

ON KNOWING ANDAIYE

(From Moses Bhagwan)

Oh hail Andaiye Andaiye! How we shall miss you so!

I have worshipped at the shrine of this supreme emotionally intelligent being with priestly powers and intuitive brilliance with the capacity to understand the heart and human conduct. Accessible to all who knock at her door. I have gone often to her counsel of wisdom to promote an idea, an initiative, a project. I put my case to her. I wait for five seconds to be dismissed: what foolishness! I do not hear this rebuke and I know I could proceed. She applies her critical mind, thoroughness and shrewdness to everything you say.

You know if you are there in her sphere of influence she watches over you and notices things about you that you have not given thought to.

She is not merely this personal oriented, but has been a protagonist for the redemption of the soul of this nation. She has dwelt in the midst of and grappled with its darkness and promise of light, its unrepentant foolishness and vision, the elusive and the real and its state of war and the fragile peace.

In the totality of her being her fundamentalism, compassion, intellect and her accomplishments, I have known no other woman, nay, no other like her. Soft spoken but with a voice of strength and conviction. Physically of light presence, but a presence that was emphatic. In the face of her pride and dignity, her knowing how not to be rude or unfair and her command of cause and reason, her foes or critics have been best advised to retreat into the shadows.

She dealt sensitively with the problem of living in a Afro-Guyanese urban community of close friends and family, who viewed with some insecurity the intrusion and rise of Indo-Guyanese, and the destabilization of the PNC regime, by the WPA and her active role in the insurgency.

Her death was not a surrender, she has simply relocated into an eminent domain of our country's history as one of the most exemplary, most gifted, and the bravest. She is there not to be ignored, permanently there, as a beacon for those who want to fight against diseases of the mind and of the body, for a higher quality of life and for a decent country to live in.

In all my public life I have been supportive of the battles of women for their liberation in an oppressive society. I have heard their voices but until Andaiye, I was not listening. It was Andaiye because she was here close at hand with her magnificent obsessions.

Central to her engagement in the many crusades and battles she fought all at the same time, was her understanding of the culture of dominance in particular male dominance and its derivatives, power, the hierarchies of power, the abuse of power and the weapon of violence, in particular against women, in its many blatant, hidden and insidious forms. So she became active in the organization, WAVE, (Women against violence everywhere).

She said: "... the recognition in the campaign that sectors of people have different levels of power including different sectors among women and that when you simply throw people together in what you call your party or your group, the powerful always win."

There is hardly any institution in Guyana and beyond, where there does not exhibit this deformity of dominance, in the state, its agencies, the security forces, the media, the church, the family, marriage and personal relations and the principal victim is always the woman.

It is possible to conceive by just looking on from the outside that contest for dominance is essentially a war among men for capture of state power, with women in auxiliary roles.

Standing up to male dominance has its costs but the alternative, yielding and being subordinate, sucks, and women know it. So they fight!

I am not innocent. For as a teacher I followed tradition in using the whip to compel learning. I honored the best fighter in school. I loved the violent sport of professional boxing not made illegal because it is consensual and quenches our thirst for blood. On one occasion I struck my wife Samia on the butt, it was not a romantic gesture and she never allowed me to forget. After qualifying as a lawyer without consulting her I made the decision to take the first plane back home to join the political struggle. I was so full of myself and so dominant. My wife who saw me through my studies should have had the opportunity of furthering her studies in London. I denied her that. I am repentant now.

It was when the outstanding and talented women of the WPA including or led by Andaiye withdrew from the organization that that organization lost its heart and soul and became vitiated and less than complete, if not irrelevant, as a revolutionary movement.

In 2016 I visited her at her home and we discussed the idea of rapprochement. We considered setting up an internal process involving the WPA and the women who had withdrawn, through a truth and reconciliation mechanism. She liked the idea but doubted that important leaders of the WPA would participate. We had also exchanged ideas on a citizens movement, outside the political parties, enlisting the energies of independent Guyanese and organizations.

Andaiye regretted that the WPA never did set up a women's section and perhaps even if it did, convention may have dictated a subordinate status for it. I have probed the reason for the departure and as a result of my discourses with Andaiye I am closer to understanding the depth and dimensions of her commitment to women's causes and her view of male dominance.

There is much more to the phrase women's struggles in Andaiye's perspective of the movement.

In the first place she was not emphasizing the primacy of the women's movement but its parallelism to movements promoted through party organization with the agenda of a transformation of society, but that inherent in political organizations is the tendency to male dominance and that women's expectations and cause are surrendered to the general cause.

We have to be wary about surrendering essential things for some higher cause. Therefore women will be more effective and more significant in a singular focus on issues of immediate and fundamental importance to their gender.

Secondly, Andaiye has articulated a most interesting and valid conception of women's labor. She does not adhere to the limited economic Marxian view of labor, the theory of surplus value. She speaks additionally of unwaged labor, of caring labor on which Marx is silent.

Here is what she says: "...[alerted]...to the fact that unwaged housework is the productive labor without which there would be no other labor, no worker, no economy, no society. I had been reading Marx for years and this same Marx used by left parties, make women totally invisible."

Andaiye has asserted women's labor as primary and fundamental and of a quality beyond that of men's labor.

Thirdly, another important facet of her social perspective is the factor of exclusion and indifference practiced everywhere, and also in particular against women and operative too in the sphere of race relations, a subject of deep concern for her. Eusi Kwayana addressed this in suggesting the entrenchment of women in highest executive offices of the state.

On a previous visit of mine to Guyana just at the time of the horrendous events at Buxton we were present at a meeting at the Office of the accountancy firm of Chris Ram. An important political activist was there to give us an update and explanation of the events. The analysis was apologetic and appear to suggest a revolutionary content in the capture of Buxton. The presentation was not far into it core when Andaiye abruptly he rose from her seat and left the meeting in disgust. She could not stay there to absorb the rationalization.

Andaiye was a keen observer of human conduct and she saw it from her perspective. When Samia (my wife) and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary she sent a message which was read out at the function. With a sense of humor she did her generous best to find something to commend me as a family man. She said she did not know if I had anything to do with preparation of meals at social get together at our home in Atlantic Gardens, but that. I certainly helped to serve the meals.

In like manner she supported me when I did not agree to hold WPA executive meetings on Saturdays because that was the time I had to do the week's shopping at the Better Hope Market.

Recently she was reviewing the early alliance between Ascria and Ipura and discovered a statement we had jointly published on the setting up of the Ipura-Ascria Race Commission in 1971. She expressed regret that Ipura and Ascria did not proceed with their work in the ethnic communities after collaborating with others to form the Working People's Alliance in 1974. This was another case of displacement.

She was a woman of true power that was above the power of powerful men,

She has written a phenomenal chapter on how to work and create in the midst of painful personal losses and a devastating illness that has immobilized many ordinary folks. She was deeply involved through a host of socio-economic organizations in helping people and women in distress and in disabilities, and came readily to the aid of persons in dire need.

I will end on this personal note. Sister Alissa Trotz told me today that among her final notes written as she was preparing for the end, reminding herself what she should do, there was one which stated "write Moses" and in another place "Moses". I feel so touched. But it was not just about me. I know. It was about me in relation to Samia, my wife, who she knew, was fighting a battle like hers, not against cancer, but Alzheimer! Imagine her concern on her dying bed for my wife, in a place so far away from her!

From me, Samia, and my sons Moen and Siddiqui, our love and solidarity to Abyssinian, Andaiye's family and friends in this moment of both grief on her passing and celebration of her extraordinary life!