Service of Death

In the twenty-first century, the human race has reached technologies that were once the stuff of legend.

But these same advances can become more exact and more harmful instruments on the battlefield.

This clash is one of the most painful in our advanced society.

To save human lives, we develop medical science,

yet to destroy human lives, we also build new technologies.

An airplane can carry passengers from one continent to another, yet the same technology can be used in war for destruction.

Communications technology can bring people closer together, yet it can also be used to spread hatred and false information.

So the problem is not technology alone.

The question is: in whose hands is technology placed, and for what purpose?

Science in itself is neither humane nor cruel. It is we who decide in what direction to use our knowledge.

Is War Always Sure to happen?

This is a difficult question.

Throughout history, governments and various groups have offered many reasons for war: defense, security, territory, resources, power, freedom, or the stopping of a threat.

But even when war is justified with political and military arguments, one moral question remains:

Who pays its human cost?

Most often, ordinary people.

The very people who played no part in the great decisions and gain nothing from the start of the war.

For this reason, every discussion of war must keep one thing at its center:

Human life.

A Factory Whose Product Is Not Only Death

If we call war a factory, its product is not only dead bodies.

Its product may be a child without a father.

A sad mother.

A ruined house.

A generation without trust.

A displaced city.

A wandering migrant.

A person who, years later, is still living with the memory of war.

And sometimes even a generation that never saw the war, yet received its marks from its fathers and mothers.

Here the meaning of this chapter's title becomes clearer:

War: the factory of human death.

A factory that may be built in a single day, yet putting out its effects may take decades.

Can Humanity Move Beyond War?

Perhaps humanity's greatest wish, from the beginning of history to today, has been to reach peace.

But peace is not merely the lack of bullets.

Peace means that a person can live without fear.

A child can go to school without fear.

A mother can see her child off without fear.

A person can express their beliefs without fear.

And no human being is forced to leave home and homeland in order to stay alive.

Perhaps one day humanity will conclude that no victory is so great that it is worth the destruction of thousands of lives.

Perhaps one day we will understand that defeating a land, without keeping the people of that land, is not a complete victory.

And perhaps a day will come when humanity, instead of asking,

“How can I destroy my enemy?”

will ask,

“How can I resolve my argument with the other without destroying them?”

If such a day arrives, perhaps one of the greatest factories of death in human history will be shut down forever.

But until that day, we must not see war only on maps and in statistics.

We must see it in the face of a child.

In a mother’s eyes.

In a ruined house.

In the suitcase of a refugee.

And in the silence of a person who has lost someone dear.

For behind every number we read in the statistics of war, there is a human being.

And perhaps this simple truth is enough for us to understand:

No war is merely war. War is a wound that human beings cause on their own kind.

And this wound, sometimes before it is seen on the body, has been made in the soul of humanity.

In the next chapter, we will step a little away from the battlefield and go to the place from which, perhaps, war begins.

Hatred: When One Human Being Cannot See Another

Elizabeth Báthory: When Power Turns a Human Being into a Hunter of Humans

In human history there have been castles whose walls were not only stone and brick. It is as if every stone had buried a secret, and every window were a silent eye that had looked outside for centuries without being able to say anything.

One of these castles was Čachtice Castle, in the land of Hungary. Its name became bound to that of a woman whose story, centuries later, still walks around between history and legend.

Elizabeth Báthory.

A woman of the rich ruling class, wealthy and powerful, who belonged to a class for whom law and power meant something different than they did for ordinary people.

But here is the question:

If power is cut off from good values, how far can a human being fall?

This question may be more important than Báthory's story itself.

For in this book we are not speaking about only one woman.

We are speaking about human beings.

In the late sixteenth century, in a land part of which now lies in Central Europe, the name Elizabeth Báthory was well known among the noble families.

Her life passed amid wealth, land, castles, servants, and the complex relationships of the rich ruling class.

In such a world, the distance between master and peasant was not merely the distance between two people. At times it was the distance between one who gave orders and one who had no chance to defend themselves.

And perhaps here the first alarm sounds.

When one person feels that another has no right to stand before them, the humanity of both is put in danger.

Young girls from poor families went to work in noble houses and castles.

Perhaps they set out for the castle with the dream of a small wage, a little more bread, or a future better than that of their poor village.

But some of these girls never returned.

Little by little, whispers began.

First one rumor.

Then two.

Then stories passed from house to house.

People said that things were happening in the castle that no one dared to speak about.

But when the walls of a castle are high, and its owner belongs to a powerful family, the truth is sometimes locked up behind those same walls.

Around 1602 to 1604, protests were raised about terrible conduct attributed to Báthory. In 1610, King Matthias II ordered György Thurzó,

one of the highest-ranking officials of Hungary, to investigate the charges.

Many witnesses were questioned; historical sources say the number of accounts is more than three hundred.

But here too, history has a complex face.

Not everything said about Báthory has been established with the same degree of historical certainty.

Some accounts spoke of violence and torture. Others told matters of which the witnesses had no direct knowledge. Even her servants' admissions were obtained under conditions whose believability has since been questioned.

So a writer who wishes to tell history should not immediately accept as truth everything that has been said about a figure over the centuries.

History is not merely a story; it is a responsibility.

And it is this responsibility that forces us to draw a clear line between truth, personal account, rumor, and legend.

Even so, Báthory's case reached a point where it could no longer be ignored.

In December 1610, Thurzó went to Čachtice Castle and arrested Báthory. Several of her servants were also arrested on charges of shared guilt.

What happened afterward is another story in itself.

In 1611, her servants were put on trial and personal account was presented against them. Some were sentenced to death, and Báthory herself, rather than being tried publicly, was locked up within the castle.

She never got back her freedom.

In 1614, after years of being locked up in that same castle, she died.

The woman who had once been mistress of the castle was finally walled in within it.

What a strange picture!

The one who had raised walls against others was at last trapped behind those very walls.

But the story of Elizabeth Báthory would be not complete without one more point.

For centuries a famous tale has been told about her:

that, to keep her youth, she bathed in the blood of young girls.

This account became so famous that it bound Báthory's name to the title "the Blood Countess."

But this part of the story is not as historically firm as the charges themselves, and many researchers regard it as legend or a later invention.

Perhaps here lies one of history's important lessons.

Human beings do not only commit crimes; sometimes we make old tales out of crime.

A historical event may be told again many times over four hundred years. Each storyteller adds something and removes something, until a historical figure becomes a famous being.

So in this book we do not wish to turn Báthory into a famous monster.

We want to draw a human question from her case.

Why should a powerful person be able to do violence to a weaker one?

Why is the victim sometimes unable to cry out?

Why do those around, when they see the signs of crime, remain silent?

And most important of all:

Can power silence a human being's sense of right and wrong?

This question does not belong only to four hundred years ago.

This question belongs to today.

We may think that Báthory's story belongs to a very distant world, a world of stone castles, horses, swords, and candles lighting the night.

But is that world really so far from us?

Today stone castles no longer play that role.

Today power has taken other forms.

Sometimes power is a gun.

Sometimes it is money.

Sometimes rank.

Sometimes the media.

Sometimes an organization.

Sometimes belief system.

Sometimes fame.

And sometimes even knowledge, which could be used to save human beings, becomes in the hands of a bad person an instrument of destruction.

The difference lies in the tools,

but the question is the same:

When power is cut off from responsibility, what happens to the human being?

Báthory, if what appears in her historical file is true, was not merely a violent individual. She was an example of the danger of power

that grows in a closed environment, alongside the silence and fear of others.

But here we must step back a little.

No crime is ever committed by one person alone.

Sometimes beside the criminal there are eyes that see but stay silent.

There are ears that hear but pretend not to.

There are tongues that know the truth but fear to speak it.

And there are structures that react too late.

So sometimes our question should not be only:

“Who is the criminal?”

Rather, we should ask:

“Who allowed the crime to continue?”

In Báthory’s story, the number of victims is likewise unclear.

During the investigation and trial, various numbers were put forward. Even the figure of 650 appeared in accounts of the case, but it was never proven, and the real number of victims remains argued over.

This point is very important for our book.

For if we are to write about “the most savage beast,” we must not blame humanity through overstatement.

The truth, even if smaller than legend, is more valuable than legend.

We do not need a large number to fear crime.

One victim is enough for us to understand that a human being has taken from another the right to live.

And now we return to the main question of the book.

At the beginning we asked:

What is the most savage animal in the world?

Perhaps the lion?

The wolf?

The tiger?

The snake?

None of them.

For an animal kills to survive.

But human beings sometimes kill for power.

They kill for wealth.

They kill for revenge.

They kill for fame.

They kill for belief.

They kill out of fear of the other.

And sometimes they even torture another human being for pleasure.

Yet in the same breath, these same human beings can save another's life.

They can build a hospital.

They can shelter an orphaned child.

They can risk their lives for another's freedom.

They can write poetry.

They can compose music.

They can forgive.

So perhaps the question is not:

"Are human beings savage?"

The question is:

“When do we set free the savage within ourselves?”

Báthory’s castle today no longer has its former power.

Its walls have grown old.

Time has passed over its stones.

But history still walks among those stones.

Not to scare us,

but to remind us of something:

No human being should become so powerful that no one dares say “no” to them.

For in the moment that a person can no longer stand against power, perhaps the first stone of the castle of crime has been laid.

And perhaps humanity’s greatest crime is not merely killing a human being,

but building a world in which killing, torture, shame, and the silencing of others become possible and no one asks: why?

Elizabeth Báthory lived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

But the question her case left us is still alive:

If we cannot hold back our own power, are we still the advanced beings of whom we are so proud?

Perhaps the most savage beast is not the creature that shows its teeth in the jungle.

Perhaps the most savage beast is the person who lives amid advanced society, wears the clothes of a human, speaks the language of a human, yet has silenced their sense of right and wrong before the suffering of another human being.

And here Báthory’s story does not end.

Here, the story of the human race is only beginning.

Every person can become the Elizabeth Báthory of their own age, when they step outside the circle of humanity.

Chapter Four

Children Who Never Had a Childhood

Children as victims of war, poverty, trafficking, forced labor, abuse, and violence

Najiba: The Child Whose Childhood Was Taken by Human Beings

As I read the story of Elizabeth Báthory, I was thinking of a distant past: a castle in seventeenth-century Europe, a powerful woman, the victims trapped behind the castle's high walls, and the question of how wild power can carry a person away from humanity.

But suddenly my mind returned from that distant castle to my own homeland, Afghanistan.

I said to myself:

To see the frightening face of human crime, must we really go back four hundred years?

No.

It is enough to look at one of the villages and towns of war-torn Afghanistan.

It is enough to hear the story of a child who did not yet know the meaning of life, and for whom people older than herself turned life into hell.

I will call that child Najiba.

Najiba was a seven-year-old girl.

Only seven years of her life had passed, an age at which a child should know dolls and games and school and a mother's stories, not death, rape, shame, and violence.

But Najiba had lost her mother.

Her father, who did not want his little daughter to grow up wholly in longing for a mother, sent her to his sister, Najiba's aunt. She could help with the housework and live beside her aunt, and perhaps something of the pain of motherlessness might be eased.

The father did not know that behind this simple decision, a bitter fate was taking shape for his daughter.

The days passed.

The days became months.

The months became years.

And Najiba went from seven years old to twelve.

Five years of her childhood had passed, yet she was still a child.

One day, her cousin Waisuddin came to his aunt's house.

Najiba was home alone.

And there, an event took place that changed this child's life forever.

Waisuddin raped Najiba.

Najiba had neither the strength to defend herself, nor the ability to grasp the scale of the disaster, nor anyone at that moment to take her hand and say:

"You have done nothing wrong."

But the world is not always kind to victims.

Months passed.

The child's body changed.

Najiba's belly slowly grew.

The people saw.

And when a society lives on rumor instead of asking for the truth, the victim very quickly becomes the accused.

The whispers began.

"This girl has been with someone."

"She must have committed zina."

"Who knows who she was with?"

No one asked:

Who hurt this child?

No one asked:

Why has a twelve-year-old girl become pregnant?

No one asked:

Where is the man who made this child a victim?

Instead of pointing the finger of blame at the wrongdoer, society pointed it at the child.

And this may be one of the most cruel forms of crime.

The first crime is committed against the victim's body; the second against her character and her honor.

Najiba's aunt was finally forced to tell the truth to her brother, Muhammad Khan, Najiba's father.

When the father heard it, he threw his sister out of the house and never allowed her to return.

But who was this punishment for?

For the aunt?

For the victim?

Or for the man who had raped the child?

Here a person must pause.

In societies that blame the victim, justice is sometimes so inverted that the criminal remains free and the victim is punished.

Najiba was a child who, instead of protection, received blame.

Instead of an embrace, she heard mocking words.

Instead of treatment, she was blamed.

And finally she gave birth.

An infant with no sin.

A child who knew nothing of his father and nothing of the sin others attributed to him.

But even this innocent child was not given the chance to live.

Najiba's father and brothers put the newborn in a sack and tied its mouth shut.

Then Najiba's young brother, with the blow of a pickaxe, ended that innocent child's life.

Najiba wept.

But within that crying was something even more painful:

Najiba blamed herself.

A child who had been hurt believed that she herself was at fault.

Who had planted this guilt in her heart?

Society.

A culture of blaming the victim.

Silence.

Lack of knowledge.

And people who, instead of telling the child “You are innocent,” laid upon her a shame that did not belong to her.

The infant died.

And Najiba lived on.

But was she truly living?

Sometimes a person is alive, breathes, walks, and speaks, yet a part of them died on the very day their hope was taken away.

The story was not yet over.

Najiba’s father, hoping to end the matter forever, took his daughter to a remote border region and married her to an elderly man of about sixty-five.

A girl who was still herself a child was handed over to a man far older than she.

As if, instead of asking her,

“What do you want?”

society said to her,

“You belong to us, and we decide your fate.”

Perhaps the father imagined that by sending his daughter far away, he would find peace.

But can the voice of sense of right and wrong be silenced by sending a human being far away?

The mocking words of the people grew.

And the disaster took on further dimensions.

Najiba's aunt's husband was also killed by Najiba's brothers, on the charge of zina. Yet according to this same account, the rape had been committed by Najiba's cousin, and his mother had asked Najiba to stay silent about the truth.

Here we are no longer facing a single crime.

We are facing a chain of crimes.

One crime gave birth to another.

Rape.

Silence.

Charge.

Shame.

The killing of a child.

Forced marriage.

Murder.

And throughout the whole chain, the one with the least power bore the greatest suffering.

Najiba.

When the Victim Becomes the Accused

I do not write this story to blame a people, a tribe, or a nation.

Afghanistan is the land of millions of honest and kind people.

But if we are to speak of "the most savage beast," we must also have the courage to look at the darkest corners of our own society.

No society is reformed by hiding its crimes.

Crime must be recognized.

It must be spoken of.

The victim must be supported.

And the wrongdoer must be held responsible.

Najiba should not have been accused.

Najiba should have been protected.

Najiba's infant should not have been killed.

He should have been allowed to live.

And the man who raped the child should have been made to answer.

This is where the idea of humanity is tested.

Humanity is not tested in beautiful speeches.

It is tested in the moment when a helpless child stands before us and we must decide:

Will we side with the powerful, or with the helpless?

Najiba Is Not Alone

The reader may ask:

"Is Najiba's story a special event?"

One cannot, and should not, judge the breadth of an event from a single personal account.

But what has been recorded about Afghanistan shows that during the years of war, children have faced serious forms of violence and abuse.

The United Nations, in its reports on Afghanistan, has recorded cases of sexual violence against children and the sexual abuse of boys in the practice known as bacha bazi. The United Nations has also reported on the hiring and use of children in armed conflict and on other abuses of children's rights in Afghanistan.

This means Najiba's story should not be seen as merely personal.

Behind such stories lies a larger issue.

In war, a child is sometimes hurt twice: once by the war, and again by people who use unfairly its chaos to abuse them.

The Child Soldier: The Child Who Took a Gun Instead of a Pen

War does not victimize children only through rape and sexual violence.

Sometimes children are taken from their homes and carried to the battlefield.

A child who should have a pen in hand takes up a gun.

A child who should be playing learns military commands.

A child who does not yet know what the future is is forced to make decisions about death.

United Nations reports on Afghanistan record cases of the hiring and use of children in armed conflict. In 2019 to 2020, for example, the United Nations checked 260 cases of the hiring and use of boys. These are only the cases the UN was able to document and prove, not necessarily all that happened.

The question remains:

How should a child who has not yet come to know themselves decide about killing another human being?

Bacha Bazi: A Small Name for a Great Crime

One of the darkest chapters in the suffering of Afghan children is the practice known as bacha bazi.

Its name may sound simple, but United Nations reports describe what lies behind it as the sexual abuse and slavery of children. The victims are mainly young boys abused by powerful men.

What a strange word!

For a great crime, we have made a small name, perhaps to calm our own sense of right and wrong.

But a child is a child.

Girl or boy.

Hurt at home or in a camp.

In a village or in a city.

A child is the property of no other human being.

Not a soldier.

Not an instrument of pleasure.

Not a means of revenge.

Not a bargaining chip.

A child is a human being.

And the World Goes On

But if we imagine that this story belongs only to Afghanistan, we are mistaken again.

In various parts of the world, children are victims of wars and crises where people need help.

Today in Gaza, too, United Nations reports speak of continuing military operations, the forced removal of people, limited access to vital services, and serious problems in supplying food and humanitarian aid. An OCHA report in July 2026 likewise noted the severe helplessness of children and the continuing need for food and medical care.

In such circumstances, the human question must go beyond borders, ethnicity, religion, and politics.

What sin has the child committed?

If a child in Afghanistan is hungry, food must be demanded for them.

If a child in Gaza is hungry, food must be demanded for them.

If a child anywhere in the world is afraid of war, their safety must be demanded.

A child's pain has no passport.

A child's tears have no ethnicity.

A child's hunger has no religion.

And a child's death has no flag.

Bombs and Bread

Today the human race has reached technologies that can cross thousands of kilometers in seconds.

Yet sometimes this same the human race halts before one very simple question:

Why is it that for war, plentiful means are always found, while for saving a hungry child there are always obstacles and shortages?

In its 2026 reports on Gaza, the United Nations has repeatedly noted the great need for food aid, limits on access, problems in supplying and distributing aid, and the helpless condition of children. At the same time, these reports show that food aid and nutrition programs have also been under way. The true picture includes severe need and serious limits, but also great humanitarian efforts.

This difference is important.

For if our book is to be about human crime, we must not, for literary effect, show the truth as larger than it is.

The reality, in itself, is painful enough.

Do the Lion and the Leopard Feel Ashamed Before Human Beings?

Perhaps the title of this book takes on a deeper meaning from here.

We call animals "savage."

We call the lion savage.

We call the leopard savage.

We call the wolf savage.

But an animal hunts to survive.

And human beings?

When a person makes an innocent child a victim;

when, instead of protecting a child, they blame her;

when they kill a newborn who has no sin;

when they make another child an instrument of war or of their own pleasure;

when they regard another human being as an enemy merely because of difference;

then we must ask ourselves:

Who is the true savage?

Perhaps the problem is not that human beings are more savage than animals.

Perhaps the problem is that we, unlike animals, have the power of choice.

We can show mercy, and do not.

We can forgive, and do not.

We can save the child, and do not.

We can tell the truth, and stay silent.

And it is this choice that makes our responsibility heavier.

Wherever in this world Najiba may be today, her story for me is not merely the story of a girl.

She is a symbol of a child whom the grown-ups could not protect.

She is a symbol of a victim who was blamed instead of the wrongdoer.

She is a symbol of a child from whom war, poverty, lack of knowledge, bias, and unfairness joined hands to take childhood away.

And perhaps the most painful sentence about her is this:

Najiba lost her mother in childhood; but afterward, human beings took childhood itself from her.

Here we return once more to the central question of the book:

What is the most savage animal in the world?

Perhaps the answer should not be sought in the jungle.

Perhaps we must seek it in the mirror.

For a wild animal fights to survive,

but a human being can destroy the life of another for power, bias, lust, revenge, good name, profit, and even for a false notion of "honor" and "dignity."

And then, perhaps it is not the lion and the leopard who should fear us;

it is we who should fear the wild human being within ourselves.

But one question still remains:

What brings a human being to the point where, to defend "honor," they kill an innocent child?

The answer to this question will take us to the next chapter of this book.

When Honor, Good name, and Bias Become Weapons

Parwin: The Girl Whose Crime Was a Book

Sometimes crime does not begin with a bullet.

Sometimes crime begins with a simple sentence:

“You are a girl; school is not for you.”

And more painful still is when someone does again this sentence so many times that the child herself comes to believe her dreams are not her right.

Parwin was one of those children.

A girl from a remote village; a girl who did not yet know why there should be a difference between her and her brother.

Her brother, Navid, every morning put his books in his bag, put on his shoes, and set off on the road to school.

Parwin would stand at the window and watch him go.

For Navid, going to school was an ordinary thing.

For Parwin, school was a dream.

A dream that passed before her eyes every morning and returned home every afternoon; yet she herself was not allowed to go after it.

Parwin had asked herself many times:

“If Navid can read, why can’t I?”

But the answer she heard was always the same:

“Because you are a girl.”

Four words.

Only four words.

Yet sometimes four words can build a high wall between a human being and all of her dreams.

Books That Smelled of Freedom

Navid came home from school every day.

Before he had even set foot in the house, Parwin’s eyes would follow his bag.

She would wait for a moment when no one would notice.

Then quietly, very quietly, she would open Navid's bag.

She would take out the books.

She would turn the pages of the notebooks.

She would look at pages that were, to others, only paper and writing, but to her a window onto a world she was not allowed to enter.

Parwin would secretly read that day's lesson.

Sometimes she would repeat a sentence several times.

Sometimes she would not understand a word and would stare at it for a long time.

Sometimes she would ask Navid something, but did not want her brother to know that she was secretly reading his books.

She was afraid.

But her passion for learning was greater than her fear.

Parwin perhaps did not know what "the right to education" was.

But she knew that knowing was sweet.

She did not know how freedom is defined.

But each time she read a page of a book, she felt a window opening before her.

A Girl Who Only Wanted to Know

Parwin had no grand dream.

She did not want to become a minister.

She did not want to become rich.

She did not want to defeat the world.

She only wanted to know.

She wanted to recognize the letters.

She wanted to read books.

She wanted to understand what the world beyond the village was like.

She wanted to know why the rain falls, why the stars are in the sky, why people live in different countries, and why her brother could learn something she was not allowed to learn.

But in that village, even knowing could be considered a crime for a girl.

The Day Parwin's Secret Was Discovered

For years Parwin had secretly read Navid's books.

Until one day, one of the elderly women of the village saw her.

Parwin was absorbed in a book.

She was doing nothing wrong.

She was hurting no one.

She had stolen nothing.

She was only studying.

But when the elderly woman saw her, she carried that scene home with her like a great secret.

The secret was first told to her husband.

The husband told another.

And finally the news reached the mullah of the mosque.

How strange!

In some societies, the news that a girl is reading a book can spread among people faster than the news of a great crime.

But why?

Is the book an enemy?

Is knowledge an enemy?

Is a girl who reads a danger to society?

Or is a society that fears a girl's reading in fact afraid of her waking up?

The Day the Books Were Taken from Navid

After that, Navid was no longer allowed to bring his school books home.

When he came back from school, he had to hand his books over to the mullah of the mosque.

Parwin could no longer open her brother's bag at night.

She could no longer touch the pages of the books.

She could no longer secretly read that day's lesson.

The window that had opened to her every day was suddenly shut.

But what the people did not know was this:

They had taken the book from Parwin's hand, but they had not been able to take the desire to know from her mind.

A book can be taken from a child's hand.

But how can one take away a question that has already taken shape in her mind?

What Was Parwin's Crime?

Let us for a moment place Parwin's file on the table.

What is the charge?

She did not steal.

She did not kill anyone.

She did not lie.

She did not set anyone's house on fire.

She did not rape anyone.

She did not even throw a stone at anyone.

All she did was this:

She took her brother's book and studied.

So what was Parwin's crime?

Being a girl.

And perhaps this answer is one of the most painful answers in human history.

Who Is the Criminal?

When we speak of "crime," we usually look for someone holding a knife or pulling a trigger.

But is taking away a child's opportunity for education not also a form of violence?

Is silencing a child's dream not a form of violence?

Is telling a girl "You have fewer rights than your brother" not a form of violence?

Perhaps not all crimes have blood.

Some crimes kill a human being's future.

A child who could have become a doctor is left without.

A child who could have become a teacher is left without.

A child who could have become a writer is left without.

A child who could have become an aware and helpful human being for society is locked up behind a hidden wall.

And society may see no corpse.

But a possible life has slowly been destroyed.

Parwin and Navid

Perhaps Navid was not at fault either.

He too was a child.

He perhaps did not understand why his books had to be taken out of the house.

Perhaps one day he too asked himself,

“Why can’t my sister study like me?”

But the decision was not made by the children.

The decision was made by the grown-ups.

And this is one of life’s great sad events.

Sometimes children pay the price of decisions made by adults.

Parwin did not hate Navid.

Perhaps she loved him more than anyone else.

For Navid’s books were not only books to her.

They were the only way through which she could come to know the world.

Navid, by accident, possessed for Parwin what she wished for:

The right to know.

And now let us ask ourselves:

If Parwin had been a brother, would anyone have stopped her?

If Navid had read that same book, why would it not have been a crime?

If knowing is good, why is it good for the boy and bad for the girl?

If knowledge is light, why must light be hidden from half the children of a society?

And if God has given man reason, why should one fear to use it?

I ask these questions of the reader;

not to blame him,

but so that for a few moments he may look inside himself.

Perhaps in another society, in another family, or in another culture, we too have without knowing built walls that have kept a child from her dream.

Perhaps Parwin Is Still Standing at That Window

Sometimes I think: if, years later, we returned to that same village, would Parwin still be standing at the window?

Would she still look at the children's books when they go to school?

Would she still remember the names of some of the lessons?

Would she still remember the sentence she once read in a book?

Or perhaps life has weighed on her so heavily that she no longer even remembers that she once wished to learn something.

But I want to believe that in those hard days, Parwin kept something in her heart that no mullah, no wall, no ban could take from her.

The passion to know.

And perhaps this passion is humanity's last lamp on the darkest of nights.

In this book we will speak of war, blood, and weapons.

Of children who were killed.

Of children who were displaced.

Of children who were abused.

But Parwin's story teaches us something else.

To destroy a child's future, we do not always need to kill her.

Sometimes it is enough to take the book from her hand.

Sometimes it is enough to tell her,

"You have no right to know."

And sometimes it is enough to make her dream so small that she herself comes to believe she does not deserve it.

Perhaps this too is one of the faces of that savage beast we are searching for in this book;

a beast that does not always attack with tooth and claw.

Sometimes it comes with bias.

Sometimes with lack of knowledge.

Sometimes with silence.

And sometimes with a simple sentence:

"You are a girl; books are not for you."

But they took the book from Parwin;

not the question.

And as long as a child keeps asking questions, there is still hope.

For perhaps one day that same child will ask herself,

"Why?"

And human history has shown again and again that many great walls first cracked with this one word:

Why?

Woman: The Silent Victim of Violence

Domestic violence, forced marriage, trafficking, need, and other forms of violence against women, focusing on human suffering rather than mere statistics.

Parwana: The Woman Who Paid the Price of Blood

From the day Parwana stepped into Nematullah's house, it was no longer a home to her. It was a place where she had to live, but where she never felt she belonged.

From the very first days, the mocking words began.

At mealtimes, Nematullah's mother would sigh and say:

"If your brother had not killed my son, this house would not be in grief today."

Nematullah's father, too, would sometimes set his spoon down on the cloth and, with a cold look at Parwana, say:

"Some wounds do not heal, even after many years."

Parwana would lower her head.

What could she say?

Could she say,

"I am not the murderer"?

Would anyone hear her?

Could she say,

"I was not even present at that killing"?

Would anyone care?

No.

Every evening when she sat down to eat, she ate a small bite of bread and a small bite of bitterness.

The food had no taste in her mouth.

The years passed, but the wound of that killing never closed in Nematullah's house. Every time they saw Parwana, it was as if they saw the dead man before their eyes, not an innocent girl who had herself become a victim of that same event.

Then Parwana's daughter was born.

For the first time, her cold house took on a different meaning.

She took the child in her arms and felt that there was still something in this world she could love, something that asked nothing of her but love.

Her daughter grew.

She took small steps.

She spoke her first words.

And the day came when she had to go to school.

For the first time, Parwana felt that perhaps her daughter might live the life from which she herself had been shut out.

But in those same days, the anger of Nematullah's parents grew more intense.

They now wanted only to hurt Parwana. They wanted to take revenge for their son on her.

It was as if they had waited for years for the day when they could pour all their rage upon this helpless woman.

And at last that day came.

One day, when Parwana's daughter had gone to school, Nematullah's father and mother took her to the cattle shed on some false reason.

The cattle shed was dark and cold.

The smell of straw and animals filled the air.

Parwana still did not know what waited for her.

They closed the door behind her.

Then the blows began.

Parwana screamed.

She begged.

She wept.

She said,

“What sin have I committed?”

But no one answered.

The blows fell on her body one after another.

Each blow was perhaps revenge to them, but to Parwana, each blow put out another part of her life.

She no longer had the strength to defend herself.

She fell to the ground.

Her breath came with difficulty.

She closed her eyes.

Perhaps the last thing that passed through her mind was her daughter’s face.

The little girl who was at school that day did not know that her mother, a few steps away, in the darkness of a cattle shed, was fighting her last battle with life.

Nematullah’s father and mother came out of the cattle shed.

They shut the door.

They took the key with them.

Parwana remained in the darkness.

Hours passed.

Morning reached noon.

Noon reached afternoon.

Light came through the cracks in the wall and slowly faded.

Parwana no longer had the strength to move.

Perhaps several times she tried to lift her hand.

Perhaps she wanted to cry out.

But her voice no longer had the strength to pass through the walls of that prison.

Evening was drawing near.

Nematullah was returning from the grass field.

He drove the cows, donkeys, and goats ahead of him to bring them into the cattle shed.

When he reached the door, he saw that it was locked.

He was surprised.

He asked his parents for the key.

His father said,

“I don’t know where the key is.”

His mother added,

“We haven’t seen Parwana at all today.”

Nematullah asked in surprise,

“Where is Parwana?”

Again they denied it.

“We don’t know.”

Nematullah looked at them for a moment.

Something in his heart was not at ease.

He went toward the cattle shed.

He asked again,

“Where is the key?”

He received no answer.

In the end he decided to break the door.

One blow.

Two blows.

The wood of the door cracked.

At the third blow the door broke.

Nematullah went in.

For a few moments he stood frozen where he was.

In the darkness of the cattle shed, Parwana’s still body lay on the ground.

The sounds of the animals came from all around, but Parwana no longer heard anything.

Nematullah cried out,

“Mother!”

Then,

“Father!”

But no answer came.

He reached Parwana’s side.

He took her hand.

It was cold.

Very cold.

Nematullah wept.

But what use was crying now?

Before Nematullah's parents reached the cattle shed, Parwana's little daughter had already gotten there.

When she saw her mother, she screamed.

She threw herself upon her mother's body.

"Mother!"

Again and again she cried out,

"Mother, wake up!"

But Parwana did not wake.

The little girl shook her mother and wept.

She wept so long that it seemed the sound of her crying passed beyond the earth and reached the sky.

Perhaps if the angels of heaven had heard a child calling for her mother, they too would have wept with her.

They brought Parwana's body out of the cattle shed.

But what could bring her back to life now?

Not water.

Not medicine.

Not crying.

Not regret.

Not even a thousand times of saying "Forgive me."

Parwana was gone.

But one question was still alive:

Who was Parwana's killer?

Her father?

Her mother?

Her brother?

Nematullah's father and mother?

Nematullah himself?

Or the society that had made such revenge possible?

It might be easy to point our finger at one or two people and say,

"The killers were them."

But does the story end there?

If Parwana's brother had not committed murder, would she ever have been brought to this house?

If the families, instead of revenge, had accepted the law, would Parwana have been killed?

If there had been no tradition that makes an innocent woman the price for another man's blood, would her fate have been like this?

And if human beings had chosen justice instead of revenge, would Parwana be alive today?

Perhaps it was not one person who killed Parwana.

Perhaps a long chain of hatred, revenge, lack of knowledge, tradition, and human cruelty killed her.

And this is what we must ask ourselves:

When an innocent person is hurt, is the killer only the hand that delivered the last blow?

Or did all those who kept hatred alive have a share in building that crime?

Parwana was not only one woman.

She was a symbol of thousands of human beings who had committed no sin, yet paid the price for the sins of others.

She may be a made-up character, but her story springs from a bitter reality, one in which a person sometimes sinks so deep into rage and revenge that they no longer see a human face in their victim.

And here the title of this book appears before us once more:

Who is the most savage beast in the world?

Is it the lion, who hunts out of hunger?

Is it the tiger, who kills in order to live?

Is it the wolf, whom nature forces to hunt?

No.

They kill to survive.

But human beings sometimes kill, not for survival,

but for revenge.

We kill, not from hunger,

but from hatred.

We kill, not from natural feeling,

but with a plan.

And most painful of all, sometimes we make beautiful names for our crimes:

Honor, ghairat, tradition, revenge, convenience, culture, and even justice.

Parwana died.

But perhaps the real death was not Parwana's.

The real death happened on the day humanity died in the hearts of her killers.

And perhaps the most savage beast in the world is that very human being who can see another's suffering, who can understand, who can choose, and yet decides not to be human.

Chapter Six

Slavery Has Not Died

Historical slavery versus new forms of the abuse of human beings

In the earlier pages you read how Parwana, an innocent girl, instead of living a free and human life, was given away like a commodity to set up peace between two families, in the wake of a crime her brother had committed.

You read how for years she put up with shame and violence; how, in a house that should have been her refuge, she became the victim of revenge; and how at last she was left to die in a cattle shed. After her death her body was secretly buried, under the name of an illness, in a grave with no marker.

Is this not itself a shameful stain on the brow of the human race?

Could the chains of slavery be any heavier than this?

Never.

But if we limit slavery to an iron chain on a person's hands and feet, perhaps we have missed the greatest part of humanity's crime.

Slavery has changed its form.

Yesterday, people bought and sold human beings. Today, human beings are sometimes bound by poverty, fear, debt, war, trafficking, threats, force, and the denial of their most basic rights.

Yesterday, the slave was bound with chains. Today we sometimes do not see the chains, because they are tied on a person in the form of unfair contracts, debt, forced labor, human trafficking, sexual abuse, or economic need.

Yesterday, we knew who the slave owner was. Today the slave owner sometimes hides behind a company, a trafficking network, an armed group, a go-between, or even a hidden structure that traps the victim so completely that no way out remains.

According to a joint estimate by the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, and Walk Free, about 50 million people were living in “modern slavery” in 2021: about 28 million in forced labor and 22 million in forced marriage. This event is not limited to poor countries. It exists all over the world.

So slavery has not died.

It has only changed its clothes.

Today a person may work in a mine and not receive their real wages.

A child may be forced to work instead of going to school.

A woman may enter work that was not her free choice in order to feed her family.

A person may be tricked by people who sell others, transported to another country, and then, through threats and violence, forced into work to which they never agreed.

The International Labour Organization defines forced labor as work that a person is made to perform under threat of punishment and that they have not freely chosen. Its estimates show that millions of women, men, and children still live in such conditions.

This is no longer slavery in the manner of past centuries.

This is modern slavery.

But there is another form of slavery as well, whose chain may be stronger than iron.

Slavery of the mind.

Sometimes a person is not taken into forced labor; their mind is captured.

They are told what to think, what to say, what to read, what not to read, and even who to be.

Sometimes religion becomes an instrument of power.

Sometimes ethnicity.

Sometimes nationalism.

Sometimes poverty.

Sometimes war.

And sometimes even the name of “enlightenment” or “saving humanity” is placed on something that, in practice, robs a person of freedom and will.

For more than four decades, my place of birth, Afghanistan, has repeatedly witnessed various forms of rule, war, foreign involvement, extreme views, and the abuse of people’s beliefs. In such conditions, ordinary people have again and again been caught between powers in whose making they had no part.

And today, too, the women and girls of Afghanistan face sweeping limits. The ban on secondary and higher education for girls and women, and the limits on their taking part in public life, are among the matters the United Nations has reported on.

If a girl has no right to go to school and university, if an educated woman cannot freely use her knowledge and ability in society, should we not ask ourselves about the meaning of freedom?

I do not wish to explain this situation with a single word.

But I ask:

When a person's freedom of choice is taken away, what is this situation called?

If a person cannot decide about their own future, what remains of their freedom?

Modern slavery is not seen only in war and politics.

New forms of it can be seen in the economy as well.

Imagine a world in which, on one side, people live with huge fortunes, and on the other, children work for a small bite of bread.

A country may have plentiful natural resources, such as gold, oil, gas, copper, or valuable minerals in the heart of its soil, yet its people may still live in poverty.

The wealth of the land does not always mean the wealth of the people.

Sometimes what comes out of the heart of the earth, instead of improving human life, turns into a source of competition, dishonesty, war, and abuse.

In such conditions, a poor person may live in a land with wealth sleeping beneath their feet, yet not have enough bread for their own child.

What a bitter irony!

The land is rich; the human being is poor.

And alongside all of this, one of the darkest forms of modern slavery is human trafficking and sexual abuse.

A person who should be the owner of their own body, will, and life is turned into a commodity by trafficking networks.

Women and girls, and also men and boys, may fall victim to trafficking and abuse. United Nations reports show that women and girls still

make up a large share of identified trafficking victims, and that in many cases they are illegally sold for sexual abuse.

Children, too, are victims: children who should be in school, playing, laughing, and building a future for themselves, but who sometimes become trapped in forced labor or sexual abuse. The International Labour Organization has estimated that millions of children are caught in forced labor, and that a large part of them are exposed to sexual abuse.

Is there anything more painful than this?

A child who does not yet know the meaning of life becomes the victim of another person's greed, lust, and power.

A child who should have a book in her hand becomes the victim of a network that buys and sells her like a commodity.

A child who should build the future of the world becomes the victim of people who think only of their own profit.

At such a moment we must ask ourselves:

Who is the most savage beast in the world, really?

The animal that hunts in order to live?

Or the human being who chains another human being for profit, power, and pleasure?

An animal hunts to be full.

But human beings sometimes take more in order to grow richer.

An animal fights to defend itself.

But human beings sometimes start a war for power.

An animal kills its prey and is done.

But a human being can keep a victim alive for years, using unfairly, shaming, and making money from their suffering.

And perhaps it is here that the border between humanity and cruelty dims.

In this chapter I do not wish to speak only of slaves who have chains on their hands.

I want to speak of people whose chains cannot be seen.

Of girls who remain behind closed doors.

Of women who have lost control of their own lives.

Of children who are sent to forced labor instead of school.

Of workers who labor under threat and force.

Of migrants who, in hope of a better life, fall into the hands of people who sell others.

Of people whose freedom of choice has been taken by poverty, war, or fear.

Slavery has not died.

Only its chains have become less visible.

And perhaps the most frightening kind of slavery is the one in which the slave no longer even knows they are a slave.

Remember Parwana.

For a deed she had not committed, they sent her to the house of the family seeking revenge.

They took her life from her.

They took her freedom.

And finally they took her very breath.

Then they hid her body as well, as if they wished that even her death should not be seen.

But I want to keep her alive in this book,

not with her body,

but with her story.

For perhaps Parwana has died, but the question her life placed before us is still alive:

If a human being can regard another human being as their own possession, can we still call ourselves advanced?

If a human being can take another's freedom, is it enough to wear the crown of dignity?

If a human being can turn a child into a commodity, a woman into a tool, a worker into a machine, and a nation into a means of power, then what is the difference between that person and the most savage beast?

Perhaps the difference is mind.

But mind without sense of right and wrong can be more dangerous than natural feeling.

For an animal does not build complex tools for crime.

But human beings, with their mind, can build ever more complex chains for one another.

This is one of the greatest sad events of human history.

Humanity has reached such progress in science and technology that it can travel into space, yet it has still not been able to free all human beings from the chains of poverty, force, trafficking, unfair treatment, and abuse.

So perhaps the time has still not come to say that slavery is dead.

Slavery has not died.

It has only changed its face.

And perhaps at the end of this chapter we must write this sentence on the brow of history:

The most savage beast in the world is the very human being who wears the crown of dignity, yet tramples the dignity of another human being underfoot.

This may be the greatest clash in human history:

We have become more advanced, but we have still not been freed from our own cruelty.

Every day, the day of disaster does again itself;

my star-filled eyes fill again with tears.

Each time I hear fresh news of human suffering, it is as if another window opens onto the darkest corners of humanity's sense of right and wrong.

International media and reports from Afghanistan have repeatedly told of very young children being married to men far older than themselves. In one recent report from Helmand, it was said that a three-year-old girl, later replaced by a six-year-old, was married to a man of sixty, and that an eight-year-old girl was married to a man of eighty. In another report from Helmand, the marriage of a seven-year-old girl to a forty-five-year-old man was raised, and it was said that the matter had been referred to the relevant authorities.

But behind these reports, a terrible question lies hidden:

How can a child who does not yet know the meaning of marriage understand the meaning of being a wife?

She should still be playing with her dolls, learning the alphabet, sitting in a classroom, and holding her mother's hand, not being taken to a house as the "wife" of a grown man.

And more painful still, sometimes poverty puts parents in such a bind that they come to see their own child as a means of saving the family from hunger or debt.

In past years, recorded reports from Afghanistan have shown that economic pressure and debt have driven some families to marry off very young daughters. UNICEF has even recorded the story of a father who, under the pressure of debt, was forced to offer his five-year-old daughter in marriage to repay what he owed.

Here we must pause.

The father may be hungry.

The family may be poor.

The house may have no bread.

But can hunger give a person the license to rob a child of her childhood?

Can poverty be an excuse for selling the future of a human being?

And should a society that sacrifices a child's life to feed the family not ask itself what it has saved, and what it has destroyed forever?

A father who gives his young daughter in marriage in exchange for money or release from debt may consider himself trapped in bad luck, but the true victim is the child, who played no part in that poverty.

She was not the person in debt, yet her life became the payment for others' debt.

This sentence should be written into the record of human history.

And I have another question.

If a child does not yet have the ability to decide independently about her own fate, is the contract that adults make on her behalf truly a "marriage"?

Or should it be seen as depriving the child of her right to childhood and to authority over her own future?

I am not speaking about one religion or one people. I am speaking about human dignity.

Whatever the religious or cultural belief may be, when in practice it leads to a child's suffering and need, we must ask ourselves: have we understood the meaning of that belief correctly, or have we turned it into a means of defending our own power and desires?

If a child cannot go from home to school, if she cannot decide about her own future, and if her body and life are placed at the disposal of grown-ups, then we must ask about the moral responsibility of society.

Who will be this child's voice?

Sometimes I think:

The lion, when it hunts, kills in order to live.

The tiger hunts to be full.

The wolf follows its natural feeling.

But human beings have mind.

We have sense of right and wrong.

We have language.

We have law.

We have books.

We have temples and mosques.

We have universities.

We have philosophy.

And with all of these, we can sometimes sacrifice a child's life for money, power, tradition, or our own wishes.

So where is the problem?

Is the problem a shortage of mind?

No.

In the twenty-first century the human race has reached knowledge and technology that past generations could not even imagine.

Perhaps the problem is that the progress of science does not always mean the progress of sense of right and wrong.

We have gone to the sky, but we have still not been able to prevent the suffering of a child who lives beside us.

We have built artificial intelligence, but we have still not been able to silence our own sense of right and wrong, the very sense of right and wrong that, when another human being suffers, sometimes falls silent.

Mr. Rabi Ansari!

You wrote about the crime of humanity in the twentieth century.

If you were among us today, what would you write?

What would you do if you saw that the twenty-first century, with all its satellites, internet, artificial intelligence, medical science, and surprising advances, still witnesses children who are handed a marriage certificate instead of a book?

Perhaps you would say:

I thought humanity had learned from the crimes of the twentieth century, but it seems history has still not turned in its exam.

I do not know what Rabi Ansari would write today.

But I know that for writing about humanity's crime, we are not short of subjects.

Every day fresh news arrives.

Every day a child becomes a victim.

Every day a woman remains silent.

Every day a human being, because of poverty, war, power, or lack of knowledge, loses a part of their life.

And each time I say to myself:

Have we truly become advanced?

Perhaps humanity has advanced in science,

but until it can protect the dignity of the weakest human being on earth, it still has a long road ahead to humanity.

So I write:

Every day, the day of disaster does again itself.

And each time such a disaster occurs, something in me dies.

But my pen is still alive.

And as long as the pen is alive,

the story of Parwana,

the story of that child,

and the story of all the silent victims

will not sink into the swamp of forgetting.

Perhaps this is the only thing a writer can do:

to be the voice of those who no longer have the strength to cry out themselves.

And once again the great question of the book stands before us:

Who is the most savage beast in the world?

Perhaps not the animal that kills in order to live,

but the human being who has mind and sense of right and wrong, sees a child's suffering, and yet, to justify power, poverty, tradition, or profit, continues that suffering.

Then we can no longer say that cruelty lives in the jungle.

Sometimes cruelty, wearing the clothes of a human, lives in the house of a human.

Crime in the Name of God?

Amid the writings and terrible stories of history, I came upon a sentence that for a moment sent me deep into thought:

Crime in the name of God?

Yes, you read correctly: crime in the name of God!

Is it possible for a human being, in order to commit a crime, to utter the name of God and make their deeds appear sacred?

Human history shows that sacred words, when they fall into the hands of power-seeking and self-serving people, can be emptied of their true meaning. In Afghanistan too, during the years of civil war, some groups and fighters justified their actions with words such as “jihad” and “spoils of war,” while human rights reports have recorded killing, rape, kidnapping, torture, stealing, and attacks on ordinary people by various groups in the wars of Kabul.

But the most painful part of the matter is this: when the name of God is spoken, a person imagines that no crime can any longer stand against that name. Yet God, if God has any meaning for humanity, cannot be a cover for the shame and destruction of another human being.

A terrible account from the war years in Kabul has been told, an account that, if it is true, may be one of the most upsetting examples of humanity’s fall before the very eyes of human beings.

It is said that a woman, amid the war and chaos, beside a public road and before the eyes of the people, fell into the hands of armed

fighters while she was in labor. She was in pain, she cried out, and she begged them to keep her human dignity.

Her voice rose to the heavens:

“By the very God in whose name you wage jihad, do not shame me!”

But who listened to her cry?

Where was the human heart?

Where was sense of right and wrong?

Where was the faith that was supposed to hold back a person from cruel treatment?

The people watching stood and watched the disaster, but seeing does not necessarily mean being human. Sometimes a person can, with open eyes, witness the fall of another human being and yet close their sense of right and wrong.

In this account, the woman, amid blood and pain, with her body exposed, gave birth to her child. But instead of the birth of a child being a moment of hope, it became a scene of shame and crime.

If we recount such an account from the past, our aim is not merely to retell an event. Our aim is to ask ourselves:

How far can a human being fall and still call themselves human?

And if someone justifies their crime in the name of God, does God’s name make the crime sacred, or is it the human being who has used God’s name to hide their own crime?

The War That Swallowed Kabul

The civil war in Afghanistan did not remain in Kabul. The fire of war spread to many provinces of the country and turned countless homes into ruins.

In Kabul, from 1992 onward, fighting among various armed groups led to the common killing of ordinary people. The United Nations and human rights organizations have reported thousands, and then tens of thousands, of deaths, common forced removal, and the destruction of large parts of the city. In 1994, Human Rights Watch

estimated about 25,000 dead in Kabul, mostly ordinary people who died in rocket and artillery attacks. By 1995, about one third of the city had been reduced to ruins.

But the disaster was not limited to rockets and bullets.

People's homes were looted. Women were raped. People were abducted. Ordinary people were killed and disappeared, and many families left their homes. Human rights reports have recorded such crimes by several groups and sides involved in the war.

This was no longer a war for bread.

This was not a war to stay alive.

This war, in many cases, was a war over power.

Human beings, to reach power, rained bullets upon other human beings. They destroyed homes and seized people's wealth by force. Sacred words such as "jihad" and "spoils of war" also, in some cases, became tools for defending behavior that was not in line with human dignity and rights.

And here the central question of my book rises again:

Is the most savage beast in the world the animal that kills in order to live, or the human being who on purpose destroys another for power, wealth, and lust, and then finds a sacred name for the crime?

In nature, a hunting animal hunts out of hunger, but human beings sometimes kill even when full.

An animal fights for territory, but we sometimes have land of our own and still want another's.

An animal attacks to survive, but we sometimes sacrifice thousands of human beings for power, fame, and rule.

So the problem is not violence alone.

The problem is that human beings can make up reasons for violence, carve out laws for crimes, find sacred names for robbery, and regard themselves as entitled to kill.

The crimes that took place in Afghanistan's wars are only part of the painful history of this land. Believable reports, including the great research of Human Rights Watch, have recorded numerous cases of the on purpose killing of ordinary people, rape, kidnapping, torture, forced labor, and the stealing of people's homes during the years of civil war.

Even so, a question remains, one that perhaps no history book can easily answer:

How is it possible for a person who speaks of God to break the honor of God's creation?

How is it possible to speak of paradise and yet make the earth a hell for others?

How is it possible to utter God's name while one's hands are stained with the blood of the innocent?

This is the very point at which the border between faith and the abuse of faith becomes clear.

In this book I have no fight with God. My fight is with the human being who sometimes makes God's name a shield for their own deeds.

I have no fight with religion. I oppose turning religion into an instrument of power, violence, and the abuse of human beings.

For if faith cannot make a person sensitive to the suffering of another, if God's name cannot lift a hand from another's throat, we must ask ourselves: is the problem in God, or in the human being who has spoken God's name?

And I return again to that first question:

Crime in the name of God?

No. Perhaps a crime is a crime, even if a person utters the most sacred names to cover its ugly face.

The results of this abuse can be seen in some of the most cruel events of those years. In February 1993, in the Afshar district of Kabul, fighters of rival sides attacked a largely Hazara neighborhood, and, according to human rights reports, large numbers of ordinary people were killed. Survivors and witnesses have also given even more terrible accounts of the treatment of prisoners in those years: that captives were tortured and shamed in terrible ways, and that some were even forced to eat human flesh and excrement, sometimes before the eyes of their own family members. I relate these as accounts told by survivors and reported in the media over the years, not as findings established by a court. Yet even as accounts, they ask the same question of us.

And perhaps the most savage beast in the world is not the creature that has teeth and claws, but the creature that has mind and sense of right and wrong, yet on purpose hurts, kills, and destroys another human being, and then finds a sacred name for the crime.

Chapter Eight

When Power Eats up the Human Being

Harsh rule, one-man rule, and the not answerable human being

Power, at the beginning, is not necessarily the enemy of humanity.

Power can serve to build: to set up order, defend the people, administer justice, and create security. A society cannot endure without some form of power and law. But power, like a fire that can warm a house and also burn it down, can become the most dangerous instrument of cruel treatment if it slips beyond control and responsibility.

The trouble begins when the holder of power no longer sees himself as the servant of the people, but imagines the people to belong to him.

From that moment, power is no longer a means. It becomes an end.

And when power becomes the end, a person may sacrifice anything to keep it:

truth,

justice,

freedom,

law,

and finally, the human being.

From a Chair to a Prison

Sometimes harsh rule begins from a simple chair.

A man sits upon the seat of power, and perhaps his first decision is a small one. Someone finds fault with him, and he is unhappy. The next day, he wants the critic silenced. Then he shuts down a newspaper. Then he threatens a writer. Then he locks up an enemy.

And if anyone stands against him, he says,

“This person is an enemy of the country.”

After a while, anyone who does not agree with him is declared an enemy of the country.

Here a society slowly arrives at a place where people no longer fear the government. They fear thinking.

They fear speaking.

They fear writing.

They fear asking.

And perhaps worst of all, they fear looking at the truth.

In such a society, silence becomes a virtue and truth becomes a crime.

Where Does One-man rule Begin?

The cruel ruler does not always enter history with a harsh face.

Sometimes he comes with a promise of rescue.

He says,

“I will save the country.”

“I will bring security.”

“I will wipe out dishonesty.”

“I will defeat the enemies.”

And the people, weary of war and disorder, may at first place their hope in him.

But the danger begins when the leader places himself above the law.

When law is for others and not for him.

When he can lock up any enemy, yet no one can hold him to account.

When the system of justice, instead of protecting the people from power, enters the service of power.

There, one-man rule is no longer merely one individual. It becomes a system of fear.

Fear: Tyranny’s Best Guard

Harsh rule does not always need thousands of soldiers to survive.

Sometimes a few prisons are enough.

A few agents.

A few orders.

A few executions.

A few disappearances.

And most important of all, a fear that passes from one house to another.

When one person is punished for speaking, hundreds of others fall silent.

When one writer is threatened for what they wrote, a hundred other writers move their pens more softly.

When one professor is driven out from the university for their thought, a thousand students learn what questions they must not ask.

And so harsh rule enters homes without having a soldier in every house.

Fear is a soldier who wears no uniform.

A Prison Is Not Only Walls

Many imagine a prison to be a place with high walls and iron bars.

But the greatest prison does not always have walls.

Sometimes the prison is built inside the human mind.

A person who knows what they want to say, but does not say it.

Who knows what they want to write, but does not write it.

Who knows what is wrong, but lacks the courage to protest.

This person may walk freely in the street, yet inside is locked up.

Harsh rule reaches its complete victory when a person, before the government shuts their mouth, shuts it themselves.

On that day, the chain is no longer on the person's hands and feet.

It is in their mind.

Torture: When One Human Being Breaks Another

Torture is one of the darkest faces of not answerable power.

Torture is not merely causing pain on the body.

...be found in poor and traditional societies: the story of a girl at whom no bullet was fired, yet whose life was taken from her by the hands of poverty, power, tradition, and the decisions of others.

Nasima: The Girl Who Did Not Choose

In our village there lived a wealthy man named Yar Muhammad Khan.

He was about sixty-three years old, counted among the rich of the village.

He believed he could have several wives, and he considered this as his clear right. He had three wives at home and wished to marry a fourth.

In the same village there lived a poor man named Muhammad Rahim.

Muhammad Rahim was very poor, and his life passed in hard times. He was in debt and had little means to repay it.

Yar Muhammad Khan had established a friendly relationship with him, but behind this friendship a hidden bargain had taken shape.

One day Yar Muhammad Khan revealed his wish.

He said to Muhammad Rahim:

“My dear friend, you owe me a large sum, and I know you have no means of paying it. If you give me your daughter, Nasima, in marriage, your debt will be paid, and your daughter will live well in my house. In my house there are servants and attendants. My wives are in comfort too. I will take care of Nasima like the pupil of my eye.”

On hearing these words, Muhammad Rahim was silent for a moment.

Then he said:

“Yar Muhammad Khan! Nasima is my daughter, but in age she is almost the same as your grandchildren. She is only eleven years old, and you are more than sixty.”

But Yar Muhammad Khan answered:

“Age is only a number. What matters is the heart. My heart is still young.”

What a simple sentence!

Yet behind this very sentence lay the life of a child.

“My heart is young.”

Yes, perhaps his heart was young. But should the body, mind, and life of an eleven-year-old girl have been given to the desire of an aging man’s heart?

What part did Nasima play in this bargain?

None.

She was not asked.

They did not want her opinion.

They did not ask her about her future.

She was only the daughter of a poor family, and her father’s debt had turned her fate into a commodity for settling accounts.

And here one of the saddest faces of human abuse appears:

when poverty forces a person to give up what is most loved to them in place of money.

A Wedding or a Transaction?

They sent Nasima to Yar Muhammad Khan’s house.

Not like a girl who was to choose her own future,

but like someone sent to pay off a debt.

No bullet was fired.

No soldier entered the house.

No bomb exploded.

But a child was cut off from her childhood.

Is this not a crime?

If we rob a child of the right to choose, to be educated, to play, to grow, and to have a future, can we not call it violence merely because no blood flowed from her body?

Sometimes violence dresses quietly.

Sometimes it enters the house with a smile.

Sometimes it comes with a wedding ceremony.

Sometimes it hides behind music and the joy of the people.

And sometimes it is covered with a few beautiful sentences about "honor," "tradition," and "convenience."

But the victim, within herself, knows what she has lost.

The Death of Yar Muhammad Khan

Not long after this marriage, Yar Muhammad Khan died.

Nasima, a girl who should still have been at school among girls her own age, suddenly became a widow beside three other wives.

But the disaster did not end there.

Yar Muhammad Khan's brother, a man named Khair Muhammad, about fifty-nine years old, this time took Nasima as his own wife.

A girl who had barely come to know life entered yet another marriage, again without any real choice.

Here my question is no longer only about one man or one family.

My question is about a society that allows such fates to be written for a human being.

What sin had Nasima committed?

Was her father's poverty a crime?

Was being a girl a crime?

Was being a child a crime?

Or was her only fault that she was born into a society in which others decided about her life?

My Own Father Was a Victim of the Same Poverty

The reader may imagine that these stories are far from our own lives.

But no.

I myself have seen examples of such unfairness in my own life.

My father too once fell into debt.

My uncle on my father's side was owed money by him, and the matter reached the point where he wanted, in a way, to take my father captive for the debt.

In the end, for a few sers of wheat that were due to us, my father was forced to hand over his land and his trees to my uncle.

There was no bullet.

No one threatened my father with a gun.

But must force always carry a gun?

Sometimes debt is itself a gun.

Sometimes hunger is itself a prison.

Sometimes poverty is a handcuff that cannot be seen.

And sometimes a person, without anyone taking them to prison by force, is placed in circumstances in which they no longer have real authority over their own life.

The land was lost.

The trees were lost.

But what hurt most was the feeling that, in the face of poverty and need, the power to decide had been taken away.

Crime Without Bullets

These are not only the stories of Nasima and my father.

In many societies there are countless people whose lives have been destroyed not by bullets, but by poverty, lies, debt, trickery, shame, force, and the abuse of power.

A child kept from school by poverty,

a woman forced into marriage because of her family's debt,

a man who loses his land over a small loan,

a worker who works hard for years but is never paid,

a person shamed because of their ethnicity, language, gender, or belief,

and a person who, because of a rumor, loses their honor and social standing.

All of this can happen without a single bullet.

But the wound it leaves on a person's soul is sometimes deeper than the wound of a bullet.

A Single Word Can Begin a Disaster

Human history has shown that violence does not always begin with weapons.

Sometimes it begins with a rumor.

One person says:

“He is a traitor.”

Another says:

“He is our enemy.”

A third says:

“He does not deserve to live.”

And suddenly a crowd forms that no longer sees the human being before it. It sees only the label that has been stuck upon them.

A single word can strip a person of their humanity.

And once treating people as less than human begins, the road to violence is open.

For this reason, language too can be a weapon,

sometimes more dangerous than a weapon that has bullets.

The Lie: The Bullet That Cannot Be Seen

A lie, if told once, may seem small.

But if it is repeated, it can push the truth aside.

If it is repeated a thousand times, people may take it for the truth.

And if political power, the media, false messages, or economic interests stand behind it, a lie can change the fate of a society.

People may come to hate one another because of a lie.

A family may fall apart because of a rumor.

An innocent person may be cast out for something they did not do.

And a whole nation may even be stirred up against another nation.

So we must know:

not every lie is harmless.

Some lies merely hide the truth,

but some lies set human beings against one another.

Modern Abuse: Slavery Without Chains

In the previous chapters we spoke of slavery and of new forms of abuse.

Now we see that abuse is not always carried out with iron chains.

Sometimes a person is tied up by debt.

Sometimes by poverty.

Sometimes by fear.

Sometimes by the threat of firing.

Sometimes by the abuse of migration and helplessness.

And sometimes by this sentence:

“If you don’t want it, there is someone else who will do this work.”

A person is forced to stay silent.

To work.

To endure.

To be shamed.

And still to smile, because their family’s bread is in someone else’s hands.

This too is a kind of being held prisoner,

a being held prisoner whose chains cannot be seen.

So What Is a Crime?

Is a crime only the killing of a human being?

If so, we will never call many of humanity’s hardships a crime.

I think crime has a broader meaning.

Whenever a person on purpose destroys the dignity, freedom, security, freedom of choice, or future of another human being for their own benefit, we are facing a form of crime.

Sometimes this crime is committed with a bullet.

Sometimes with money.

Sometimes with a lie.

Sometimes with power.

Sometimes with tradition.

Sometimes with fear.

And sometimes with a single sentence.

For this reason, more than the sound of bullets, we must listen to the silences behind which human lives are destroyed.

For perhaps the greatest crimes are not always the loudest ones.

Sometimes the greatest crimes happen quietly and without sound.

And perhaps this is why a victim, years later, cannot say who shot her.

For no one had fired.

There was only a poor family, a debt, a tradition, a decision, a trickery, a silence...

and a human being who no longer had authority over her own life.

Here once again I ask myself:

Who is the most savage beast in the world?

The animal that hunts to fill its belly?

Or the human being who is full, yet for more wealth, more power, and more pleasure sacrifices the life of another human being?

A bullet always has a sound.

But cruel treatment does not always have a sound.

And perhaps the most savage crimes are those that happen without a bullet.

Among the crimes without bullets, we may also recall the women who are driven into prostitution in our time. No woman is born into this life. Time and place, society, economic conditions, poverty, and lack of education sometimes lead human beings toward it. Many women who end up in prostitution are, before anything else, victims of circumstances that left them no other choice.

But the painful and striking point is that, in many cases, others profit from it, and often those who profit are not the women themselves. In Crime and Punishment, Dostoevsky speaks through the character of Sonya of people whom poverty and social conditions push toward lives they never freely chose.

In various societies around the world, even in some countries considered as free, the buying and selling of women's bodies has been put up with in different forms. Sometimes a woman turns to prostitution out of necessity. In other cases, people who profit and networks, private and sometimes even state-connected, build businesses on a woman's youth and beauty and profit from her for as long as she has customers.

In such a system, the woman is no longer treated as a human being. She becomes a commodity. She has a price, she has buyers, and she is valued only for as long as there is demand. But when her youth, beauty, or physical strength no longer holds its former appeal, the very people who gained money from her cast her aside, and no one asks how she came to be there, what she suffered, and who gained from her life and her youth.

Just as Rabi, in his book The Crime of Humanity in the Twentieth Century, pointed to examples of this same human abuse, today too we see with our own eyes that the various forms of crime are not always carried out with guns and bullets.

Sometimes a person is killed by poverty,

sometimes by lack of knowledge,

sometimes by shame,

sometimes by abuse,

and sometimes by being turned into a commodity to be bought and sold.

When a bullet is fired, its sound echoes everywhere and people understand that a crime has happened. But a crime that happens in silence, in the marketplace, in a contract, in poverty, and behind closed doors may continue for years without the sound of its shot ever being heard.

This is the very crime without bullets: a crime that sometimes does not kill the body, but slowly destroys a person's dignity, hope, and future.

And perhaps the most savage beast in the world is the very human being who, for profit, turns another human being into a commodity. An animal tears flesh to stay alive, but human beings sometimes do it to make a profit.

Today we see with our own eyes how much work the crime without bullets does,

how many victims it claims,

and how quietly it draws human beings away from their own humanity.

Chapter Ten

Wealth and Poverty

Why, in a world of such abundance and progress, are there still human beings without life's most basic needs?

In a sense, this question brings us back to the title of this very book. The honest answer is not found in forests or deserts. It is found on marble terraces and in the boardrooms of vast companies. The same creature that calls itself "the best of beings," and wears upon its head the crown of "We have honored the children of Adam," is the one that has used its power to keep poor nations in chains.

Robbery in the Shadow of Power

The history of foreign rule does not belong only to the past. Its form has changed, but not its nature. Yesterday it was armies and attacks. Today it is contracts, loans, and unfair trade agreements. What lies buried in the soil of poor countries, from minerals and oil to gas and rare metals, is largely taken out for the benefit of those who have never felt hunger in those lands. The people who sit atop a treasure often have no bread of their own. This is one of the saddest clashes of our world: poverty in the midst of plenty.

I stated this truth clearly in my novel The Dragon's Sleep in the Butterfly's Bed: that humanity, sadly, is in a state of decline and is marching toward ruin.

Two Poles of One World

On one side stands the shocking wealth of the world's very rich people, where the fortune of a single individual is more than the national output of several countries. On the other, millions struggle with having no job, having no home, and hunger. These two poles did not come to rest side by side by accident. The piling up of wealth at one end has often been reached at the cost of need at the other. When resources, opportunities, and decision-making power are

concentrated in a few hands, everyone else is surely pushed to the margins.

A New Threat: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work

A new danger has now been added to this picture. Artificial intelligence and automation are advancing quickly, and in the near future they may replace a large part of the workers of giant companies in retail, logistics, and making goods. If this change takes place without justice and planning, the result is clear: millions will lose their ways of earning money, and the number of the hungry will rise beyond today's figures.

Technology is not an enemy in itself. The real question is who receives its fruits. If its profits flow only to the owners of capital, machines will become yet another instrument for growing class divisions.

The Roots of Poverty

The causes of poverty are countless, and no single factor can account for them all: war and lack of safety, corrupt governments, lack of education and healthcare, natural disasters, and climate change. Yet among all these, one carries special weight: the greed of powerful companies and states, which push poor and hungry nations, step by step, toward death. Sometimes this cruel treatment is carried out with weapons, sometimes through hurting loan conditions, sometimes by imposing unfair prices on the products of weaker countries, and sometimes simply through not caring.

End

It may therefore be said that the most savage beast on earth is this very human being who claims to wear the crown of dignity. The hunters of the jungle hunt in order to survive, and once full, they leave their prey alone. But never satisfied human beings, with their full storerooms, still profit from the hunger of others.

If this crown is to rest fairly upon our heads, we must prove it through justice, kindness, and the fair distribution of the earth's wealth.

Chapter Eleven

Technology: Gift or Weapon?

How technology has improved human life, and how it can be abused: from modern weapons to watching, digital trickery, and the wrong use of information

With the first stone he sharpened, early the human race discovered two things at once: a tool for building and a tool for killing. From that day to this, every new human success has been a double-edged knife. One edge cuts bread, the other cuts throats.

That is the question of this chapter: in the hands of "the most savage beast on earth," is technology a gift or a weapon?

The honest answer is both. And what decides our fate is not the machines themselves but the hands that use them.

The Bright Face: A Gift That Transformed Life

It cannot be denied that technology has made human life more beautiful and more comfortable. Vaccines controlled diseases that for centuries killed generation after generation. Advanced surgery, medical imaging, and modern medicines have lengthened life and reduced suffering. Modern agriculture has fed a population our ancestors could never have imagined. The internet has opened the gate of knowledge even to a child in the most distant village, and the mobile phone allows a mother whose son lives in another land to hear his voice every night. Electricity, clean water, transport, and communications are all threads in the fabric of our daily lives.

But here we must ask: who has received these gifts?

As we said in the previous chapter, a world with so much wealth and progress still keeps millions of people without life's most basic needs. Technology, if not fairly shared, becomes a new wall between the "haves" and the "have-nots."

The Dark Face: From Stone to Bomb

The history of technology is, in a sense, also the history of war. Many of the inventions that now sit in our pockets were first born in military laboratories. And whenever humanity has gained greater knowledge, the first question of the powerful has been: how can this be used to rule over others?

Hiroshima and Nagasaki remain forever in humanity's memory, as the moment when the science of physics, which could have supplied the world with endless and cheap energy, reduced cities to ashes in seconds. Today the nuclear weapon stores of the great powers are large enough to threaten the survival of advanced society itself, and the fate of the human race hangs on the reason and calm of a handful of officials.

Today's weapons are more advanced still: drones guided from thousands of kilometers away, which turn war into a game without the smell of blood for the person pressing the button; long-range missiles; cyber weapons that can badly damage a nation's roads and buildings; and now autonomous weapons that, with the help of artificial intelligence, can identify a target on their own. When the decision to kill is handed to an algorithm, heavy questions arise: who bears the moral responsibility? And as human beings pull back from the scene of blood, do they not also lose their kindness?

And again, as we said in earlier chapters, the heaviest price for these instruments of war is paid by the people of weak nations, the very countries that so often serve as testing grounds for the weapons of the great powers.

The Eye That Never Closes: Mass Watching

In the past, rulers needed spies to hear what the people were saying. Today we ourselves, gladly and with excitement, carry the listening device in our pockets. Street cameras, facial recognition, location tracking, purchase and search histories: all of these can assemble a complete picture of a human life, showing where a person goes, whom they speak with, what they read, what they fear, and what they hope for.

Watching begins under the false reason of security but easily becomes a tool of crushing of freedom. A government that can identify and follow every citizen no longer fears its enemies, because it silences them before a voice is even raised. More frightening still, large companies, without needing any law to permit it, use the same watching to sell more and to gain more influence.

Freedom without privacy is only an empty name.

Digital Trickery: When Eyes and Ears Lie Too

There was a time when people said, “Seeing is believing,” and what the eye saw was considered as final proof. Today that certainty is gone. With technologies for making up video and voice (deepfakes), anything can be put into anyone’s mouth, and any image can be made to show anything. Social networks, with algorithms designed to capture attention and keep people engaged, spread shocking lie faster than quiet truth.

The result is the wearing away of trust. When people cannot tell truth from lie, they either believe everything they see and are tricked, or believe nothing and sink into not caring. Both results serve those who profit from confusion. Mental warfare, political false messages, financial fraud, and rumor-mongering all grow well in this soil.

Information: The Oil of the Twenty-First Century

If the twentieth century was the century of oil, the twenty-first is the century of data. Every click, every message, and every step we take in the digital world is recorded and turned into a commodity that can be bought and sold. The companies that gather this data know more about us than we know ourselves: our habits, our weaknesses, even the points at which we can be persuaded.

This knowledge is a huge power, one that can steer the tastes of buyers and even influence elections and public opinion. Data leaks, identity theft, and the sale of personal information without its owners’ knowledge are examples of this abuse. And once more, the same unfairness appears: countries and peoples without protective laws

and roads and buildings are the most helpless victims, and “digital foreign rule” takes the place of the old foreign rule, this time not for minerals but for the information of the people.

Technology Is Innocent, but Not Neutral

It may be said that technology is in itself neither good nor bad, and this is true up to a point. But it is not neutral, because every tool reflects the will of its makers and owners. When a company’s goal is greater profit, its technology moves toward capturing more attention and collecting more data. When a government’s goal is to keep power, its technology moves toward watching and control. And when a society’s concern is justice and health, that same technology can defeat disease and make knowledge available to all.

So the central question is not “Should we fear technology?” but

“Who commands it, and to whom are they responsible?”

To answer that, we need several things: clear and effective laws to protect privacy; openness in the use of artificial intelligence; international treaties to rein in autonomous and nuclear weapons; media and digital literacy education for everyone; and above all, watchful citizens who refuse to sell their freedom for the price of comfort.

End

The human race discovered fire, and with it both warmed its homes and burned its cities. Today a far greater fire is in our hands.

If wisdom and sense of right and wrong do not grow alongside knowledge, technology, which was meant to be the ladder of humanity’s liberation, will become a quieter and more hidden chain. The most savage beast on earth, once armed with the most advanced tools, can remain the most savage of all, or can finally prove itself worthy of the crown it places upon its head.

The choice is ours, and the opportunity to make it is not endless.

Chapter Twelve

Crime in the Virtual World

When words become weapons

In the past, to convey hatred to another, a person sometimes had to travel a long distance. They had to stand before the other, speak, or even reach for a weapon. But today, thanks to technology, a person can, without rising from their seat, ruin another's good name, throw a family into trouble, create hatred between two peoples and languages, and carry a lie to thousands in a few seconds.

This is one of the new faces of humanity's crime, a crime that does not always spill blood on the ground, but sometimes causes wounds on the human mind that remain for years.

The virtual world, at the beginning, spread with the promise of bringing human beings closer to one another. It was meant to cut distances, put knowledge within everyone's reach, carry the voices of the silenced to the ears of the world, and provide a ground for the exchange of ideas and experience.

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Networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok can be instruments of education, awareness, art, friendship, and unity. A person can speak with their family from thousands of kilometers away, introduce their book, read aloud their poem, and share the experiences of their life with others.

But the question is: has humanity used this great opportunity for hatred and destruction as much as it has used it for awareness and understanding of others?

Unfortunately, the answer can be seen in many of our everyday behaviors in the virtual space.

Unclaimed Words, Real Wounds

On some pages of social networks, especially among a number of Afghan migrants and refugees in Europe and America, we sometimes witness, instead of helpful talk, verbal wars, ethnic scorn, linguistic insults, and mutual charge.

People who rose from one land, who share memories, and many of whom have known the suffering of war, migration, and distance from home, sometimes fall upon one another in the virtual space as if they were ancient enemies.

One boasts of their ethnic group, and another considers their own group better. One makes their language the measure of human worth, and another looks down on their neighbor's language. Some, instead of criticizing ideas and conduct, attack one another's origins, families, faces, and identities.

But they do not ask themselves: what is a person's superiority based on?

On the people into which they were born?

On the language in which they first spoke?

On the name their family chose for them?

Or on the conduct they show toward other human beings?

No one chooses their ethnicity, language, or place of birth. A person is born into a family, learns a language, and grows up in an environment that existed before their birth. So how can something that was not a person's own choice be made the measure of their worth or feeling worthless?

If one's mother tongue is a source of pride, why should another's language become a means of scorn? If loving one's own people is natural, why must hatred of another people be born from it?

I believe a person can love their own culture and language without looking down on another's. Love of one's identity is beautiful when it does not turn into hatred of the identities of others.

An Experience from My Own Life

I too have not been spared this poisoned feeling.

One day, someone active on Facebook addressed me with words such as "regular drunkard" and "poetry thief," though I had never met that person and did not know him.

I do not wish to judge here on that person's character. What matters to me is the way a human being can, without enough knowledge, issue a decision about another and then place that decision before the eyes of others.

It is enough for someone to write a charge. Others read it, some republish it without checking, and some add to it. In the meantime, the truth may never be examined, yet a person's good name is damaged.

Who is responsible?

The author of the charge?

The one who republished it without checking?

Those who issued a decision without hearing the other side's answer?

Or all of us, who sometimes do not ask ourselves whether what we read is true?

These experiences led me to limit my activity on social networks and to concentrate on my personal pages, including Facebook and YouTube, where I can share my writings, poems, and thoughts with those who are interested, without being drawn into every useless fight.

Of course, this decision does not mean that all users of the virtual space are like this. Well educated, kind, and responsible people are

present in this space as well. But their presence should not keep us from seeing the damaging behaviors that can poison the feeling of talk.

I have come to the end that not every remark should be answered, and not every charge should be turned into a battlefield. Sometimes silence is not a sign of weakness. It is the aware choice of a person who does not want to spend their time and peace of mind on a useless fight.

Even so, silence in the face of every kind of unfairness is not right either. There is a difference between holding back from a personal fight and being uncaring to cruel treatment.

One should not answer every insult, but one should not remain uncaring to human suffering.

When a Lie Wears the Clothes of Truth

One of the most dangerous features of the virtual world is that a lie can spread faster than the truth.

A photograph may be separated from its original context. A statement may be quoted not fully. A video may be published with a false explanation, and a rumor with no believable evidence behind it may, in a short time, become the belief of thousands.

In such an environment, people sometimes ask, before asking “Is this news true?”, “Does this news agree with my beliefs?”

If the news matches their bias, they accept it. If it is against their beliefs, they may even deny the truth.

This is the moment when a person, instead of seeking the truth, places themselves in the service of their own judging too early.

Spreading lie is not merely a simple mistake. When someone on purpose publishes false information to damage the name of a person, to stir up one group against another, or to stir up violence, their words can have real and dangerous results.

A rumor may destroy someone's family life. An unproven charge may cost a person their job, standing, or relationships. A hatred that began on a virtual page may end in threats and violence in the real world.

The screen is virtual, but the human being suffering on the other side of it is real.

The Media: A Window on the World or a Curtain over the Truth?

Social networks are not the only arena of harm. Audio, visual, and print media also bear a heavy responsibility before public opinion.

The media can be a window to understanding the world. But if they publish information only in part, ignore the voices of victims, or view similar events by different standards, they may, instead of shedding light on the truth, place it in shadow.

I sometimes feel that the suffering of people in weaker countries, especially when it conflicts with the interests of great powers, is not reflected with the same attention and sensitivity. Sometimes the voice of the powerful is heard louder, and the account of those with less political, economic, or media power is pushed to the margins.

Of course, the media are not uniform. Many journalists face danger and hard times with courage to expose crimes, be the voice of victims, and demand answers from officials. Some media also publish deep and well-recorded reports without which many truths would remain hidden.

But these very valuable examples make the responsibility of the media heavier.

A medium that speaks of truth must be ready to question all sides, whether powerful or weak, ally or enemy.

The standard of responsible journalism should not be the identity of the victim or the power of the wrongdoer. One must ask what happened, what evidence exists, who is responsible, and how the voices of the victims are being heard.

If the death of one human being in one country is the lead headline, while the death of another in a poor country becomes a brief item, we must ask whether the difference lies in the importance of the events, or in the amount of attention the world gives to the victims.

This question must not be answered with judging too early. It must be addressed by examining reports, evidence, and the standards of news coverage.

A human life should not be valued according to the power of their country.

War: The First Casualty Is Truth

In our time, war is not waged only on the battlefield. War also continues in images, news, messages, and stories published from different fronts.

In war, each side tries to bring its own story to the ears of the world. Sometimes accurate information is published. Sometimes the information is not complete. And sometimes on purpose false messages takes the place of truth.

The image of an injured child may be published to awaken sympathy, but sometimes the same image is republished without proper explanation, with the wrong time and place, or to stir up hatred. In such a situation, even the real suffering of a victim may become an instrument of false messages.

We must be able to accept two truths at once: first, that false messages and false information exist in wars; second, that the existence of false messages does not take away from the real suffering of ordinary people.

When a child loses their home, when a mother searches for her child under the broken stones, and when a family walks around in search of water and food, their pain is not limited to a political story.

That child needs food, not our fights.

That mother needs security, not charges traded from thousands of kilometers away.

And that family needs help, not for its suffering to become a tool for spreading hatred.

Kyiv, Gaza, Iran, Yemen, and Afghanistan: Different Names, One Human Suffering

In recent years, the world has witnessed wars and crises where people need help in various regions, from Ukraine and Kyiv to Gaza, and from Afghanistan to Yemen and other lands whose people have been hurt by violence, unrest, and the results of war.

The political conditions, the responsibility of the parties, and the details of each conflict are not the same, and each event must be examined on the basis of its own evidence. But one human principle must remain constant everywhere: ordinary people must not be targeted, and children must enjoy special protection.

I ask myself: why has humanity, with all this knowledge and progress, still not been able to keep war away from children's lives?

Why are huge budgets still given to weapons and military equipment, while many people in the world struggle to gain access to food, clean water, medical care, and education?

Of course, humanitarian aid, peace efforts, and people who work to save others also exist, and these very efforts show that the human race does not have only a dark face.

But the main question still remains:

If humanity has the ability to build advanced instruments of destruction, why can it not strive just as hard to prevent human suffering?

Behind Every Page Sits a Human Being

Perhaps our greatest mistake in the virtual space is that we forget that behind every user account there is a human being.

A human being who may make mistakes, but has the right to be criticized without insult.

A human being who may not agree with us, but does not for that reason become our enemy.

A human being who may be from another ethnicity, language, religion, or land, but whose pain and joy are real too.

When we curse someone, perhaps we write only a few words on a screen, but those words may be repeated in their mind many times over.

When we publish a rumor, perhaps we press only a single button, but we may put in danger a person's good name before hundreds or thousands.

When we make stronger ethnic hatred, we may imagine we have defended our identity, but we may in fact have raised higher the very wall that has kept human beings apart for years.

Before publishing any message, we can pause for a moment and ask ourselves:

Is this statement true?

Do I have evidence for it?

If this same statement were written about me or my family, would I consider it fair?

Does publishing it add to people's awareness, or does it only fan the flames of hatred?

These questions may seem simple, but sometimes a single moment of thought can prevent great harm.

Crime Does Not Always Have a Bloody Face

In this book we have written about crimes that involve murder, war, torture, and the destruction of human lives. But we must not forget that some damaging behaviors are very ordinary in appearance.

An unproven charge.

An ethnic insult.

A false news item.

A shaming image.

A threat.

A rumor republished thousands of times.

Each of these behaviors may, in certain circumstances, lead to serious mental, social, or even physical harm. Of course, not every false statement or every disagreement can be treated as the same with great crimes. But these differences should not make us neglect the moral responsibility of our words.

Freedom of expression gives a person the right to criticize. It does not mean that we may call a lie the truth or shame another human being because of their identity and difference.

One can criticize a government without regarding the people of a country as enemies.

One can oppose an idea without stripping the holder of that idea of their humanity.

One can expose a crime without turning to lies to prove it.

Truth does not need lies in order to stand, and justice is not gained through blind hatred.

The Last Question: Who Sits Behind the Screen?

Dear reader,

As you read this chapter, perhaps you will recall someone who offended you in the virtual space. Perhaps you will recall a message that destroyed someone's good name, or a news item that was republished without checking.

But before you point at others, look for a moment at yourself too.

Have I ever accused someone without enough knowledge?

Have I ever believed a statement only because it agreed with my bias?

Have I ever shamed a person because of their ethnicity, language, religion, or belief?

Have I too, sometimes, in order to win an argument, ignored the truth?

These questions are not meant to blame the reader. They are so that each of us may recognize our own share in building a more humane feeling.

For the reform of the world does not begin only with changing the behavior of others. It begins where a person accepts responsibility for their own behavior.

The virtual world can be a battlefield, but it can also be a field of awareness.

It can build a wall of hatred, but it can also create a bridge between human beings.

It can destroy a person's good name, but it can also carry the voice of the oppressed to the ears of the world.

The choice between these two does not rest on one person alone. It depends on the conduct of millions of people who sit every day behind their small screens.

And perhaps the most dangerous beast is not the one who hides behind the screen. It is that part of ourselves that wants, without knowledge, without evidence, and without a sense of responsibility, to judge on the lives of others.

So let us, before pressing the publish button, turn for a moment to our sense of right and wrong.

Perhaps a brief pause will prevent a great lie.

Perhaps one question will stop the spread of hatred.

And perhaps one kind word, on a dark day, will give a person hope.

For in a world where a person can, with a few taps of a finger, carry hatred to thousands, aware kindness too can spread by the same road.

And this is one of the choices that still remains in humankind's hands, even though the most savage beast in the world is this very human being.

Chapter Thirteen

The Human Being Against Nature

Is the human race destroying its own home?

In this chapter, too, the charge falls on the most savage beast in the world. Not on all human beings, but on those who have wandered off from the road of humanity.

Who Cuts Down the Forest?

Are the forests cut down by lions, rhinoceroses, tigers, and wolves, or by human beings?

The answer is plain. No hunter has ever taken a saw to a forest. The lion sleeps in the shade of a tree, and the wolf shelters beneath its branches. The one who brings axes, saws, and heavy machinery into the forest is the human being.

Every tree that falls takes with it the nest of a bird, the refuge of a deer, and the home of thousands of small creatures. Homes shrink one after another, until the animal, desperate, comes to the villages, and then the same human being calls it a "nuisance."

The Air We All Breathe

Wild population growth and the endless abuse of resources have worn nature down and spoiled it: factory smoke, plastic in the oceans, waste in water and soil.

But the most important question is this:

Is pollution merely the by-product of work and ordinary life?

Smoke of Incense, or Smoke of Poison?

Every day, gunpowder rains down on the villages and towns of lands torn by war and cruel treatment.

Is that smoke the smoke of incense?

No. It is a deadly, harmful smoke that destroys human beings and keeps air, water, and soil poisoned for years.

War does not end when the guns fall silent. Its poison stays in the ground.

Factories of Death

Across the world, arms industries produce vast quantities of dangerous waste, some of it lethal and even radioactive, and in some places it has been dumped in deserts or in the open sea, as though deserts and oceans had no owner.

And in these same days, bullets, shells, mortars, and pilotless drones make the air of nature more dirty than it can bear.

Another Planet

Perhaps one day the Earth will no longer be a place for human beings to live.

Already today, some of the world's very rich people are investing in space travel and dreaming of other planets, looking for somewhere for themselves.

Like a traveler who sets his house on fire and buys a ticket the same night.

And the question remains where it started: will the one who destroyed his home keep the new one?

Chapter Fourteen

Migration and the Homeless

Forced removal, asylum, war, and poverty; but alongside the suffering, the stories of people who search for safety and a new life in new lands

The Night the House Stayed Behind

The lion on the plain goes to no village, and no hunter sets fire to anyone's house.

But on the night Farid took the hand of his eight-year-old daughter Mina and walked out of the door, everything he owned fit in a single prayer mat: a few loaves of bread, a bottle of water, and a photograph of his mother.

About the house he was leaving behind, he said only one sentence:

"Mina, don't look."

The house had not been destroyed by lions or tigers. The most savage beast in the world, the human being who has wandered off from the road of humanity, had destroyed it with rockets and fire, so that a few could get closer to the resources that lay beneath its soil.

The Road

Forced removal does not begin with a single goodbye. It begins with a thousand small ones: the wall on which Mina had drawn pictures all year, the fig tree that stood in the yard, the neighbor's dog that followed them to the end of the lane.

The roads were long: mountains, desert, cold nights, and bread that grew less each day.

Mina asked, "Baba, where are we going?"

And Farid answered honestly, "I don't know, but somewhere a rocket won't land."

Walls and Gates

For those who have money and papers, a border is a line on a map. For those who do not, it is a high wall.

Here too the most savage beast in the world appears in another form: an illegal trader who sells human lives like goods, a boat that takes more passengers than it can carry, and an official who sees all of them only as a “problem.”

The lion hunts out of hunger. This creature earns its bread from the pain of others.

For a long time they stayed in a camp. White tents, a queue for bread, a queue for water, and a queue that no one knew when it would reach its turn: the queue for life to begin again.

The New Land

The new land welcomed the new arrivals neither with flowers nor with stones. A strange language, a strange cold, and looks full of questions.

Farid took work he had never imagined. At night he swept the streets of a city in which, by day, he would remain unknown.

In her first school, Mina was silent. After one month she spoke a word, after three months a sentence, and after a year she won a prize in a painting competition.

Her painting was the same old painting: a house that no one could see, yet everyone knew.

The Hand That Reaches Out

This is not the whole story.

The same creature that destroys houses sometimes reaches out a hand: a neighbor who brings a blanket, a teacher who taught Mina her letters after the bell, an old man who gave Farid a job.

Here the central question of the book turns once more:

Is the most savage beast in the world only savage?

Or can the same creature that burns a house also give bread?

The answer is both, and the choice belongs to that creature.

In the second winter, at the class ceremony, Mina held up her painting: a house with a fig tree, a wall with a child's drawing, and in the corner a dog wagging its tail.

The teacher asked, "Where is this house?"

Mina answered exactly like her father:

"I don't know. But it is a place where I will build again."

From the Author's Memories: An Evening in 1992

It was evening, in the year 1992. The Mujahideen were fighting among themselves, and one of the mortar shells fell near our house.

In the darkness of that night, my family and I left our home for an unknown place and an uncertain fate. I had with me six innocent children and my wife, my lifelong companion.

We spent two nights in the home of strangers, and afterward we traveled for five days toward Pakistan.

But, sadly, thirteen years passed there, in that place of darkness.

Chapter Fifteen

The Borders Humans Drew Between Humans

Nationality, language, race, ethnicity, social class, and other labels that sometimes become instruments of scorn and bad feeling

The Mental "I"

This long-lasting disease exists everywhere in the world, especially in my ruined homeland, the land of my birth.

The mental “I” has played a huge role since the earliest days of the human race, and it lives in the most savage beast in the world itself. These “I”s have divided human beings into countless groups and sides. Each tribe calls itself the master of the earth and imagines the others to be its servants.

A lion has never killed another lion because of its language.

A wolf has never driven out another wolf because of the color of its coat.

Religion, Ethnicity, and Labels

In my view, some of the founders of groups in history made an instrument of these differences, so that they could use other people like slaves.

In my homeland, nationality is sometimes treated as if it were the difference between Islam and unbelief. Yet my countrymen in exile, despite their differences of belief, hold an unbreakable bond with the very people of the same country, the very brothers, whom they once called “infidels.”

This clash shows that borders do not rise from the heart. They come from the mind.

Two Beasts over One Dead body

Nations are sometimes like beasts fighting over a corpse, looking at one another with hatred.

But there is a difference. A beast fights over a real dead body. Human beings sometimes fight over a dead body of their own making: land that has been given a border, and a crown that no one has ever seen, for which we tear one another apart.

A Writer Between Two Languages

If I were to reveal all the truths, even in this corner of refuge the most savage beast in the world would not leave me in peace.

When I write some articles in Pashto, Dari speakers say, “He is a Pashtun,” and look at me with hatred.

When I write in Dari, they say, “He is a Tajik.”

They accept neither a writer nor a historian who writes the truth.

If those who draw borders between human beings are not the most savage beast, then who are they?

Larger Borders

On the international level, the same disease can be seen. Many powerful countries do not count poor and friendless countries as full members of the human family. Their tables are freshly laid at great conferences, with empty chairs for the countries whose voices do not reach.

The most savage beast in the world comes each time in new clothes: sometimes in a turban, sometimes in a flag, sometimes in a suit.

But always with one sentence:

“We are better.”

Chapter Sixteen

The Crime Within

Greed, envy, bitterness, selfish behavior, pride, extreme belief, and the thirst for power

Up to this point we have searched for the most savage beast in the world in forests and mines, at borders and in camps. Now the time has come to turn the camera toward ourselves.

For every crime that occurs in the world, before it is carried out with a weapon, has first been carried out in the mind as a single thought.

A Forest Within

The lion has its forest outside. We have our forest within.

In that forest, greed is a wolf that is never full, envy a snake in the shade, bitterness a fire beneath the ashes, and selfish behavior a leopard that sees only its own prey.

The spiritual people of old called these forces, taken together, the "self" (nafs), and they saw it as a dragon sleeping in every person's breast. The dragon stays calm as long as it finds no food, and its food is these very desires.

Greed: Endless Hunger

The lion's hunger ends with a single hunt. Human greed never ends.

The one who has a grain store of bread looks for a second grain store, and the one who owns all the earth wants the sky.

This is the very greed that digs the mines and cuts down the forests, and in the end feeds no one.

Envy and Bitterness: The Poison We Drink Ourselves

Envy is a poison we drink ourselves while waiting for another to die.

Bitterness is the same poison, kept in the heart for years until one day we pour it over others' heads.

The lion bears no anger. It does not carry yesterday into tomorrow.

Human beings not only remember, but hand it down to their children.

Selfish behavior and Pride: The Mirror That Shows Only Ourselves

The selfish person sees only themselves in every mirror.

And pride is the mirror that makes everything look larger except the person looking, who grows smaller.

People who had not an ounce of modesty become, with power, a mountain, and see themselves standing on its peak.

Extreme belief: A Wall of the Gaze

Extreme belief means closing the windows of the mind.

The one whose windows are shut imagines the world is dark, and instead of opening a window, charges others of darkness.

The same walls we saw in the previous chapter, in geography, were first built in the mind.

The Thirst for Power: Water That Makes You Thirstier

Power is like salt water: the more you drink, the thirstier you become.

A person who once only wanted to sit quietly in their house, once they have power, wants to keep a city quiet, then a country, then a world.

Here the most savage beast in the world appears in its most shapeless shape: an inner desire that knows no road.

The Mirror and the Door of the Cage

Rumi and the spiritual people also said that the greatest battle is the battle with the self.

This battle is not fought with swords and rockets. It is fought with awareness.

The one who knows the dragon within first sees it, then names it, and then slowly, gently, tames it.

And for this reason the most savage beast in the world is not always in a cage. Sometimes it is in a cage whose door is open, and the key is this simple look inside.

As long as we go searching for the wild beast outside, we make stronger the same wild beast within.

And when we look within, we are afraid at first. Then we understand that even fear has a way through.

Chapter Seventeen

Can Humanity Still Return?

Awareness, education, love, justice, and self-knowledge

After all this darkness, the book should not end without hope.

The question of this chapter is exactly that:

Can awareness, education, love, justice, and self-knowledge change the course of the human race?

Two Millimeters of Distance

In all texts, ancient and modern, we read that the human being is a surprising creature. We make everything in nature, and beyond nature, obey us, yet within two millimeters of our own inner self, our sense of right and wrong, we do not make peace.

If human beings were willing to make peace with themselves, and to love their own offspring, it is natural that everything would begin to return to normal.

False Faces in the Mirror

Unfortunately, modern humanity, “the savage beast of the century,” is not seeking peace with itself or self-knowledge.

In its own mirror it always sees false faces, that is, mental “I”s, and imagines itself good. Yet the same person, ten minutes later, may sign the order that drops tons of bombs on an oppressed and helpless country.

Is this not the most savage beast in the world?

The Pulpit and Hypocrisy

Some religious speakers, from pulpits in mosques and religious gathering halls, call themselves “the followers of the prophets.” But as soon as they finish their sermons, pressing upon those who have no bread, they take a child in marriage for themselves.

I remember that in our village Gul Mohammad Khan owed ten thousand Afghanis, and his daughter was twelve years old.

A certain Maulvi Sahib, a religious cleric, came and said:

“Either marry your daughter to me, or pay off my debt right now.”

And he, who was seventy-six years old, took that girl in marriage.

Should I call this man a human being too? If such people are human, then I am not.

Humanity is not defined by robe and crown. It is defined by suffering over the pain of others.

And a little girl who went to the creditor’s house instead of to school is a sign of a place that education had not reached.

Education Is the Work of Human Beings

Education and schooling are the work of human beings, not of the savage ones.

The savage beast rules by force and fear. Human beings open the way with knowledge.

If a girl like Mina stays in school, word by word she builds a world in which there is no longer a hunter.

Five Ways Back

- Awareness: the one who knows the root of pain turns less to killing.
- Education: the doors of the school break down the very borders that the mind has built.
- Love: the one who loves their own generation will love the neighbor’s generation too.
- Justice: a law that stands between a maulvi and a twelve-year-old girl, instead of custom.

• Self-knowledge: an honest look in the mirror, not those false faces.

If Human Beings Become Human

The book began with a question: who is the most savage beast in the world?

And it ends with the same answer, but not with hopelessness.

Whenever human beings become truly human, and know themselves as human beings, everything becomes possible.

Chapter Eighteen

The Last Question: Where Is Humanity Going?

The final chapter: a return to the opening question, and an invitation for the human being to return to humanity

Returning to the First Question

The book began with a question: what is the most savage beast on Earth?

Let us ask it once more, but this time with eyes that have seen several lands.

On the plains, we saw the lion hunt only when it was hungry, and sleep once it was fed. In the forests, we saw human beings take the nest of the bird and the refuge of the deer. In the mines, at the borders, and in the camps, we saw bound hands and broken hearts. We looked into the mirror of war and found children robbed of childhood. We looked into the mirror of power and found a prison without walls. And at last we looked into the mirror within, and saw a forest inside ourselves: the wolf of greed, the snake of envy, the fire of bitterness, and the sleeping dragon of the self.

So let us say the answer without shame:

Among all creatures, the human being who has wandered off from the road of humanity is the most savage beast on Earth.

But This Answer Is Not Yet Complete

For as long as he had not left the road, he was a human being.

So the deeper question is this:

Is the problem the human being himself, or a human being who has not yet come to know himself?

The lion is a lion because it cannot be anything else. But a human being can be the kindest creature on Earth, just as he can be the most savage. This chance of both is the sign of the one thing the lion does not have: choice.

And choice, when made without awareness, becomes greed, bias, and the thirst for power. When made with awareness, it becomes love, justice, and learning.

So the problem is neither human nature itself, nor human fate. The problem is the human being who has not yet looked at himself.

What Saves Everything

In this book we saw a father named Farid take his daughter's hand in the dark and walk out of their house. We saw his daughter, Mina, who after years of silence first spoke a single word. We saw a documentary maker named Arman who spent thirty years searching for the most savage beast and in the end found it in the mirror. The author, too, is one of these people: someone who spent long years in exile and, in spite of it, did not lose hope and went on writing.

(Added:) We also saw Parwin, who was not allowed a book and kept her question. We saw Najiba, whom the grown-ups failed to protect, and Parwana, whose death the world tried to hide. Their stories are not here to make us hopelessness. They are here so that we remember what was taken from them, and refuse to let it be taken from others.

These stories show that even on the darkest nights, a human being can choose: to give bread instead of hatred; to build a bridge instead of a border; to write instead of staying silent.

An Invitation

This book does not wish to blame the human race. Blame reaches no one who still has a way back.

This book is an invitation.

An invitation to look in the mirror, not as we wish to see ourselves, but as we are.

An invitation to break borders: first the borders of the mind, then the borders on the map.

An invitation to one small act: a blanket for a neighbor, a kind word to a child, forgiveness for someone we have held in our hearts for years.

An invitation to the school: every little girl who stays in the classroom is a cage that opens.

(Added:) And an invitation to speak. A crime survives on silence. When we name it, document it, and refuse to call it by a more gentle name, we have already taken the first step toward ending it.

The Return of the Human Being to Humanity

Where is humanity going?

Wherever it chooses.

If it moves toward the bomb, the border, and lust, it is coming near the last page of its own history. If it moves toward the mirror, the school, and the outstretched hand, it stands at the beginning of a chapter that has not yet been written.

The lion moves away through the mist, and the world remains, with no lion to guard it. So watching over the world begins with watching over the human being within us.

And here the book ends, and the question remains open:

What is the most savage beast on Earth?

This time, dear reader, you give the answer. Not with a single sentence, but with the day that you begin today.

Epilogue

A Closing Note for the End of The Most Savage Beast

Dear reader,

This book began with a question, and it ends with a question too.

If at any point in these pages you were hurt, know that the author's aim was not to wound. I wanted to hold up a mirror before your eyes, one that does not praise falsely us, but shows us as we are.

Everything written in this book has come from the very world we live in: a world of forests that fall, borders that are drawn, houses that burn, and human beings who, in spite of everything, still give bread and still study their lessons.

Gratitude

Thank you to all those who lost their homes and still remained human.

Thank you to those who, in the darkness, gave someone a blanket, a word, or an open door at a school.

And thank you to you, who stayed with me to the last page.

A Wish

I wish for a day to come when this question is no longer needed.

A day when no child walks through the ruins, no little girl goes to a creditor's house instead of to school, and no border exists except on a map.

A day when the most savage beast in the world, the very one who can be the kindest being of all, chooses to be kind.

The lion moves away through the mist.

The doors of the school remain open.

And you, who are reading this page, are standing one step closer to those doors.

The End

Author’s Note

This book is about human suffering, and I have tried to write it with respect for the victims.

On names and stories. The names of most of the people who appear in the stories of this book have been changed to protect their privacy and that of their families. [Some of these stories are based on real events that I witnessed myself or heard from witnesses. Others, such as the story of Farid and Mina, are literary reconstructions inspired by similar realities. — Please specify which story belongs in which group.] Wherever this is so, I have tried to keep the core of the truth rather than overstate any event.

On sources. Figures and reports taken from international bodies (such as the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and Human Rights Watch) are cited in footnotes or in the bibliography at the end of the book, with the name and year of the report. Accounts that I heard from survivors and witnesses, or read in the media over the years, and that have not been established by a court, I have presented as accounts, not as proven fact.

On tone. This book does not wish to blame any religion, ethnic group, or nation. The violence I speak of arises from human beings, and any person, in any land, can be both its victim and its wrongdoer. That is why I began and ended the book with a question about the human being.

Thanks. I am grateful to everyone who shared their suffering with me, and to you, dear reader, who stayed with me to the last page.

Basir Shafaq