

The anatomy of a suicide note



BLOWIN’ IN THE WIND

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A recent news from Rajshahi brought tears to our eyes. A family of four died to avoid the trap of debt and pain of hunger. It was a case of filicide where the father confessed to the killing of the other three members of his family. Such deaths are not uncommon in a country that is in denial about the significant segment of its population living in extreme poverty. The policy of reducing poverty to zero is a horse that exists in the book of the authorities but not in the stable of practice, as a Bangla proverb puts it. The transformation of four individuals to four zeros, therefore, is a case study that needs close scrutiny. I will attempt a close reading of the short note, written by a father who had just killed his children and wife.

The opening declaration sets the fatal decision as inevitable, “Tonight, the four of us will leave this world. We will never see each other again. *Khoda hafiz.*” Then the author positions himself and takes responsibility for his action, “I am Minarul, and what I write below is entirely my own.” He excludes the possibility of any external blame by stating, “I put it down because tonight, the four of us will die. No one is to be held responsible for our deaths. I write this letter because the police will otherwise accuse someone falsely and extort money.”

Minarul knew how, in a country like

a flattened affect. The sequential description of killings suggests that he had already killed three members of his family before killing himself. The atrocity is justified as an act of necessity.

In the next part, he leaves some instructions about his last rite, “The elder son of our father, along with his family, must not come to see our bodies or attend our funerals. Our father must not spend any money on the shrouds that will cover our bodies... From, Minarul. *Assalam Alaikum.*”

By not naming the relationship that he has with his brother, it suggests that he felt betrayed by him and his family. The social exclusion of banning his father and elder brother from the funerals asserts some control over his action even after his death. The closings, which include religious courtesies, create an impression of a ritualistic farewell.

The suicide note reads like a testament and shows careful cognitive planning rather than any impulsivity. He names himself three times in the course of the note, which indicates that he is fixated on his authorial identity and mindful about misattribution. The attempt at clarity by the authors is common in suicide notes. But what is uncommon is the blunt repetition and directness of verbs. He asserts responsibility for his sequential homicide by

over language by using imperatives to assert himself one last time. The statements that his elder brother “must not come” and that his father “must not pay for shrouds” hint at a displacement of anger. We can understand that there are unresolved conflicts within the family. While Minarul has absolved society, he does not extend the same reprieve to his immediate family members.

From a psychological point of view, the repeated emphasis on death as predetermined signifies helplessness conditioned by hunger, debt, and social stigma, which zeroes in on a

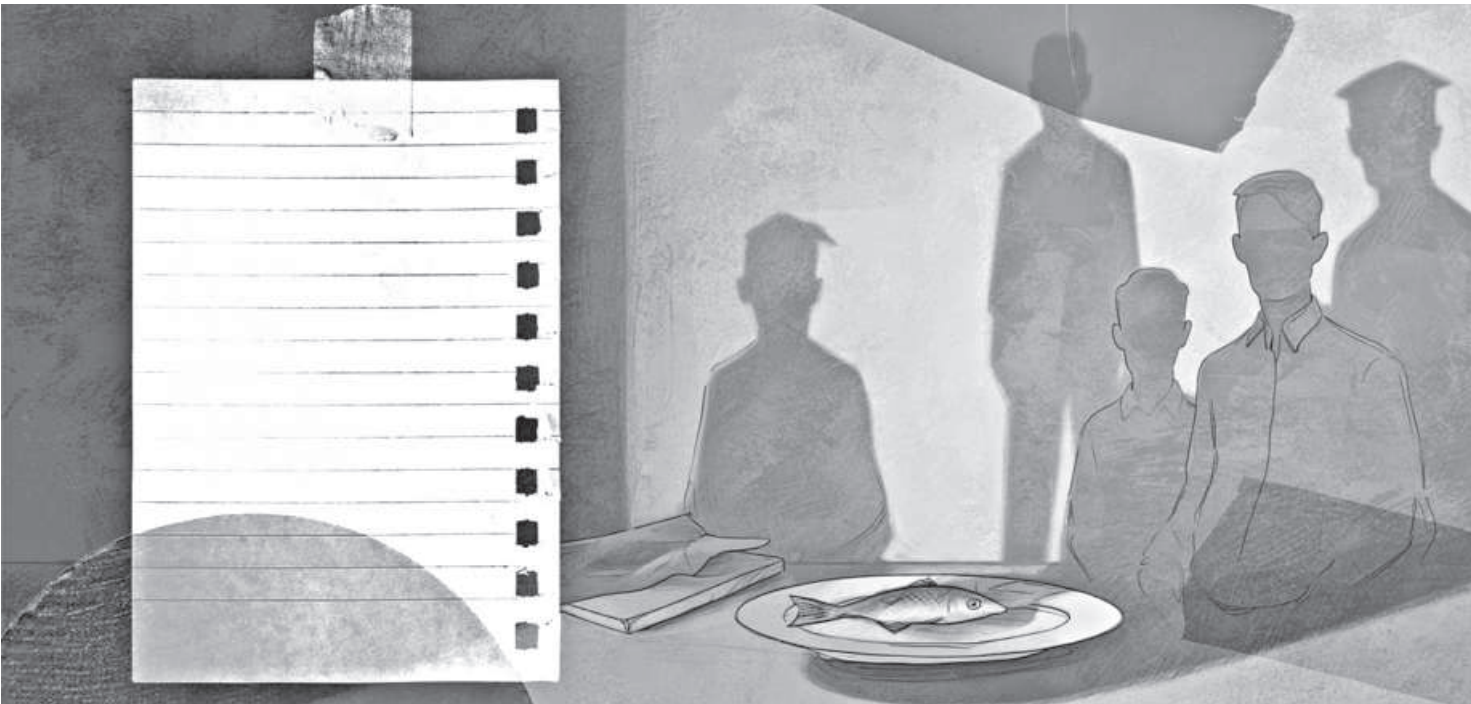
along with the note.

The filicide is paternalistic in tone, as Minarul behaved like a provider who turned into an executioner. He could have simply died by suicide himself. But instead of abandoning his family members to uncertainty, he decided to kill his dependents, too, to release them from suffering. This behaviour exemplifies a twisted interpretation of “care,” which aligns with the concept of altruistic filicide.

Minarul attempted to conform to social decorum and dignity by using religious courtesies like “*Khoda hafiz*” and “*Assalam*

or instructional, fatalistic or resigned, and accusatory or indirect. For instance, Minarul owns up to his action and clarifies responsibility (e.g. “No one is to be blamed”). He provides practical instructions (e.g. “Our father must not pay for the shrouds”). It is fatalistic when he writes, “Four of us will leave the world tonight.” He has already resigned and given up hope. And the indirect anger directed at his elder brother and the police exemplifies the third type of suicide note.

Teach numerous realistic texts from various cultures that address hunger as a driving



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

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ours, narratives can be twisted and how law enforcement agencies can use someone else’s misery as an opportunity to make money. He then provides a chronological account of the killings. The calm and composed voice reflects a kind of emotional numbing that produces

repeatedly stating, “I killed...” This suggests possible dissociative detachment or a forensic awareness of how the events will be reconstructed. The language is direct and not conditional. Minarul presents his action with certainty and finality. He maintains control

sense of no escape. When Minarul killed his loved ones, he expressed concern about the police potentially taking advantage of the situation. The result is a deep-seated paranoia and mistrust against institutions that we all share as his fellow citizens. Now that this act of suicide is linked to debt, we can also highlight the systemic neglect and the lack of social support that leads individuals to self-annihilation.

One report suggests the daughter, Mithila, was only two years old. She craved fish. Her grandmother brought a dish of fish and found the door closed from inside. When neighbours broke in, they found the bodies of the victims

alaikum.” The irony lies in the fact that he violated one of the major religious injunctions: suicide. The religious courtesy is a psychological relief that cloaks despair and seeks spiritual solace.

There are quite a few markers that make this note seem genuine. They include personal identifiers, explicit sequencing, emotional leakage (distrust, bitterness), and distrust for authority (i.e. police). In the note, Minarul emerges as a perpetrator experiencing acute psychological distress characterised by fatalism, a desire for control, and feelings of resentment. There are also overlapping themes that are common to suicide notes: explanatory

force for death. Manik Bandyopadhyay, Emile Zola, Victor Hugo, Toni Morrison, and John Steinbeck are a few such names. In class, we glorify death and pain and critically appreciate their aesthetic dimensions. The explanatory-instructional-fatalistic typology shaped by hunger, debt, and systemic distrust is a matter of linguistic investigation that my students undertake for their grades. We write essays on how deprivation corrodes familial bonds and can present death as mercy. There are times when we need to question why one turned the other three into zeroes. Minarul killed because he cared. But who killed Minarul? Is he a villain or a victim?

To create an inclusive society, we must change our mindset



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I was recently a guest speaker at a course for health workers at a private university. The session focused on non-discriminatory behaviour in the workplace. From the very beginning, many participants shared personal stories: how they faced derogatory comments about their skin colour, height and/or weight during childhood and adolescence, and how such experiences led to emotional distress and a loss of self-confidence. Several participants mentioned that even in adulthood, they continue to encounter such behaviour within families, social circles, and workplaces. This is the reality for many in our society. Remarks about people from religious minorities, indigenous communities, and those with mental health conditions are also often made casually and insensitively.

Are we even aware that our jokes or comments may be hurting others? Asking intrusive questions about someone’s marital

status or children as soon as we meet them is still a part of our social conversations. Misogynistic jokes are rampant in social media groups, mirroring the attitude prevalent in real life.

The state has a responsibility to eliminate discrimination through laws and policies. Many organisations also attempt to guide their employees through codes of conduct that define what behaviour is acceptable and what is not. These are all important steps. But they are not enough to create an inclusive society. Discrimination will persist unless the social attitude changes. Institutional and state frameworks typically consider race, gender, ethnicity, and disability. But human diversity includes many other dimensions.

Let us imagine this scenario: you are interviewing candidates for a job. One applicant replies with a regional accent. Would you consider them as qualified as someone

who speaks in standard pronunciation, or would bias creep in? There are countless such situations where biased assumptions lead to exclusion.

Chotoder Chhobi, a film directed by Kaushik Ganguly, revolves around a group of people with dwarfism, some of whom work in a circus. Like everyone else, they experience joy and sorrow in their everyday lives. They are doing just fine. But the problem lies elsewhere. Wherever they go, people look at them with a patronising gaze, which makes

person joins, the game cannot begin, even if that person is not particularly skilled. Their presence itself is a gift. It enables connection, collaboration, and meaningful experiences. Just like our presence, our differences are fundamental to who we are.

Diversity is what makes human society beautiful and strong. If everyone were the same in terms of their identities and lifestyles, then society would be monotonous. Still, when someone lives differently than we do, we hesitate to accept them, as if they are

Diversity is what makes human society beautiful and strong. If everyone were the same in terms of their identities and lifestyles, then society would be monotonous. Still, when someone lives differently than we do, we hesitate to accept them, as if they are doing something ‘wrong.’

them uncomfortable. There is a societal standard for what is considered “normal,” and anyone who doesn’t meet it is often seen as “abnormal.” This mindset was challenged by Judith Snow, who spent her life advocating for a more inclusive society. She argued that “presence is a fundamental contribution we make to society.” For example, imagine you’re organising a team game that requires seven players. You have six. Until the seventh

doing something “wrong.” Paul Dolan, who has long studied happiness, explores this in his book *Happy Ever After*. He critiques the social narrative that ties happiness to education, career success, health, marriage, and having children. While this formula may work for some, it does not apply to everyone. There are many ways to live a meaningful and joyous life. In trying to appear happy in the eyes of others, many lead deeply unhappy

lives. Dolan’s work shows how we can break free from this trap and seek happiness on our own terms. We must respect others’ choices instead of judging them. We can treat people with sensitivity, reflect on whether we are harbouring unconscious biases, and allow others the freedom to live in their own way.

I am reminded of a protest gathering I attended in London almost five years ago. During the deadly pandemic, I felt very “alive” to be part of the Black Lives Matter movement. Members of women’s groups, climate activists, local council representatives, and young people joined the protest to challenge racism in various sectors. “It is not enough to be non-racist; each of us has to be anti-racist” was a powerful call to action by one of the young speakers who encouraged all to take a stand while witnessing racism in any form. Attitudinal changes and confronting unconscious biases are required in addition to fighting systemic oppression if we are to create an inclusive society anywhere in the world.

Interestingly, people usually recognise when they face discrimination, but fail to understand when they are discriminating against others. We need internal reform if we are to create a society that is liveable for all. Let us refrain from discriminatory attitudes and behaviour. Silence contributes to discrimination. But if enough of us challenge such behaviour, its social acceptability will decline, and change will come gradually.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Enjoy the library
- 5 Blinds piece
- 9 TV’s “Uncle Miltie”
- 10 Car quartet
- 12 Be of use
- 13 Early Mexican
- 14 Reserved money
- 16 Can. neighbor
- 17 “- we there yet?”
- 18 Trial
- 20 Reduce
- 22 “Clumsy me!”
- 23 Routine
- 25 Asian language
- 28 Charge criminally
- 32 London theater

area

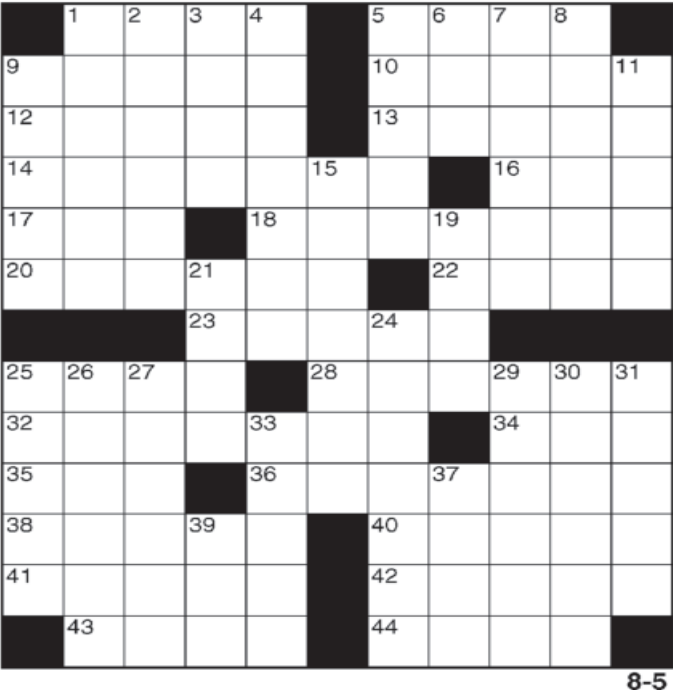
- 34 “- TURN”
- 35 Consume
- 36 Ring carrier
- 38 Dodge
- 40 Give a speech
- 41 Hamper
- 42 External
- 43 Budget item
- 44 Call for

DOWN

- 1 Historic rider
- 2 Wipes off
- 3 Stepped down
- 4 Edits out
- 5 Antlered animals
- 6 Designer Claiborne

7 Music’s Toscanini

- 8 Prepares to drive
- 9 Insipid
- 11 Looks over
- 15 Bona fide
- 19 Related
- 21 Hearts, e.g.
- 24 Et cetera
- 25 Jacket material
- 26 Physician
- 27 Keen
- 29 Prison resident
- 30 Like some aspirin
- 31 Radio dial
- 33 Reviewer Roger
- 37 Faithful
- 39 Bear’s lair



YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

