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together

magazine

COMPASSION

compassiō (L) = fellow feeling

compātī (L) = to suffer with

rechen (H) = mother's womb

Together is a national family magazine. It is a monthly, published by the Franciscans (OFM) in India. It was started in 1935 in Karachi, now in Pakistan. It got its present name in 1966.

The magazine **Together** is a conversation platform. Nothing changes until our families change. It is an effort at making worlds meet by bringing down fearful, pretentious and defensive walls. **Together** is a journey, an ever-expansive journey—from me to us, from us to all of us, and from all

of us to all. Let us talk, let us cross borders. The more we converse and traverse, we discover even more paths to talk about and travel together. **Together** is an effort to uncover our shared humanity.

Your critical and relevant write-ups, that promote goodness, inclusivity and shared humanity, are welcome. Your articles must be mailed to editor@togethermagazine.in before the 15th of every month.

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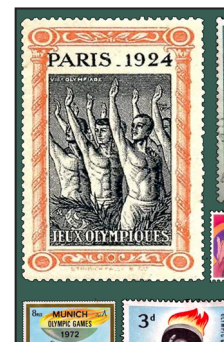
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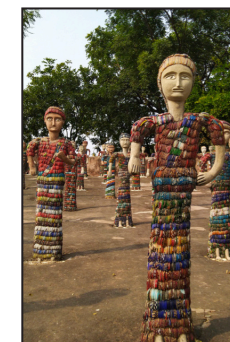


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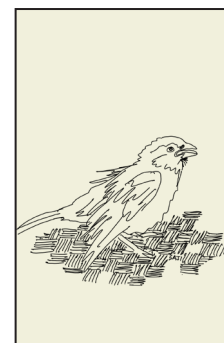


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Compassion Fatigue

What does one do when one's compassion cup goes dry and empty; when one comes to a point where there is nothing more left to give?

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

I lost my mother very recently. She was 93. For the last two and a half years, she was ill, and for the last one and a half years, she was bedridden. Though all her children, when they visited her, used to be generous in taking care of her needs, it was my brother and his wife who took care of her day in and day out. They did an amazing job; they regulated their daily routine to make sure that mother did not lack anything, they sacrificed their possible travels and outdoor fun activities to make sure that there was someone with mother always. As days passed, weeks passed, months and years passed, I could see exhaustion and a certain level of irritation setting in with them. There were feelings of helplessness and powerlessness in the face of distress and pain, for medically they could do nothing more for mother, except to give palliative care. Other siblings, especially my sisters, increased their frequency of visits, and they remained at home for longer periods of time, giving my brother and wife a little respite.

Leave my family there; imagine you are someone taking care of your old parents or grandparents for a prolonged period of time, or taking care of a child at home with chronic illness, or a child with autism or other mental health issues, or trying to understand a partner who has given in to addictions, or helping and being with a friend who is in a toxic relationship for a long time, or simply having very demanding and entitled children, and you place their needs first. Gradually you begin to feel overwhelmed, feel exhausted and tired; and come to a stage where you can't take it anymore. People can get tired of caregiving or

showing understanding or compassion—it is called compassion fatigue. Though compassion fatigue was identified and written about by Carla Joinson, who herself was a nurse and a writer, in 1992, this is a phenomenon that got noticed especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the pandemic hit the world wave after wave; nurses, medical practitioners, volunteers, firefighters, police, pretty much everybody in the business of caring began increasingly growing tired. It is a physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion. One comes to a point where there is nothing more left to give.

We are all potentially vulnerable to compassion fatigue. It happens because of prolonged exposure to the emotional and psychological needs of others. All empathy is used up; one's empathy cup, compassion cup goes dry, goes empty, one loses one's capacity for compassion as one used to have. People live in denial of compassion fatigue for a long time. We may feel tired, irritated, etc., but we have been the helper, playing the role of caregiver for long, so we go on, we don't acknowledge that we are tired.

Juliette Watt, who herself was a victim of compassion fatigue, while narrating her life story in a TED talk, gives a few symptoms of compassion fatigue: irritation and frustration, feeling absolutely worthless and terribly sad, isolating yourself from everyone around you including your own family, reduced feelings of empathy and sensitivity, and nothing making sense anymore. People can behave mechanically and become more and more task-focused and less emotion-focused.



What do we do when we reach this stage of compassion fatigue? Just ignore our duties of caring and showing empathy? Acknowledging that one is tired, burned out, and exhausted because of caregiving is important because it not only gives the caregiver an opportunity to cope with it and rejuvenate but also ensures the person receiving care does not suffer because of the exhaustion of the caregiver.

How do we refill our cup of compassion? If you are in the business of caregiving, recharge your batteries daily. Spend plenty of quiet time alone. Engage in what you enjoy doing—perhaps your hobbies. A regular exercise routine and good sleep can reduce stress and help you re-energize. Traveling gives lots of oxygen for your depleted empathy cup.

The ability to reconnect with a spiritual source and practice mindfulness meditation are excellent ways to ground yourself in the moment and keep your thoughts from pulling you in different directions. Commit to eating healthily and better; and stop all other activities while eating.

Spend time with family and friends who give you positive vibes. Hold one focused,

connected, and meaningful conversation each day. This will jump-start even the most depleted batteries.

Ask for help. Assuming that no one will help could be wrong. Connect with people; speak to them about what is happening with you. Caregivers deserve care against compassion fatigue.

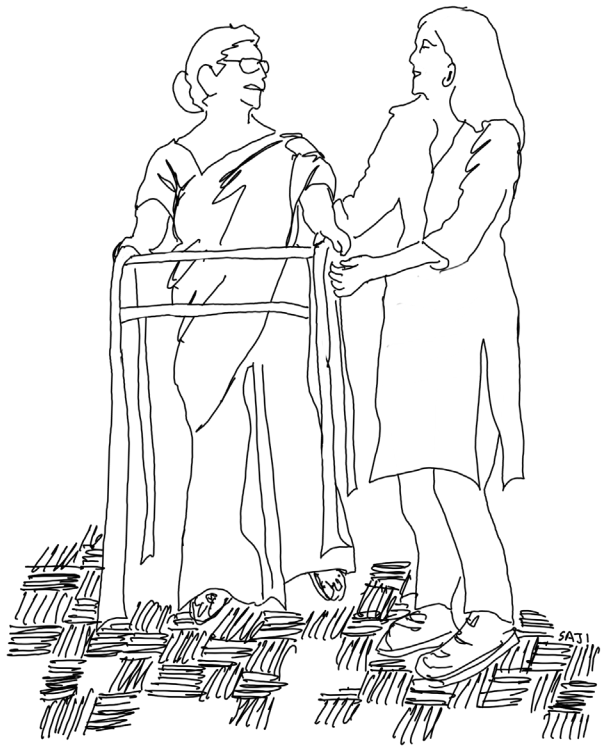
Compassion fatigue is real. Sadly, it happens to good people, people who care. We need them to continue works of compassion. We must step in when we see people facing compassion fatigue. When we visit the sick around us, which is a good thing to do, we must also visit the caregiver, speak to them, and be of help to them if possible. *The Migrant Mother* (the image on the cover), by photographer Dorothea Lange (1936) expresses compassion fatigue. It is the image of a mother, aged 32, and her children who were victims of a blighted pea crop in California in 1935 that left the pickers without work. This family sold their tent to get food. This image embodied the hunger, poverty, and helplessness endured by so many Americans during the great depression. Children are constantly in want, how long would her cup of compassion last? ■

A regular exercise routine and good sleep can reduce stress and help you re-energize. Traveling gives lots of oxygen for your depleted empathy cup.

The Power and Virtue of Anonymous Philanthropy

The detachment from ego-centricity allows us to develop humility and compassion.

DR GEORGE JOHN



“Generosity is the most natural outward expression of an inner attitude of compassion and loving-kindness” – DALAI LAMA

In the realm of literature and moral philosophy, the concept of anonymous philanthropy stands out as a beacon of altruism, encouraging individuals to engage in selfless acts of kindness without seeking

recognition or reward. This principle finds a powerful narrative in Lloyd C Douglas’s 1929 bestseller, *Magnificent Obsession*. The story revolves around Robert Merrick, a wealthy and reckless playboy whose life undergoes a profound transformation following a tragic incident. Saved from a boating accident, Merrick feels a deep sense of indebtedness after the rescue crew who saved him fails to save Dr Hudson, a reputable and selfless doctor, from a heart attack occurring simultaneously on the other side of the lake. This pivotal moment sets Merrick on a path of redemption and anonymous giving, highlighting the enduring impact of altruistic deeds performed in secrecy.

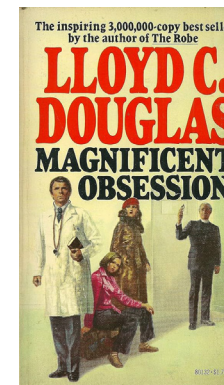
The catalyst for Robert Merrick’s transformation is the profound guilt and responsibility he feels for Dr Hudson’s death. The good doctor who is known for his unwavering dedication to others embodies the epitome of selfless service. His sudden demise, juxtaposed with Merrick’s reckless existence serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of life in general and that of Dr Hudson’s in particular, Merrick embarks on a journey of self-discovery and redemption, seeking to honour the doctor’s legacy by adopting his philosophy of anonymous philanthropy. This tragedy becomes the catalyst for change, illustrating the theme of redemption and second chances.

The Philosophy of Selflessness and Hidden Good Deeds

Anonymous philanthropy, or *beneficium latens*, is rooted in the idea that true charity is performed without the desire for recognition or accolades. This concept is echoed in various religious and philosophical traditions, emphasising the purity of intent and the virtue of humility. In *Magnificent Obsession*, Dr Hudson’s charitable acts were performed discreetly, embodying the essence of *beneficium latens*. Inspired by the doctor’s legacy, Merrick begins to anonymously support those in need, transforming his wealth and influence into tools of genuine altruism. The value of selflessness and hidden good deeds is central to this philosophy.

The philosophy of anonymous philanthropy resonates with the teachings of numerous ethical frameworks. In Christianity, the Sermon on the Mount advocates for discreet giving, stating, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret” (Mathew 6:1-4). This principle underscores the value of humility and the intrinsic reward of knowing in one’s heart, that one’s actions have positively impacted others, without the need for public acknowledgement or even allowing pride to seep into one’s heart.

In *Magnificent Obsession*, Merrick’s transformation is a testament to the profound impact of anonymous philanthropy on both the giver and the receiver. Although initially driven by a sense of guilt, Merrick’s acts of charity gradually became expressions of genuine compassion and empathy. Through his anonymous



deeds, he experiences a profound sense of fulfilment and purpose, discovering that the true reward of philanthropy lies in the act itself, rather than in external validation. This journey reflects a spiritual awakening, often subtle but resulting in a deep quest for purpose and connection.

As one immerses oneself in the practice of anonymous giving, one will begin to understand the interconnectedness of humanity and the profound impact that one individual’s actions can have on the broader community. Only such a journey can graphically illustrate the transformative power of selfless service. It demonstrates that true wealth is measured not by material possessions, but by the positive influence one can exert on the lives of others. By choosing anonymity, one can not only aid others but at the same time can also engage in self-improvement. This detachment from ego-centricity allows us to develop humility and compassion which are often overshadowed by the desire for public acknowledgement. Anonymity in generosity can foster personal growth with societal benefits, aligning closely with living a life influenced by spiritual and moral principles. A devoted practitioner of anonymous giving invariably encapsulates the transformative power of their secret philanthropy.

The personal transformation that results from anonymous giving, illustrates how anonymity in philanthropy aids not just the recipient, but also the giver. This transformation underscores the adage *Virtus Sola Nobilitat* – virtue alone ennobles – highlighting that true nobility lies in righteous action, not in accolades.

The Ripple Effect of Societal Impact of Secret Giving

The societal implications of anonymous giving are multifaceted. On one hand, they inspire a ripple effect, encouraging others to give without seeking the spotlight, thereby fostering a culture of genuine altruism. On the other hand, anonymous philanthropy challenges societal norms about the need

The notion that one can influence others and propagate a chain of goodwill simply through selfless acts provides a profound commentary on the human potential for moral evolution.

for recognition and reward, proposing an alternative model where the focus shifts from the giver to the recipient and the collective greater good the act of generosity generates.

The principle vividly portrayed in *Magnificent Obsession* is the philosophy underlying secret giving, which is deeply rooted in the idea that true generosity involves giving without expecting anything in return, not even recognition. The notion that one can influence others and propagate a chain of goodwill simply through selfless acts provides a profound commentary on the human potential for moral evolution.

Ethical Considerations

While the virtues of anonymous philanthropy are many, the narrative in *Magnificent Obsession* also invites readers to consider its complexities. For instance, anonymity in giving can sometimes shield donors from accountability, making it crucial for philanthropists to ensure that their contributions result in positive changes. While the positive ripple effects that anonymous giving generate and inspire a culture of genuine altruism, it also introduces complex ethical considerations. The lack of accountability and transparency can sometimes shield donors from seeing the impact of their contributions, potentially leading to ineffective or misdirected efforts.

Secrecy in giving can also inadvertently support a culture of dependency or entitlement, as recipients may expect continuous support without understanding the source or limits of these contributions. Furthermore, the absence of public acknowledgment can limit the potential to inspire others, especially when vested interests are involved and want to shield themselves from their wrongdoing, through the cover of anonymity provided.

Double-Edged Sword of Secrecy

Adding to positive societal impacts, secrecy in philanthropy also has its downsides.

By obscuring the visibility of generosity, it takes away the essential aspect of inspiration to others to give, and accountability that it should generate. While anonymous donors may avoid the pitfalls of ego-driven charity, they may also miss opportunities to lead by example and encourage others to contribute.

There is a delicate balance between inspiring through visible leadership and maintaining humble anonymity. It encapsulates the essence of the dilemma faced by those who choose to give secretly.

In conclusion, anonymous philanthropy, stripped of the desire for personal gain, presents a compelling model of selflessness that challenges individuals to reconsider the motives behind their actions. This form of giving, focusing solely on the welfare of others, promotes a pure form of altruism that is rare but profoundly impactful. It encourages a deeper connection to the communal aspects of human welfare, transcending individual recognition and fostering a collective spirit of generosity.

As we reflect on the virtues of anonymous giving, we are reminded of its power to effect real change while respecting the dignity of those it aids. In a world increasingly driven by personal branding and social recognition, anonymous philanthropy stands as a bastion of genuine selflessness, prompting us to live not for applause but for the cause. This approach not only enriches the lives of recipients but also elevates the moral landscape, reminding us that at the heart of philanthropy lies the simple, yet powerful conviction that we are all, in essence, keepers of our brothers and sisters. ■

Dr George John, a retired British Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist from London, is now a freelance essayist and lives with his wife in Kochi, India. GJ was awarded the Freedom of the City of London by the Lord Mayor of the City of London for services to the city and was granted his Coat of Arms by the College of Arms, London.

Compassion Changes Both Them and Us

Compassion bandages wounds—both theirs and ours. We'll never bandage them all, nor do we need to, but we do need to get close to the wounds.

RICHARD ROHR OFM

Compassion changes everything. Compassion heals. Compassion mends the broken and restores what has been lost. Compassion draws together those who have been estranged or never even dreamed they were connected. Compassion pulls us out of ourselves and into the heart of another, placing us on holy ground where we instinctively take off our shoes and walk in reverence. Compassion springs out of vulnerability and triumphs in unity.

Compassion and patience are the absolutely unique characteristics of true spiritual authority, and without any doubt are the way both St. Francis and St. Clare led their communities. They led, not from above, and not even from below, but mostly from within, by walking with their brothers and sisters, or “smelling like the sheep,” as Pope Francis puts it. Only people at home in such a spacious place can take on the social illnesses of their time, and not be destroyed by cynicism or bitterness.

Spiritual leaders who lack basic human compassion have almost no power to change other people. Such leaders need to rely upon roles, laws, costume, and enforcement powers to effect any change in others. Such change does not go deep, nor does it last. In fact, it is not really change at all. It is mere conformity.

We see this movement toward a shared compassion in all true great people. For example, St. Francis was able to rightly distinguish between institutional evil and the individual who is victimized by it. He still felt compassion for the individual soldiers fighting in the crusades, although he objected to the war itself. He realized the folly and yet the sincerity of their patriotism, which led them, however, to be unpatriotic to the much larger kingdom of God, which we could call the Great Compassion. The realm of God is one that is known for its kindness and generosity, its compassion and healing. No one is excluded from fellowship, not the rich or poor, male or female, slave or free. Jesus went beyond superficial divisions and called for a culture of compassion.



We are supposed to be kind and gentle, caring and nurturing, empowering and forgiving of ourselves.

Mirrored Suffering Leads to Compassion

The outer poverty, injustice, and absurdity we see when we look around us mirrors our own inner poverty, injustice, and absurdity. The person who is poor outside is an invitation to the person who is poor inside. As we nurture compassion for the brokenness of things, and learn to move between action and contemplation, then we find compassion and sympathy for brokenness within ourselves. We, too, are full of pain and negativity, and sometimes there is little we can do about it.

Each time I was recovering from cancer, I had to sit with my own broken absurdity as I've done with others at the jail or hospital or soup kitchen. The suffering person's pain and poverty is visible and extroverted; mine is invisible and interior, yet just as real. The two sympathies and compassion connect and become one world. I can't look down on a person receiving welfare when I realize I'm receiving God's welfare. It all becomes one truth; the inner and the outer reflect one another.

As compassion and sympathy flow from us to any person marginalized for whatever reason, wounds are bandaged—both theirs and ours. We'll never bandage them all, nor do we need to, but we do need to get close to the wounds. That idea is imaged so well in the gospels with Thomas, the doubting apostle, who wanted to figure things out in his head. He had done too much inner work, too much analyzing. He always needed more data before making a move. Then Jesus told Thomas to put his finger inside the wounds in Jesus' hands and side. Then and only then did Thomas begin to understand.

For most of us, the mere touching of another's wound probably feels like an act of outward kindness; we don't realize that its full intended effect is to change us as much as it might change them. Human sympathy is the best and easiest way to open heart space and to make us live inside our own bodies. God never intended most human beings to become philosophers or theologians,

but God does want all humans to represent God's own sympathy and empathy. And it's okay if it takes a while to get there.

According to God's own self-revelation, "God's very being is determined by *rechem*, which is mercy, loving kindness, compassion." Translations of the Hebrew most carefully connect *rechem* with the feminine for womb. God's way of being poured out in the world is womb-love. A womb provides a safe, holding place for life to grow

Sacred Self-compassion

Psychologist and theologian Chanequa Walker-Barnes, says, there can be no self-care without self-compassion, which is compassion turned inward. It is the ability to connect to our feelings, to respond to our suffering with kindness, and to desire that our suffering be ameliorated. Self-compassion prompts us to treat ourselves in ways that alleviate, rather than cause or amplify, our pain and suffering. While many Christians understand compassion, mercy, and kindness to be essential in our interactions with others, we don't always see these as core values for our relationship with ourselves. We neglect our self-care, directly and indirectly contributing to our pain and suffering. We judge ourselves for our own suffering, listening to the voice of our inner critic as it rehearses our shortcomings, our errors, and our deficiencies.

We are supposed to be kind and gentle, caring and nurturing, empowering and forgiving of ourselves. If we are unable to do this, ultimately we may be unable to do it for our neighbors. And if we cannot love our neighbors, whom we can see, we cannot love God, whom we cannot see (1 John 4:20). Self-compassion, then, is not indulgence; it is a necessity for true discipleship.

Honestly, the stories playing out in the world can make it difficult to love yourself, and therefore your neighbor. Messages from the culture that you don't matter, not just because of your race, but because of your gender, sexuality, economic status, or reli-

gion, can thwart self-love. Though her skin gives her some privilege, a white child might grow up in a context of poverty or domestic violence that can cripple her self-love. A child traveling across deserts and rivers to emigrate with his parents might lose some of his self-love in the wilderness. Even if you're born into circumstances that others consider ideal, messages in the culture can signal that you're not good enough, light enough, thin enough, smart enough, feminine or masculine enough to measure up to some ideal. The space between those ideals and your realities can make it difficult to embrace your particularities and love them. Learning to love your particularities is not just an individual project; you need your communities—your posse—to see those pieces of you, to accept them, and to love all the parts of you, fiercely.

Compassion Through Connection

For Franciscan scholar Ilia Delio, compassion stems from knowing that we belong to one another, she says, I think our greatest fear is our deepest desire: to love and to be loved. We long to be for another and to give ourselves nobly to another, but we fear the cost of love. Deep within we yearn for wholeness in love, but to become more whole in love we must accept our weaknesses and transcend our limits of separation in order to unite in love. We long for oneness of heart, mind and soul, but we fear the demands of unity. Sometimes I think we choose to be alone because it is safe. To be comfortable in our isolation is our greatest poverty.

Compassion transcends isolation because the choice to be for another is the rejection of being alone. The compassionate person recognizes the other as part of oneself in a way that is mystical and ineffable. It is not a rational caring for another but a deep identification with the other as brother and sister.

We must seek to unite—in all aspects of our lives—with one another and with the creatures of the earth. Such union calls

us out of isolated existences into community. We must slow down, discover our essential relatedness, be patient and compassionate toward all living creatures, and realize that it is a shared planet with finite resources. We are called to see and love in solidarity with all creation.

Compassion requires a depth of soul, a connectedness of soul to earth, an earthiness of person to person, and a flow of love from heart to heart. Recognizing our relatedness creates space within us that we wouldn't otherwise find, and opens a deeper capacity to love.

Compassion is realized when we know ourselves related to one another, a deep relatedness of our humanity despite our limitations. It goes beyond the differences that separate us and enters the shared space of created being. To enter this space is to have space within ourselves, to welcome into our lives the stranger, the outcast, and the poor. Love is stronger than death and the heart that no longer fears death is truly free. Compassion flourishes when we have nothing to protect and everything to share. It is the gravity of all living beings that binds together all that is weak and limited into a single ocean of love.

We have the capacity to heal this earth of its divisions, its wars, its violence, and its hatreds. This capacity is the love within us to suffer with another and to love the other without reward. Love that transcends the ego is love that heals. When we lose ourselves for the sake of love, we shall find ourselves capable of real love.

Seeds of Compassion

The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:6). Joyce Rupp is dedicated to the cultivation of compassion in the world. The four main spiritual qualities necessary for compassion's growth: nonjudgment, nonviolence, forgiveness, and mindfulness. The more these seeds are nurtured, the greater the harvest of compassion. Enlivening these four aspects requires deliberate practice and interior stamina.

We plant the seeds of compassion by being aware of our thoughts and feelings, and by the deliberate intention to think and respond in a kindhearted manner. We can teach our minds to activate compassion, so that we do not react on impulse, or go about our lives unconsciously, missing opportunities to alleviate suffering—and create more suffering. What do you do with your thoughts and feelings? Do they run rampant all day without being tended? Do they move your heart toward loving-kindness? The qualities of nonjudgment, nonviolence, forgiveness, and mindfulness wait to be nurtured. ■

An Ode to the Maid

Remembering the real heroes. They have helped me raise my family despite doing the stretch for their families and their children.

Dr RUPA PETER



A few days back, there was a heated discussion in a ladies Whatsapp group about a maid who wouldn't clean the bathroom drain properly or squeeze the water out of the mop stick completely. The conversation soon drifted into unsavoury territory where one of the group members accused people from one community as not having cleanliness in their DNA! And of course, several other Whatsapp University graduates chipped in with their own two cents on what an ideal maid should be like and why some people are 'unqualified' to be maids but come in to do our dirty dishes and clean our homes only to make ends meet. I was taken aback by the bigotry of it all. After nearly one hour of being a silent (yet fuming) listener to this tirade against the maidfolk, I couldn't take it any longer and I jumped into the conversation and simply told them that maids work in our homes just like we work elsewhere for a livelihood and we cannot make blanket statements against anyone who is trying to feed their family and live a decent life. The group fell silent for a while. And thankfully so.

This 'virtual' incident got me thinking about my life in general and 'the role of the maid in my life', in particular. I have lived in the city of Bengaluru for the past 19 years. I came here as a young mother with a messy, mischievous toddler and now I have teenagers at home who bang doors and throw clothes all around. The mess has remained the same, albeit the degree has varied. And so has my dependence on maids. I owe it to the series of maids - these incredible wom-

en who have helped me keep a clean house and raise two kids while still being able to hold my own in this world with a rewarding career. I remember with fondness the two women who have helped raise my daughter as their own. Uma who was with her from the time that she was six-month-old baby till she was a six-year-old school-going kid; and she loved my daughter no less than I have. Savithri who was with her from then on till Covid-19 stuck and she headed back to her village. I could go out and work in peace and build a career not worrying about my home or my daughter only because these women held fort while I was away.

I remember with gratitude the cook who cooked for my family while I was travelling back and forth for my doctoral studies and who sent us fresh homemade food when the whole family was down with Covid-19. Not to mention, the countless maids who have cleaned my house, washed the dishes and cleaned the mess that the kids make, day in and day out. They are the real heroes. They have helped me raise my family despite doing the stretch for their families and their children. And I am amazed at their grit, their work ethic and their commitment to their families. And yet, most of us (that includes me as well) ignore their contribution to our lives and sometimes, even, think poorly of them. A good start in recognizing their efforts would be to thank them for their services on special days like festivals and maybe even acknowledge their birthdays, once in a while. And that, my friend, would be a maiden effort worth taking. ■

together



INDIA INCLUSION AUDIT 2023

Let us make our world more inclusive;
Participate in our annual national survey



Everyone wants to belong; and everyone does have the right to belong and grow. A sense of belonging is one of humanity's most basic needs. Belonging is a feeling of being happy or comfortable as part of a particular group and having a good relationship with the other members of the group because they welcome you and accept you with equality of opportunity and opinion.

Sadly, many are pushed to the margins, sidelined, and excluded from decision-making, in policy matters, pushed out of social positions, positions in religious hierarchy, etc. because of their position in a particular section or intersection of society.

The Together magazine (www.togethermagazine.in) is conducting an end-of-the-year audit to access the state of inclusivity in India. Please be part of the **India Inclusion Audit 2023** by answering seven straightforward questions.

Help build an inclusive society!

SCAN TO TAKE
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You can also go to Google Forms directly
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Independence

Towards Democratic Coalition

The results of the General Elections have brought to re-birth the idea of an Independent India, as envisioned by the founding fathers of our democracy.

GERRY LOBO OFM

On August 15 India once again celebrates her Independence Day. An event of history, but yet to face the reality! Not that nothing has changed, but something is wanting! Since 1947 certainly life for millions of India's children has never been the same. India, the Mother, has offered her children food, education, shelter, health and wealth with much struggle, sweat and pain. She has birthed upright and outstanding seers and leaders, but has also witnessed 'insolent might', self-styled god-men-women and autocratic portents. The leaders whom she witnessed had been statesmen as well as those who closely imitated dictators; there were those who scripted her Constitution and honored it as a sacred book to live the Independence honorably and justly, as well as others who securely managing a majority in the parliament attempted to undermine the "We the people of India" by almost burying the Constitution in order to write a new one which would suit their hidden agenda. India, the Mother, witnessed religious harmony in her temple of multi-religious hearts as well as she kept witnessing atrocities and hate speeches, violence and segregation between religions. India, the Mother, worked to provide for her children the daily bread by providing employment as well as she suffered to see the widespread economic depression due to harmful policies of her government which were detrimental to a decent subsistence.

India, the Mother, is certainly honoured and is exultant about all the scientific and technological advancement, while at the same time her heart melts at the level of her distressed citizens, sometimes even without basic health care and housing when a handful rise to the level of becoming economic giants who breathe and consume only monetary profit and luxurious comforts, living in a Disney world. These, unfortunately, prefer to forget those suffering the excruciating circumstances of their life. It is also true that the celebrities become gods which their fans worship and sadly enough, some of them actuate in real life the violent, murderous or other scandalous, non-ethical, inhumane scenes. The recent brutal murder of a fan by a popular actor in Karnataka speaks for itself. Similarly, India, the Mother, whose heart is of justice, equity, equality and freedom, respect and honour to every person, experiences atrocities committed against women, degradation of their human rights and the abuse perpetuated on them, most of all by the political representatives of citizens bringing down decency in the polis. Politics, thus, is reduced to a dirty, shameless and absurd state of affairs, so much so, the Constitution which upholds human dignity and rights is desecrated on the altar of lies, hate and arrogance. When will our representatives who, graced by the franchisers, ever learn the basics of human decency? While numerous high-branded institutions in the country strive to emulate

India, my Mother, is a celebration of diversity and unity in coalition. She speaks hundreds of languages, and even if her citizens are unable to converse with each other at times in this multi-lingual environment, their capacity to understand each other is a matter of pride.

education with character; while the Indian land is sanctified by worship houses belonging to various religions to bind people to an Ultimate Power; while sages and seers, pundits and poets of Indian history have left behind the wisdom path, how is it that those who lead the country have trespassed all possibilities and have murdered human kindness to prevail in the land? Is this my India, my Mother, who deletes the memory of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and other front-leaders in order to put oneself as founders and nation builders? Were those stalwarts of history not instrumental in creating a space of freedom and well-being for you and me?

India, my Mother, is a celebration of diversity and unity in coalition. She speaks hundreds of languages, and even if her citizens are unable to converse with each other at times in this multi-lingual environment, their capacity to understand each other is a matter of pride. A person does not rest on language alone, but on every form of gesture and disposition which enhances human interaction and closeness. There may be coalition partners governing the country as a composite structure once in a while, but a coalition in partnering everyday life is conspicuously observable and experienced too. Life along the Indian high-ways and by-ways depicts the story of alliance and an existence of family coalition irrespective of caste, religion, language, work and education. Diverse form of economic transactions taking place daily along our narrow streets and open market centers is yet another spectacular picture of a collative and collective existence. Religious tolerance and acceptance of others in their own cult and traditions paints a colourful India. En-

countering strangers and being hospitable to them into a conversation, particularly on our train journeys and in our village festivals proclaims a unitive diversity and friendly bonhomie. India is not "order" but an "order in a constant dis-order!" Perfection is her imperfection and the home is her house in ruins! She is *swach* interiorly but *a-swach* exteriorly; her cup is *shudh* externally but *a-shudh* internally. India is contradictions and compromises, but integrated and composed!

We, the people of India, the tallest of democracies in the world, have all the reason to celebrate her Independence Day, on August 15, this year. After the "acrimonious and protracted" General Elections there is a conversation about resurgence of individual liberty, societal harmony, media autonomy, freedom of the press, governance by consensus which had been deeply erased in the past decade. Hopefully some of the values of the ancient wisdom of polity would be the dance of the day. Perhaps the results of the General Elections have brought to re-birth the idea of an Independent India, not in terms of mere autonomy from the British Raj, but as envisioned by the founding fathers of our democracy. Liberal values, cultural beliefs, representative ruling institutions of the past, perhaps are hopeful signs. Of course, the "Independence" does not absolve any form of oppression and marginalization, linguistic and caste discrimination and classification of human people. Indian Independence can never tolerate the weaponising the feelings of being marginalized. The Independence of India implies egalitarian democracy with disciplined organizational structures and permitting no surrender of individual



The coalition India was invariably wounded by a monolithic perception commanded and diverted by a “monolith”, a monolithic majoritarian dispensation for a decade long by commanding one voice, one religion, one nation, one election, one party, one language and one tribe.

liberties to any majoritarian demagogue which, as experienced, had been constantly undermining independent institutions and exceeding its Constitutional powers.

We, the people of India, celebrate our Independence by duly honouring the “other” we meet every day. The other who walks on our streets is not our enemy, instead, a fellow pilgrim who needs to be welcomed because my existence with him in this motherland makes my country. His or her individuality encourages me to know that together we can contribute to the making of India into a nation where everyone is everyone else’s concern, a friend, though our interests and religious affiliation may differ. Indian democracy is an energy that produces light in the darkness, hope in despair and unity in chaos!

The coalition India, unitedly diverse, was invariably wounded by a monolithic perception commanded and diverted by a “monolith”, a monolithic majoritarian dispensation for a decade long by commanding one voice, one religion, one nation, one election, one party, one language and one tribe. By weakening the legitimate institutions which were to act independently of any party or government order done on a every-day basis, by disrespecting the autonomy of the judiciary and by enforcing ordinances framed and formulated overnight, the coalition India found itself

derailed in her Constitutional freedom of speech and action. Yes, the insolent might paved its way through the alliance, accommodative and independent India. While the mainstream media bent itself low to save its position and profit from the wrath of the ‘big-boss’, the social media gave rise to forth-righted commentaries and prophetic opinions of the performance of his master’s voice, only to discover the next hour that sedition sheet was already filed against them. Disrespecting the coalition government formation at the state level, a breakdown of law and order was promoted by the ruling monolithic machinery, thereby deepening the divide in order to create political absolutism. Obviously the majority feared the minority; the “one-man” was threatened by a community of divergence. The truth that India can never be dismantled from its coalition principles and an aligned performance was not accepted by those ruling the country with their majoritarian strength because the truth is always bitter! The truth that “Independence” of India is not absolutism in governance and in the decision making process was not tasteful to those who assured themselves a firm position for ever more and to those who acquired a Mussolinian authority through the years of political praxis which even the angels feared to tread!

Indian Independence can thrive only by a coalition community! ■



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Normalisation Is Good Until It Is Not

SUMIT DASGUPTA

Hannah Arendt’s series of reports on the trial of Adolf Eichmann for *The New Yorker* in the early 1960s became the seminal work, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. In her first dispatch from Jerusalem, the prosecutor, Attorney General Gideon Hausner, in his opening speech, articulated something that shed global light on the tragedy of the Jews. He remarked that if Eichmann was also charged with “crimes against non-Jews,” it was not “because he committed them but

“because we make no ethnic distinctions.” Those words captured the essence of suffering, often not brought to the world’s attention with the same dramatic intensity the Eichmann trial generated—or with Arendt’s narrative flair. Hausner’s words elevated the crime against the Jews, executed with emotionless precision by Eichmann, beyond race and established a moral foundation on which nations could build arguments about justice. By confining evil to

the familiar geography of race and ethnicity, his words implied, we only excuse ourselves from the difficult choices of fairness and responsibility in a world where the right to exist remains contested—and it takes an Eichmann to devise a final solution. Evil was normalised, and its obviousness was rendered routine.

The concept of the normal, the state of normalcy, and the process of normalisation are central to understanding contemporary societies. Normalcy is a polymorphous concept, variously defined across different disciplines, making the notion essentially contested and contingent on semantic interpretations. Normalcy denotes a spe-

cific condition of being, closely linked to conformity to particular norms and codes of conduct, whereas normalisation entails the process of imposing, creating, restoring, maintaining, or accepting a specific order of normalcy. Evoking a strange yet multifaceted engagement with social reality, normalcy simultaneously describes and prescribes a particular state of social affairs.

This normalisation permeates the social fabric of a community, a country, and the entire world quietly. It is banal. Social disorders, inequalities, violence, and lack of opportunities become so commonplace that social engagement is entirely missing from it. Superstitions become routine. A language that berates, discriminates, and communalises human beings becomes regular. Other forms of oppression become everyday affairs that do not bother anyone.

The reason I am discussing this is that our labour, its indentured nature, and its exploitation become easier in a world where anything can be normalised, as historical precedent has shown. Poverty and wealth inequality become normal as well. After a controversial job reservation proposal for locals, the Karnataka government is currently planning to increase the daily working hours in the IT and ITES sectors to 14 hours, up from the current maximum of ten hours, which includes overtime. This move comes just days after the state faced a controversy over a jobs-for-locals policy. Coupled with the harsh reaction to the current union budget released by the NDA government, which serves as another blow to the populace, one might suggest that sociopolitical normalisation is beginning to lose its grip on us because people are resisting exploitation. However, my cynical mind tells me that all kinds of social movements die out in time;

fascism and capitalism eventually suppress all aspects of resistance. Although this self-inflicted scepticism is my cross to bear, time and again, I find resolve in my cynicism due to the daily injustices that occur.

Please do not misunderstand me; I am not taking the moral high ground. I am equally responsible for making these injustices normal. But when the state machinery suppresses a protest into non-existence, the language of oppression becomes regular. Society absorbs that oppression, and unfortunately, the fight for survival continues. We become so resigned to an exhausting system, that one person might begin to think that there is no point in fighting it because nothing can change. Diffusion of responsibility occurs and we might say, “Chalta hai” and move on. This gives rise to a language that normalises corruption and scoffs at people who might have the language to articulate its issues. It is a form of internal and external fragmentation that alienates us from others and others from us.

If one is to paraphrase Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, the limits in our language extend to the limits of understanding and navigating our world. We can see that in inter-religious marriages that’s termed as love jihad if the man is a Muslim, or homecoming if the man is a Hindu. Rahul Gandhi as Pappu, left-leaning intellectuals or critiques of the government as Urban Naxals or anti-nationals, what have you, are clear examples of a world that changes in our perception of it when certain words are ascribed to it. Although we tend to add new words to our vocabulary every year that help us navigate our day-to-day lives, it also stands true when inequality is on the rise and we seem to be okay with it because, *Kya karein? Chalta hai*. The languages we speak, colloquialisms included and the way we acquire those languages shapes how we see the world.

The 77-year-old husband of India’s richest simple woman, Sudha Murthy, Narayan Murthy tried normalising India’s work culture by wanting to change it for the young folks entering the workforce and asking them to put in 70 hours a week at work. Although that backfired into meme-filled explosion, the Karnataka government’s decision to increase the working hours further

While lavish weddings are common in India, the Ambani celebration starkly highlights the country’s growing wealth divide.

cemented the idea that working until you’re dead is a very normal thing to expect. Millennials and Gen-Z workers can’t imagine a sensible retirement for themselves because the conditions have changed and words associated with retirement sound like a distant dream.

The term ‘eat the rich’ has gained popularity among younger generations, yet often remains symbolic rather than actionable. The recent wedding of Anant Ambani, youngest son of Mukesh Ambani, and pharmaceutical heiress Radhika Merchant solidified billionaire extravagance, resembling a PR campaign flaunting the family’s immense wealth.

This wedding has drawn widespread attention not only because Mukesh Ambani is among the world’s wealthiest men but also due to the obscene display of wealth, with costs estimated to exceed 600 million USD. In a country where over 37% of the population lives below the poverty line, such displays seem profoundly immoral. If you did not know, India’s upper castes hold close to 90% of billionaire wealth, according to *Business Standard*.

If Al Jazeera’s reports are to be believed, the wedding’s cost represents 0.5% of Ambani’s wealth. While lavish weddings are common in India, the Ambani celebration starkly highlights the country’s growing wealth divide. According to a study by the World Inequality Lab, income inequality in India is now worse than during British colonial rule. The top 1% holds over 22% of the country’s income and 40% of its wealth, with Mukesh Ambani’s wealth alone accounting for around 3% of India’s GDP. Instead of enforcing a fairer tax structure, there is significant wealth accumulation by the private sector.

The Ambanis’ display of wealth amid such inequality shows their confidence that people will see it as mere entertainment, distracting from critical reflection on the causes of wealth disparity. This spectacle turns their wealth into an abstract concept, creating an illusion of existing beyond societal constraints. They cast themselves as stars in a movie featuring A-list celebrities as extras and international stars like Kim Kardashian and Beyonce in cameo roles, with the public as the unwitting audience.

The Ambani family have turned India into unwilling spectators of their grand spectacle. French theorist Guy Debord writes in *The Society of the Spectacle* that such spectacles demand “passive acceptance” through their appearance and monopoly on attention.

The act of consuming these images is relentless. From news magazines to paparazzi accounts, influencers flooding social media, and even mainstream news channels discussing this so-called once-in-a-lifetime event, we were constantly exposed to the spectacle normalising it or at least trying to.

According to *Business Standard*, since the 1980s, income and wealth inequality in India has surged, especially from the 2000s onwards. By 2022-23, the top 1% controlled over 40% of the nation’s wealth, up from 12.5% in 1980, and their share of pre-tax income rose to 22.6% from 7.3%. This sharp rise in inequality made India one of the most unequal countries globally. To be in the top 10% of earners, an annual income of 2.9 lakh INR is needed, while 20.7 lakh INR is required for the top 1%. Meanwhile, the median income is around 1 lakh INR, and the bottom 50% earns only 15% of the total national income. This disparity has been normalised for a long time and fighting it has also become a moot point. The normalization of inequality and its widespread acceptance is not merely a byproduct of economic policy but a deeply ingrained social process. The extravagant wedding of Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant epitomises this, serving as a glaring reminder of the vast chasm between the rich and the poor in India. While the spectacle of such opulence may captivate public attention, it also reinforces a narrative that normalises extreme wealth disparity. This normalization is reflected in the daily lives of ordinary citizens, who witness the lavish lifestyles of the ultra-rich while struggling to make ends meet. People will keep paying taxes and working without ever thinking of retiring just so they can manage their poverty better. When three UPSC aspirants lost their lives in the basement of Rau’s IAS Study Circle in Delhi, the incident sparked outrage in the country. At the risk of oversimplifying the issue however, people fail to realise that the



Rau IAS Coaching Centre Flooding: At the risk of oversimplifying the issue however, people fail to realise that the deaths of those aspirants were the result of bad roads and crumbling infrastructure, which we have normalised over the years lead to this. (Image from *The Economic Times*)

deaths of those aspirants were the result of bad roads and crumbling infrastructure, which we have normalised over the years lead to this. Rau’s IAS Study Circle charging upwards of 1.7 lakhs INR as fees does not reflect that extravagant amount in the infrastructure of the institution but we collectively, have normalised these ideas that we almost feel numb to it.

The concept of normalcy is not static; it evolves with societal changes and is heavily influenced by those in power. In India, the normalisation of wealth inequality is a testament to the successful imposition of a particular order of normalcy by the elite. This process is not new. Historically, power structures have always sought to maintain control by dictating what is considered normal and acceptable. To truly challenge the normalisation of inequality, society must engage in a conscious effort to redefine what is considered normal and acceptable. This involves questioning the narratives presented by those in power and advocating for a more equitable distribution of resources. It also requires a commitment to social justice and the recognition that every individual, regardless of their economic status, has the right to a fair and just existence. ■

Budget 2024: There Is Nothing New

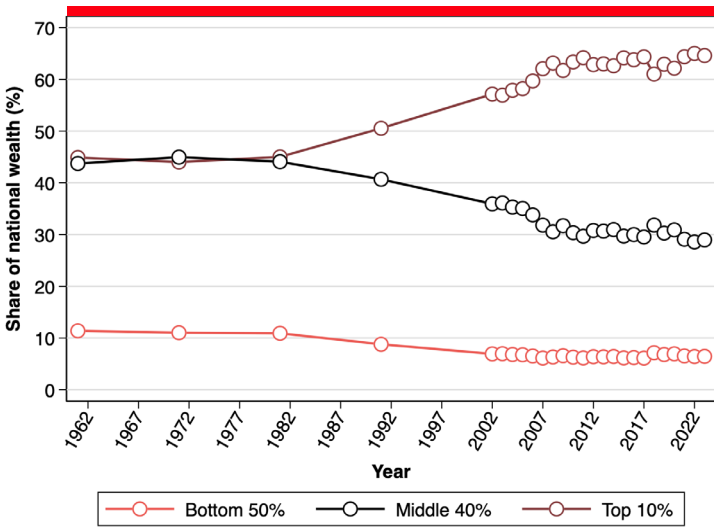
The progressive decline in the allocation for agriculture which can be noticed over the years and an increase for defence expenditures showcase a nationalistic sense of nation building.

Dr SANKAR VARMA



According to the World Inequality Database, the share of the top 1% in national income, at 22.7% in 2023, is higher than at any time over the last century. This increase in inequality has been accompanied by a rise in the ratio of the population facing absolute nutritional deprivation. India's quinquennial surveys on consumer expenditure show a significant rise between 2011–12 and 2017–18 in

the percentage of the population unable to access a minimum daily calorie norm per capita, which is 2,100 for urban and 2,200 for rural areas. India is believed to be one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, although growth rate figures are known to be highly exaggerated. However, it currently ranks 111 out of the 125 countries in the Global Hunger Index—a rank that has worsened over the last decade. The latest



Note: The figure presents the distribution of pre-tax per-adult net national income.

Long-run wealth inequality in India, 1961–2023

Source: *Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922–2023: the Rise of the Billionaire Raj*. Available from World Inequality Lab: https://wid.world/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/WorldInequalityLab_WP2024_O9_Income-and-Wealth-Inequality-in-India-1922-2023_Final.pdf

In an economy where more than 80% are informal workers, still trying to make the middle class happy without lending your tax procedures help the informal is a hit to the democratic functioning of any nation.

Periodic Labour Force Survey shows that the average regular monthly real wages, for the country as a whole, including both urban and rural areas, have fallen by as much as 20% between 2017–18 and 2022–23. In such a backdrop when inequality is widening and disparity more so across class and caste is increasing this budget of 2024 comes as nothing but another same budget that follows a similar strategy of the last few years which followed a neoliberal logic which at present is at a dead end and crisis (Patnaik, 2024).

MGNREGS, which has been kept at ₹86,000 crores still falls short as peasant crisis continue to loom large in India. And also, at the other end the standard deduction for salaried employees is proposed to be increased from ₹50,000 to ₹75,000 annually. The deduction on family pension for pensioners is proposed to be enhanced from ₹15,000 to ₹25,000. “This will provide relief to about four crore salaried individuals and pensioners,” Sitharaman said in her Budget speech. In an economy where more than 80% are informal workers who contribute to the bulk of labour workforce, still trying to make the middle class happy without lending your tax procedures help the informal is a hit to the democratic

functioning of any nation. Compared to the budget estimates for 2023–24 the budget estimates for 2024–25 for education shows a 7.8% increase which is a welcome. However, health virtually no increase was noticed, which means a fall relative to GDP in both sectors.

PM Awas Yojana Urban 2.0 opens a hope for lesser deprivation in urban and certain plans such as water management is interestingly a well thought off project. However, transit-oriented development need not function all the time as street vendors constitute the urban more than anybody else. Dwelling in a larger sense in urban is going to become more of a costlier affair is what is felt post analysing the budget. Also, the progressive decline in the allocation for agriculture which can be noticed over the years and an increase for defence expenditures showcase a new sense of nation building that is more nationalistic in its nature. Expenditure allocated for health and education falls much lower than defence. Also, a separate urban development plan could’ve been chartered especially considering the increasing urban deprivation. Therefore, there is nothing really new in this budget nor new in the new itself in this 21st century post-truth society! ■



Inside Manipur's Iconic Mother's Market

KAPIL ARAMBAM



Ima Keithel, also known as Mother's Market or Khwairamband Keithel, is an absolute gem in Imphal, Manipur. Imagine a bustling marketplace entirely run by women! That's right—this unique market has over 5,000 women traders who own and operate everything, making it the largest all-women market in Asia. The market has been around for centuries, with roots going back to the 16th century.

Walking through Ima Keithel is like diving into a kaleidoscope of colors, sounds, and aromas. You can find everything here, from vibrant handwoven textiles and intricate jewelry to fresh fruits, vegetables, and local delicacies. The market is divided into three main sections, each with its own charm—one area for traditional crafts, another for food, and yet another for household items.

It's not just a shopping destination; it's a cultural experience. The women here aren't just vendors; they're keepers of tradition, passing down skills and stories through generations. Plus, it's an empowering sight to see women running the show in such a significant way.

The market is a key part of the local economy, drawing in tourists and locals alike. If you ever find yourself in Imphal, visiting Ima Keithel is an absolute must! ■



Imphal's Ima Keithel has three main sections: the Leimarel Shidabi Ima, Emoinu Ima and the Phouoibi Ima (see above) which are quite visible from their pagoda-style roofs. It is estimated that, as of 2023, the annual turnover of the market was estimated to be between ₹40–50 crore. Another landmark in the city, Samu Makhong (The Elephant Statue)—depicting King Chingthangkomba (1748–1799) taming a wild elephant—is located right in front of the Leimarel Shidabi Ima Keithel.

Nonviolent Communication

MONICA FERNANDES

In order to address the conflict in society, the late Dr. Marshal Rosenberg, an American psychologist, wrote a book called *NonViolent Communication – A Language of Life*. Mature communication is a fundamental building block of society as it helps us to function effectively. Dr Rosenberg believed that human beings are at their core empathetic and compassionate. A mature, non-judgmental, non-violent reaction to hurtful situations is a choice we make and could be learnt at any time.

Conflict is a part of our daily lives. It could be because of irrational learnt beliefs and prejudices, negative emotions, misunderstandings, lack of concern for others. Today cut throat competition is lauded by the media and influencers. This constant quest for being first results in conflict when our needs are unmet. Living on the edge brings about unhappiness, destroys human relationships and results in various psychosomatic sicknesses. For instance a gossip is impinging on the rights of others by spreading canards. Some communicate through criticism, bullying, aggression and sarcasm.

Irrational culturally learnt beliefs and prejudices: “As the head of this family, my daughter must be married off early. A woman’s place is in the house. What does she need an education for?” Prejudice colours a person’s thinking and he will defend a lie. Negative emotions: A person feels worthless, perhaps due to mental and physical abuse during his/her early days. Consequently the person is aggressive in communicating with others. Misunderstandings: This arises when we imagine that the other person is hostile and out to hurt our feelings. In actual fact he or she may be habitually blunt. Lack of empathy and compassion: This is a cultural phe-

Follow DESC, that is : ‘D’ Describe the hurting behavior. ‘E’ Express your needs and feelings honestly without passing a judgment. ‘S’ Specify your grievance and make a request for behavior change. ‘C’ Mention consequences for behavior change.

nomenon arising out of the emphasis on achievements and acquiring wealth. The gossip is perhaps acting out of jealousy and in order to grab attention.

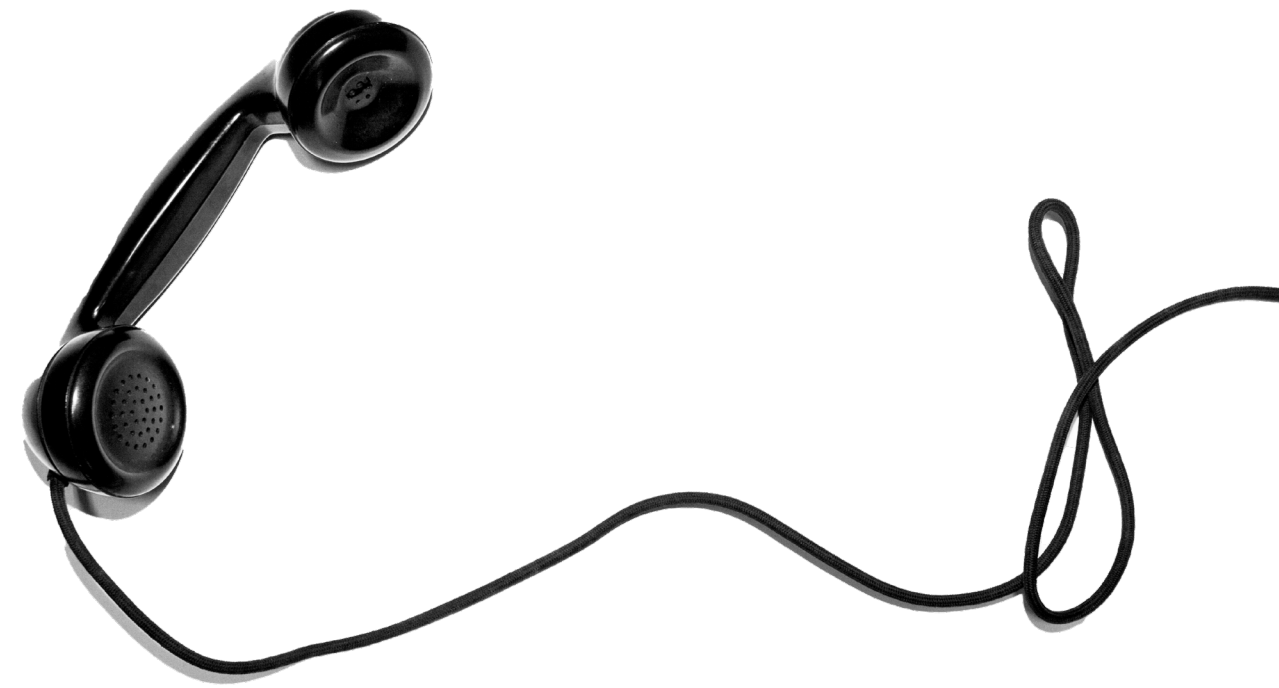
Immature responses to conflict: One such response is that of being submissive. This stems from feeling powerless and inferior. For instance, imagine a difficult boss who yells at everyone. His subordinates are submissive but their hatred for the boss only grows. The frustration, having no outlet, implodes within the staff and results in them falling ill. Similar situations are a wife facing a drunkard husband who beats her or a vicious mother-in-law. These venomous individuals draw the energy out of a person and are not open to reason. At times the only recourse is getting out of the situation and moving on.

Passive aggressive response: Women often resort to this method. When the wife doesn’t get the new micro wave she wanted, she resorts to giving her husband the cold shoulder treatment. Some people resort to sarcasm and interrupting the other person. They effectively block dialogue. This attitude only sours relationships.

Aggressive: This reaction is more common among men. In such a situation the individual has lost control of his emotions and explodes when he is contradicted. Continuous such behavior results in the destruction of relationships.

In all of the above three immature responses, the mind is not thinking logically and feelings predominate. Emotions are high and reasoning is low. There are always three sides to an argument – your side, my side and the right side.

Dr Rosenberg and other psychologists suggest various ways to cope with conflict situations. One such way is to wait to respond when tempers cool. “Instead of



getting at logger heads, let us discuss this contentious issue when we have cooled down and rationality prevails. Perhaps we could find a middle ground.”

Let us imagine a situation where we have been maligned by a gossip. Follow DESC, that is : ‘D’ Describe the hurting behavior. ‘E’ Express your needs and feelings honestly without passing a judgment. Say “I feel upset to hear the things you are saying about me.” Do not say, “You are a nasty person to gossip about me” as ‘nasty’ is judgmental. ‘S’ Specify your grievance and make a request for behavior change. ‘C’ Mention consequences for behavior change. “Please stop spreading these rumours that hurt my reputation as otherwise it will damage our friendship of years.”

Psychologists talk of two ways of communicating. The negative way is that of the fierce Pit-bull. This person is aggressive, defensive, justifies his point of view, perceives others as enemies and may harbor feelings of guilt, shame and anger. The ‘Labrador’ is understanding, assertive but not aggressive and is open to other points of view. In which category do we fall?

The first step towards changing our attitude is to introspect. It is said that the eyes are the gateway of our personality. The social media has created a culture of violence. What are the movies we watch, the

news and books we read? Repetitive exposure to violent images slowly but surely deadens our empathy towards us. We need to raise our levels of consciousness by changing what we watch.

Secondly it is never too late to unlearn and change our approach. It just takes a bit of effort on our part. Instead of yelling at her husband and kids, “I am lugged with all the work in this house like an unpaid servant because you do not help me”, Shaila could say, “I feel angry because I have to work so hard. I would appreciate if you could give me a helping hand. Let’s work out the sharing of chores.” Shaila is communicating anger at her situation and not blaming her family.

“You never listen to me! How many times must I tell you not to play the music so loud?” could be construed as Cyril criticising his son. Instead he could explain to his son that loud music is impinging on his requirement for peace after a hard day at work when he needs to unwind.

I conclude with two enlightening quotes from Dr Rosenberg to reflect upon. “ Every criticism, judgment, diagnosis, and expression of anger is the tragic expression of an unmet need. “Empathy is a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing. Instead of offering empathy, we often have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling. Empathy, however, calls upon us to empty our mind and listen to others with our whole being.” ■

Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

Reconciling with Fat Indian Weddings

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Humans who have a sense of justice, empathy for the other, respect for sexes and sexual orientation, etc. are all very recent developments.

I recall a parable told by a Palestinian wanderer over 2,000 years ago. The owner of a vineyard hires day-labourers at various times throughout the day. The ones hired at six o'clock in the morning put in a full day's work. Those hired at five o'clock put in only one hour of work. But the owner pays everyone a full day's wage (*a denarius*). He goes out of his way to make sure that everyone knows that all are paid the same in spite of the different number of hours worked. Not surprisingly, those hired first complain that they worked longer but earned no more money than those who

started late in the day. "But the owner replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?... Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?'"

The recent billion-dollar Ambani wedding was a global spectacle, an event that showcased India's mushrooming economic might. The wedding, held with unprecedented grandeur, became a subject of fascination and scrutiny, with the world watching in awe and disbelief at the staggering expenditure. While the exact figures for the total expenditure on the Ambani wedding remain shrouded in secrecy, estimates suggest that it was well into billions of rupees. It also highlighted the stark contrast between the lives of the ultra-rich and the vast majority of middle-class, lower middle-class, and underprivileged population. The event

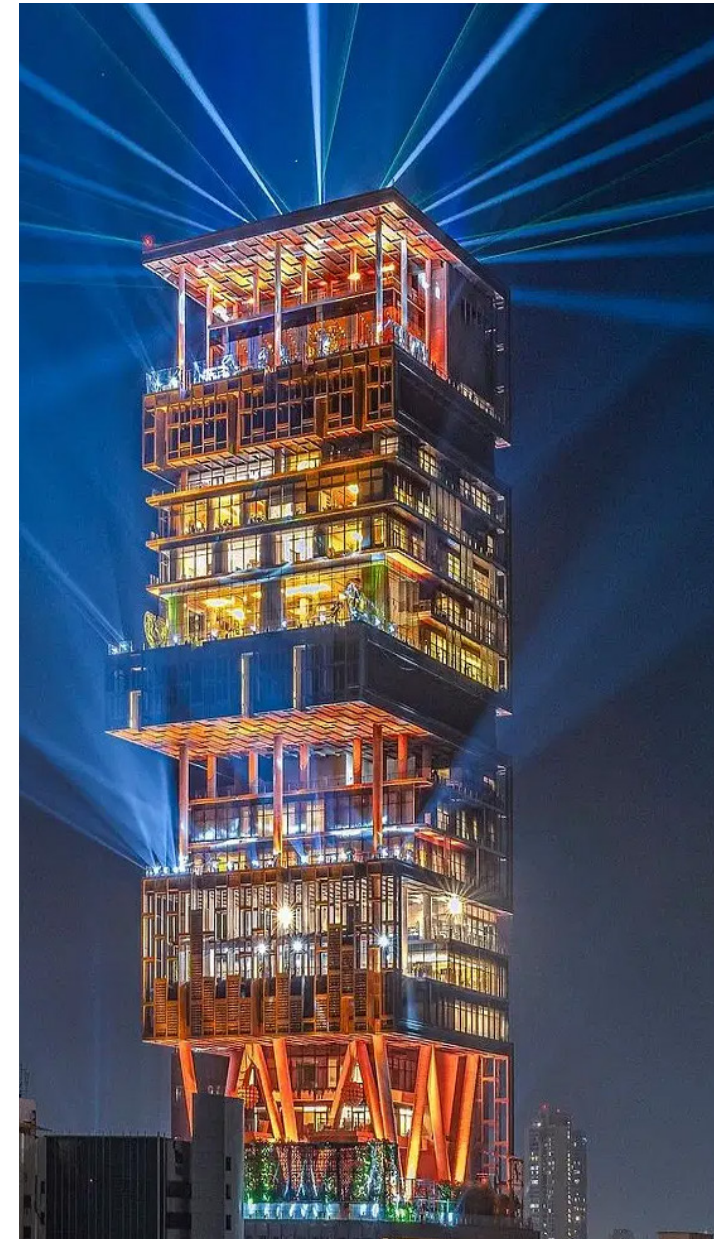
sparked a nationwide debate on the appropriate use of wealth, with some criticizing the extravagance while others defended it as a celebration of India's economic success. The Ambani family too may defend it with the age-old question, 'Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?'

The French philosopher and author, Foucault, boldly claimed, "Man is a recent invention". Michel Foucault in his *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* wrote, "It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form."

Of course, humans existed on this planet for over 70 million years, then how does human become a recent invention? Humans existed on this planet, by and large, engaging in eating and breeding, and being slaves to people in power. But men and women who are free and with their own opinions are a recent invention, maybe less than 200 years old. Humans who have a sense of justice, empathy for the other, respect for sexes and sexual orientation, etc. are all very recent developments. And the world is fortunate to have this development. Books and education have played a major role in creating modern men and women.

I would see the French Revolution in the second half of the 18th century with its motto, liberty, equality, fraternity, as one of the triggering points for the birth of the modern human. What was distinct and unique in it

Ambani's Mumbai mansion Antilia illuminated ahead of the wedding.
Image: Instagram/@ompsyram



was the idea of fraternity, one's concern and vigilance for the other. With Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), capitalism spread its roots, especially to now-independent America. The capitalist idea of modern men and women is far from the French idea of modern men and women. Capitalism upheld freedom and right to property, meaning, my freedom is my power and opportunity for wealth and private property. The ultra-rich, according to their convenience and benefit, hijack the idea of modernity, and by the jarring display of wealth pretend to be modern. The eyes and minds of people are so dazzled that, as George Orwell tells at the end of his novel, *Animal Farm*, they looked at pigs, then at men, again at pigs, again at men, and already it was impossible to say which was which. Modern men and women, which is a recent invention, are already in jeopardy.

In the land of Sri Buddha, whose greatest contribution to the Indian psyche was the concern for the other - compassion, Dr. BR Ambedkar and the makers of the Indian Constitution, seeing the large populace who are poor and left behind, and foreseeing the need for affirmative action, proposed justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity as the fundamental leading force of Indian politics and policies. Aggressive capitalism, as showcased in the jarring fat events like the wedding of Anant Ambani, is alienating, apathetic, and insensitive.

Coming back to the capitalistic question, am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Seeing what the master did with what rightfully belonged to him, we could categorically see the answer as 'NO'. He chose not to do just whatever, but he consistently, going beyond the norms and forces of capitalism, spent his money to make sure that every worker, till the very last one, had the means to have his food, and the capacity to provide for his household.

Bangalore Needs to Rain Water Harvest Through the Monsoon

Urban water stress can be a thing of the past if we all decide to Rain Water Harvest.

Dr MARIANNE FURTADO DE NAZARETH

It was just a few months ago that Bangalore was reeling under a deficiency of fresh water supplies and many areas of Bangalore had erratic supplies, making life miserable for those residents. It was crazy having to ration water supplies and all homes and buildings had to use water stop cocks to thin the water coming out of their taps, or be fined.

Rain water harvesting is the need of the hour on a war footing through the monsoon. All the borewells have been drained dry by people imagining that a bore well holds an infinite supply of water. It does not! Reading up on the net one can educate oneself on what a borewell is. The borewell system operates on the principle of accessing groundwater from underground aquifers or springs. A borewell is essentially a narrow, deep hole drilled into the earth's crust to reach these water-bearing layers. Water is then pumped up to the surface for various purposes. This water has been saved hundreds of years ago into cracks in the rocks, which we are accessing for our use.

Rain water harvesting is the need of the hour on a war footing through the monsoon.

So using common sense and logic, if we do not replenish that water, which we pump out of the borewell, it just goes dry. Then we humans in our ignorance, dig deeper and deeper to access new water sources. A borewell system is like a straw that reaches down to the water hidden beneath the ground. The term 'borewell' comes from 'bore,' meaning to drill or dig, and 'well,' indicating a collection of water as in what is commonly called a well.

So once the first borewell we dug in our farm in Hoskote dried up, we began to buy water tankers to water the trees. It was expensive and a big drain on our finances. So, we decided to dig a second borewell. A water diviner was called and he pointed out an underground 'river' as he called it, after using various tools to divine where we should dig. We were happy that we hit water, but it was three times the depth of the first bore well. That was crazy, but we were happy we got water.

But our joy was short-lived. The water dried up in a month and the well ran dry. We were back to buying water tankers, like

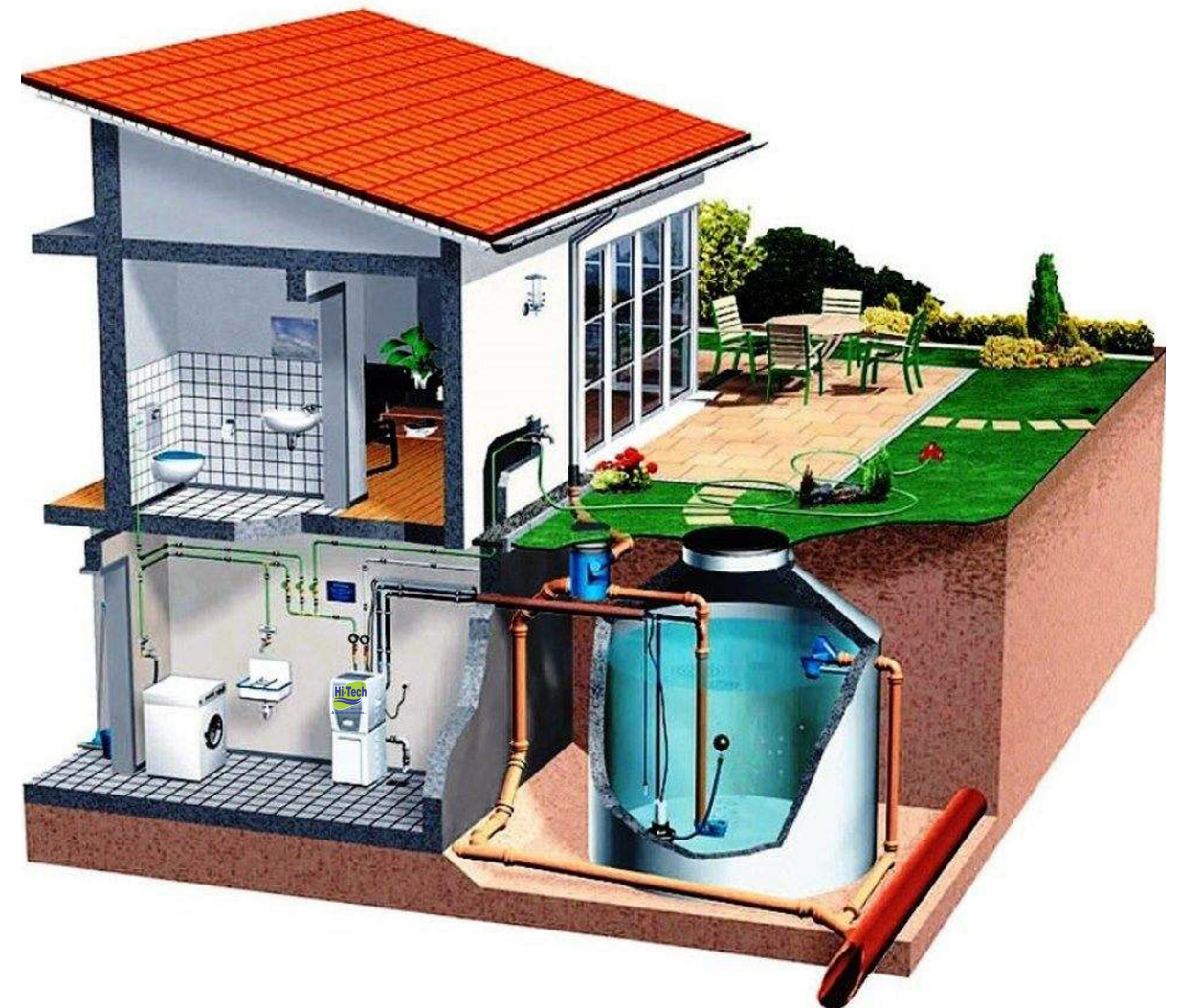


Image from Hi-Tech Sweet Water Technologies

we did in the past and since the water was rationed we had no option but to curtail our planting on the two acre property.

Then as a science and environment journalist, I was selected to attend a workshop by UNEP in Nairobi, where scientists were educating people in Africa on how to Rain Water Harvest, in order to get fresh water supplies. That's when I realised what a Jesuit priest – Fr Cecil Saldanha, had mentioned to us when I was a teenager, that rain water harvesting was important for us in Bangalore. He was a prophet before his time and I am sure he chuckles in heaven, at the desperate rain water harvesting methods we are using today, in Bangalore.

In our farm we use three different methods to RWH: (i) We have dug a massive 12–14 ft deep × 15 ft length pit in the path of the rain runoff. So we catch all the rainwater that flows in the path, which used to be wasted and flowed out onto the road. (ii) We have piped the entire roof of the farm house into a large tank which can be used whenever needed. The water is piped into the toilet and a basin where hands can be washed after a meal. (iii) And the third method is digging injection wells into which ready made cement concrete rings have been lowered holding the sides up but letting the water fill up and percolate into the ground aquifers. Needless to say the farm has plenty of water now all through the years with the harvesting we do with every rain. Urban water stress can be a thing of the past if we all decide to Rain Water Harvest. We just need the will to do it and save ourselves all the dry days we face in the summer months. ■

The Gift of Being Yourself

JOY PRAKASH OFM

I dentity is a challenge only for humans. A tulip or a rose knows exactly what it is. It is not tempted to false ways of being. Nor does it face complicated decisions in the process of becoming. So it is with animals and birds, rocks and trees, stars, amoebas, electrons and, indeed, all other beings. All give glory to God by being exactly what they are. For in being what God meant them to be, they are obeying Him. Humans, however, encounter a more challenging existence. We think. We consider options, we decide, we act, we doubt. And, yes, we play games!

During adolescence, our search for an identity takes front stage: we want to know how we look in new clothes, we want to be seen...; but then it stays on long after adolescence. Tragically we settle easily for pretence and a truly authentic self seems illusory. Our false selves are the identities we cultivate in order to function in society with a sense of pride and self-possession: our real selves are a deep religious mystery, known entirely only to God. As an elder I do not consider important the identities that the young endeavour to live up to.



Our false self is built on an inordinate attachment to an image of our self that we think makes us special.

it; the problem is in the inordinate investment that we place in this image and way of being. At the core of the false self is a desire to preserve an image of our self and a way of relating to the world. This is our personal style—how we think of ourselves and how we want others to see us and think of us. I may have an image of myself as one who is rational and careful. This will be at the core of my basic style of functioning. It is a trait that we prize most, which is actually part of what we are in toto. But the truth is always that this trait is simply one among many. We live a lie when we make it the sum total of our being. The peak form of this type of behaviour is manifested in arrogance!

Our false self is built on an inordinate attachment to an image of our self that we think makes us special. The twin-problem thus is this attachment and our lack of qualities that make us unique. The American Franciscan friar, Father Richard Rohr, stands out as a source of inspiration in terms of questioning ourselves as to whether we are prepared to be other than our image of our self. If not, we shall forever live in bondage to our false image.

Rohr says, the only hope for unmasking the falsity located at the core of our being is a radical encounter with truth. Nothing other than truth will suffice to dispel illusion. And only the Spirit of Truth is strong enough to dispel illusion and ultimately

For the sake of coping with life and achieving happiness, for meeting our basic needs for love, survival, power and control we do a lot of things. The problem is not that we can do certain things well, and have the necessary competence for

save us from the consequences of having listened to the serpent rather than God.

The man who sweats in his mask, whose role makes him itch with discomfort, who hates the division in himself, is already beginning to be free. Some people have to pay the psychiatrist to scratch them so as to feel uncomfortable with the mask.

The shallow “I” of individualism can be possessed, developed, cultivated, and pandered to: in the centre of all our strivings for gains and for satisfaction, whether material or spiritual. But the deep “I” of the spirit, of solitude and of love, cannot be “had”—possessed, developed, perfected. It can only be and act to the inner law which is not of man’s contriving but which comes from God. The false self must constantly manufacture itself. That is why it is always nervous and insecure. The true self only needs to uncover and discover itself anew. It is already there. Every single individual is a tabernacle of God devoid of degrees, opines Rohr who insists it is all equal, the only difference being the degree of conscious realization—the degree to which you draw life from that Source. You are the dwelling place of God. As such, your deepest DNA is Divine.

The true self is already there! You don’t have to invent yourself! When Rohr says, “You are Original”, one cannot but get goose bumps. The reason: the true self cannot get hurt. Indeed! The true YOU is unhurt. All your hurt comes from your false self. In all our conversations we tend to tell the other of how we have been hurt, and then the other speaks of their hurt.

When you are in your True Self, which is God-self, you don’t have to impress others by showing off your power. When you don’t have spiritual power, you need to create walls based on language and culture. ■

The author is deeply indebted to a retreat preached by Franciscan Father Richard Rohr OFM.

Paris Hosts Olympics Again After a Hundred Years

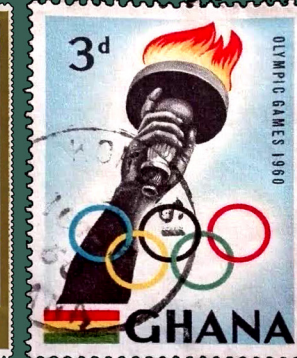
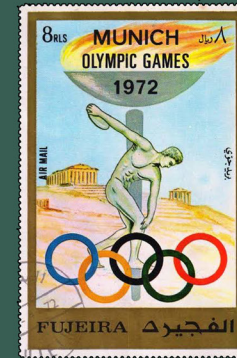
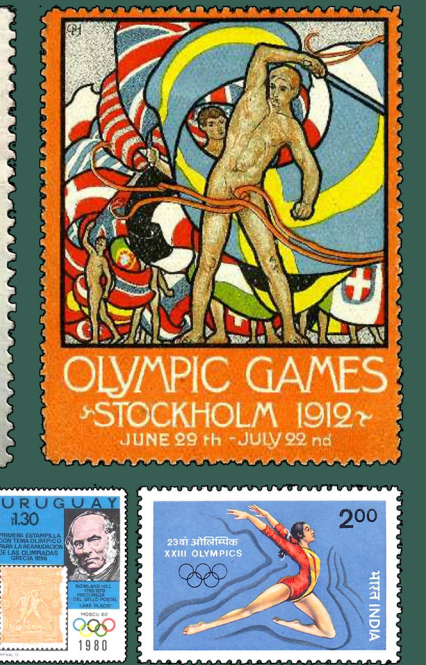
26 July – 11 August 2024

TOM JOHN OFM

Modern Olympics games is inspired by the sports events that took place in Greece from 776 BC to 393 AD. In 393 AD, the Roman Emperor Theodosius I banned the Olympic Games for religious reasons, claiming that they encouraged paganism.

The first Olympic Games of the modern era took place in Athens, in the country where the original Games took place in Antiquity, in April 1896. Paris hosted the second Games in 1900, and again in 1924. The Paris 1900 Olympic Games saw women compete for the first time.

Today Olympics is the world's foremost sports competition and include athletes of 206 countries from all over the world. A total of 40 sports are in the Paris Olympics, including 32 in the Summer Olympics and eight in the Winter Olympics. India have sent 117 athletes to Paris Olympics 2024 who will compete across 16 sports.



Chandigarh: A Gridded Legacy

The sectoral grid layouts of Chandigarh and Harappa complement each other in a planned settlement.

SAJI SALKALACHEN

The vivid colours of a rainbow appear mystical to most beholders, and so does the Rock Garden of Chandigarh. Widely regarded as a unique creation, the garden was envisioned as a dream kingdom and created entirely from the bounty of Nature by Nek Chand Saini, a PWD road inspector of the early 1900s. Nek Chand witnessed the trauma and pain following the partition of India in 1947 and sought solace in nature. As a child, he longed for a world where gods, humans, animals, and birds would live harmoniously with nature. Pursuing a childhood hobby of collecting natural stones, rocks, and waste materials, he ferried them on a bicycle to a secret gorge near the river, Ghaggar, where he deposited them thematically. Ceramic tiles, mosaic pieces, broken sanitary ware, damaged electrical sockets, broken bottles, and bangles were all part of his painstaking collection. It was an effort that seemed lacking in worth, but for Nek Chand, it formed part of a larger scheme that embraced his passion and love for natural treasures.

His commitment and resolve strengthened over the years. He continued to work on the secret project, almost single-handedly, until 1973, when the government discovered the stash. By then, he had converted the seemingly wasteful items into nearly 2000 sculptures and art forms with intricate designs and textures spread across 12 acres of land. Walled paths, artificial waterfalls, amphitheatres, courtyards, miniature villages, tableaux, and landscapes formed the integrated scheme. Public opinion led the government to soften its stance, appointing Nek Chand as a caretaker with labourers to continue the work more systematically. With sustained



(Top) The walled structure is entirely made from discarded electrical sockets and insulators.

(Above) The Le Corbusier Centre: The work place of the architect where the entire city was designed. The museum showcases drawings, pictures, and documents relating to the creation of Chandigarh. The Open Hand monument is a signature design of the architect and adopted by the Government of Chandigarh. It symbolises *the willingness to give and to receive, peace and prosperity, and the unity of mankind*.

momentum, the project expanded into 4 phases, which included a lovely doll museum, a large amphitheatre, and lifelike animals on pillars over 40 acres. The quality and immensity of the work of Nek Chand attracted more visitors, and the Indian Government recognized and awarded him the Padma Shri in 1984. The Rock Garden, stemming from a singular vision that transformed a wasteland into a uniquely spectacular landscape, is today a jewel in the crown of Chandigarh.

The Punjabi parathas are a toast to the partakers and invariably form a generous portion of the breakfast menu in these parts. The hot and freshly fried gobi (cauliflower) and green chilli flavours, laced with butter and served with thick yoghurt and savoury pickle as essential accompaniments, prime the senses of a gourmand. The glitzy Elante Mall, one of the most spacious in North India, is a landmark of luxury brands, while Shastri Market and the Sector 17 arcades offer great street finds (at unimaginably low prices) to compulsive shoppers. With winter around the corner, warm garments and jackets are easy pickings greatly facilitated by the large wholesale garment and apparel production centres nearby in Ludhiana. Chandigarh is home to many gardens and picnic spots – Rose Garden, Japanese Garden, Butterfly Park, Pinjore Garden, and Sukhna Lake – frequented by residents and tourists.

A 65-km road trip away in the suburbs lies Kasauli, a laid-back hill station in Himachal Pradesh northeast of Chandigarh and midway to Shimla. Elevated at 6000 feet, Kasauli has winding mountain roads with vertical cliffs on one side and deep valleys on the other. Traffic runs alongside the narrow Kalka-Shimla Mountain Train, but roads constantly need repair due to landslides and falling boulders, a natural response and nature's wrath at

encroachment. Kasauli predominantly serves as a communication and surveillance centre for the Indian Airforce due to its vantage and border location. Tourists are frisked for security before they are allowed to walk around the area sans cell phones and cameras. The Hanuman Temple at the highest peak is reachable by a series of vertical flight steps and pathways and offers breathtaking views of the snow-clad Himalayas in the north and the plains of Punjab to the west. Visitors should be wary of the monkeys, the sentinels of the post, who search for food in handbags and pockets; carrying a stick or stone is advisable to ward them off.

In 1950, the city-contracted architects invited the Swiss-born French painter-sculptor Le Corbusier to create a design for the new city of Chandigarh after the partition of India. He gladly accepted the assignment since it had the backing, goodwill, and confidence of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, then Indian Prime Minister. Le Corbusier arrived in India in 1952 and stayed until 1965, bringing many architectural designs, urbanism, and town planning techniques, which had proven endurance in urban development. With an able chief engineer as his ally, Le Corbusier quickly brought his vision to life. Chandigarh benefitted immensely during his 17-year tenure, during which prominent city buildings (and monuments) such as the high court, secretariat, and assembly area took shape. The conceptualization and demonstration of managing sunlight in buildings was a hallmark of his design and remains a topic in civil engineering curricula even today. His tenure culminated in a Master Plan of Chandigarh, reinstating that modern life demands a new design and plan for both houses and cities. The sectoral development and road design concepts created almost six decades ago have withstood the test of time and the challenges of modern urban development. The roads and sectoral network ease traffic and preserve order; the layout of the roundabouts and the overlap of service lanes and sidewalks facilitate traffic flow with minimal pedestrian intervention. The Le Corbusier Centre, which displays and exhibits the life and works of the architect and his team, is one of the earliest buildings constructed in Chandigarh and holds historic value. In the northwestern region of the subcontinent, Historians term Chandigarh as a part of the Indus Valley Civilization, particularly the 5000-year-old Harappan heritage found at several sites. The sectoral grid layouts of Chandigarh and Harappa complement each other in a planned settlement. Tourists and future generations can acquaint themselves with this cultural heritage, and Chandigarh richly deserves its capital status for the states of Punjab and Haryana.

At the end of our visit, the timeless heritage and order of urbanism lingered in our minds. In a fitting tribute to its visionaries, this city continues to regard order and clutter-free traffic as key social elements for the unequivocal need for cohabitation. The experience left us wondering if modern technologies would yield clues for adaptive solutions in this respect. That would allow other cities to perpetuate proven models for urban planning, an exception and rare phenomenon for an Indian City built entirely to plan in a grid-like fashion. ■

A VIOLENT HALF-CENTURY

ROMIL UDAYAKUMAR TNV

In Tamil cinema today, reaching the milestone of 50 films is a significant achievement that reflects an actor's enduring talent, versatility, and influence. Vijay Sethupathi and Dhanush, two of the most acclaimed actors in Indian cinema, have each celebrated this landmark with distinct films that showcase their unique abilities and artistic sensibilities. Vijay Sethupathi's 50th film, *Maharaja*, and Dhanush's 50th film, *Rayan*, offer a fascinating contrast in terms of themes, performances, and directorial approaches. This comparative analysis explores these aspects to understand how each actor has marked this important milestone in their career.



Maharaja Vijay Sethupathi's 50th Film

Plot and Themes: *Maharaja*, directed by Nithilan Swaminathan, is a grand, multifaceted drama that explores themes of power, politics, and personal redemption. Sethupathi plays a charismatic and morally complex character entangled in a web of political and personal conflicts. The film presents a narrative rich in political intrigue, societal commentary, and emotional depth, highlighting Sethupathi's ability to handle layered, intense roles.

Performance and Characterisation: In *Maharaja*, Sethupathi delivers a powerful performance that underscores his ability to portray complex characters. His role demands a deep emotional range and nuanced portrayal, from moments of intense drama to subtle introspection. Sethupathi's expertise in embodying multifaceted characters is evident as he navigates the intricacies of his role with remarkable depth and authenticity.

Directorial Vision: Nithilan Swaminathan's direction in *Maharaja* is characterised by its ambitious scope and intricate storytelling. Jeyakodi, known for his ability to craft detailed narratives,



Maharaja is a grand, multifaceted drama that explores themes of power, politics, and personal redemption.

weaves a story that challenges the audience with its moral and political dilemmas. The film's visual style, complemented by a strong script, enhances Sethupathi's performance, creating an immersive experience that engages viewers both intellectually and emotionally.



Rayan Dhanush's 50th Film

Plot and Themes: Dhanush's 50th film, *Rayan*, directed by the man himself, marks a departure from conventional narratives with its exploration of human resilience, societal issues, and personal transformation. The film features Dhanush

in a role that blends elements of drama and social commentary, focusing on the protagonist's journey through adversity and self-discovery. *Rayan* combines contemporary issues with personal struggles, offering a rich tapestry of themes and emotions.

Performance and Characterisation: Dhanush's performance in *Rayan* showcases his versatility and depth as an actor. His portrayal of a character grappling with significant societal and personal challenges highlights his ability to bring intense, relatable emotions to the screen. Dhanush's ability to shift between different emotional states and maintain a strong, engaging

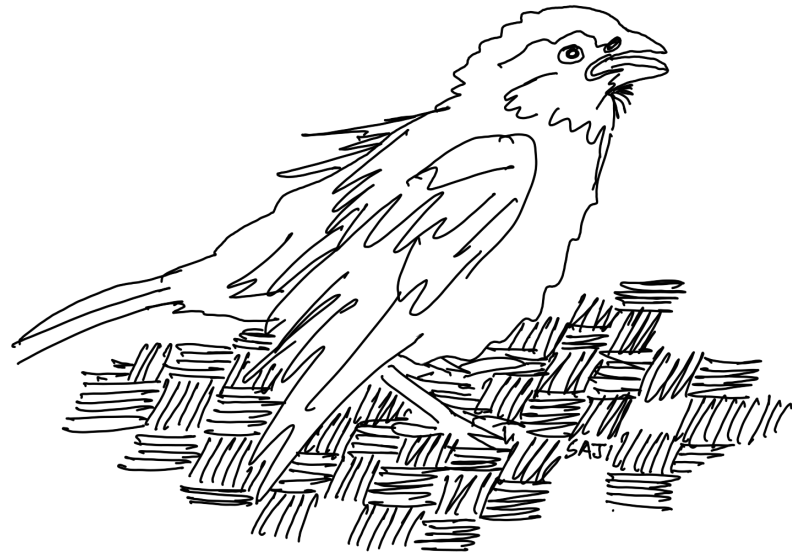
Character Complexity: Both *Maharaja* and *Rayan* feature protagonists with significant depth and complexity. Sethupathi's character in *Maharaja* is a multifaceted figure caught in vendetta and personal turmoil, requiring a portrayal rich in emotional and psychological nuance. In contrast, Dhanush's role in *Rayan* focuses on personal transformation and resilience in the face of societal challenges. Both actors deliver performances that showcase their ability to handle intricate characters, but their approaches highlight different aspects of their versatility.

Themes and Narratives: *Maharaja* and *Rayan* approach their narratives from different angles. *Maharaja* explores themes of power, morality, and redemption within a political and dramatic framework. The film's narrative structure allows for an exploration of complex political and personal dynamics.

On the other hand, *Rayan* delves into societal issues and personal growth, presenting a story that combines drama with social commentary. The thematic divergence between the two films underscores the actors' ability to tackle diverse subject matter and genres.

Directorial Influence: The direction in both films plays a crucial role in shaping the actors' performances. Nithilan Swaminathan's direction in *Maharaja* is noted for its ambitious scope and intricate narrative, which complements Sethupathi's performance by providing a rich backdrop for his character's development. Dhanush's direction in *Rayan* is characterized by its innovative storytelling and visual style, enhancing Dhanush's portrayal with a dynamic and engaging approach. Both directors bring their unique sensibilities to their films, influencing the overall impact and reception of the performances.

Impact and Legacy: The 50th films of both Vijay Sethupathi and Dhanush represent significant milestones in their careers. *Maharaja* solidifies Sethupathi's reputation for handling complex, intense roles with nuance and authenticity, while *Rayan* highlights Dhanush's ability to tackle socially relevant themes and deliver emotionally resonant performances. Each film contributes to the actors' legacies by showcasing their growth and versatility, affirming their status as leading figures in contemporary Indian cinema. They reach mark 50 with an all out entertaining violent action film for both the stars. ■



One Sparrow, Many Stories

Each refracts the world into unique perspectives through their lived experiences. NAFISA SHABBIR BAHERANWALA explores the subtle nuances, the contrasting hues, and the evading details in diverse perspectives through the life of a sparrow.

What I Saw

The first time I saw the sparrow, it was on a sultry day in May while I was chatting with my youngest sister on the net on Skype. I heard a loud thud in the balcony. Looking through the glass doors, I saw a small sparrow collide against the glass door separating my bedroom from the balcony. It then fell on the ground. My sister sent me four to five messages before it registered on me that I was concentrating on the sparrow, and it was only when she asked what was distracting me so much that I realized I had been totally absorbed in the events occurring in my balcony than on my sister's comments. I told her to excuse me for a few minutes while I investigated what was happening outside the room, before I resumed my conversation with her.

Looking at the sparrow, I saw that it was a tiny creature and it had sustained an injury – some feathers were standing out at an awkward angle, and it was hopping from one potted plant to another. Taking pity on its plight, I filled a small bowl with water, and a plate with some bread crumbs and placed it in a strategic place, hoping that the little one would understand that this was nourishment being provided for its sustenance. However, not only did the sparrow ignore the bounty, but the food soon attracted pigeons, and flies, and much later ants too, and I had to finally pick it up with a feeling of hopelessness and despair, and leave Nature to run its course. Frustrated with my failure to tempt the sparrow, I turned to the computer, and resumed the threads of the conversation I had been having, though time and again, I kept getting distracted, and in between typing my messages and chatting, I kept stealing looks at the sparrow.

Over the next few days, in fact for a week or more, at whichever time of the day, I went to the balcony to water my plants, I would see the sparrow run for shelter to hide behind some leaves, hoping that it was invisible to me. It would stand

still till I returned back to the room, when it would resume its hopping, either on the ground or by taking small leaps on the branches and stems.

By that time I had discovered that the sparrow was just a wee baby and its mother had also arrived to take care of it. This was because I heard more chirping everyday. This was the sound of its mother arriving with food for its baby, which it would tenderly feed in its mouth, and then fly away, to return again and again. As I looked at this tender picture, I was transported back in time to my teenage years. We used to have lunch in the kitchen, and I would always take care to scatter a few grains of cooked rice [if not available, uncooked] to feed the sparrows that would fly in chirping excitedly whenever we assembled for lunch during weekends or the holiday months, before partaking of the food myself. On those weekdays that I was in school, my mother used to feed the sparrows. Lost in my reverie about the past, I felt a strong bond with the present – in both places, there had been sparrows, and there had been my family; and the bonding was as strong as ever. The only difference was that the sparrows of my childhood were eager to share in my simple fare; and this baby sparrow was too timid, and too small to grab its share—it still waited for its mother to feed it.

In the weekly supplement that came with the local paper, I had come across an article about a sparrow being rescued on the highway, and being turned over to the SPCA. I was in a dilemma from day one – should I call the local SPCA and report the sparrow, and separate it from its mother? Was it fair on my part to interfere with Nature, and with a living species? What was the exact procedure that I should follow? Meanwhile, since the sparrow was hopping around, I deduced that if it was able to hop around, it should be better, and therefore it was best to leave it to its fate. My dithering stopped on the day I woke up to the sound of silence. No more sound of baby chirps to distract me. I thought that the sparrow had regained

its strength as it had been hopping further down the balcony day by day, and finally gained the will power and the strength to fly off. I wished it happiness wherever it was.

Little did I know what had happened till I had my servant clean the balcony a couple of weeks later. He came to me with a weebegone face, carrying the body of a tiny little sparrow in the trash holder. Oblivious to its fate, I had not realized that the little one had fallen from its precarious perch on one of the pots and fallen down. How long did the mother search for it? How long did it suffer before its death? These questions consumed me with grief and regret at my passivity....

Life goes on, the wheel of time keeps spinning and the sparrow is now a memory...I hope that relieved of its misery, it is now in the Garden of Eden happily warbling its merry songs in the presence of its Maker.

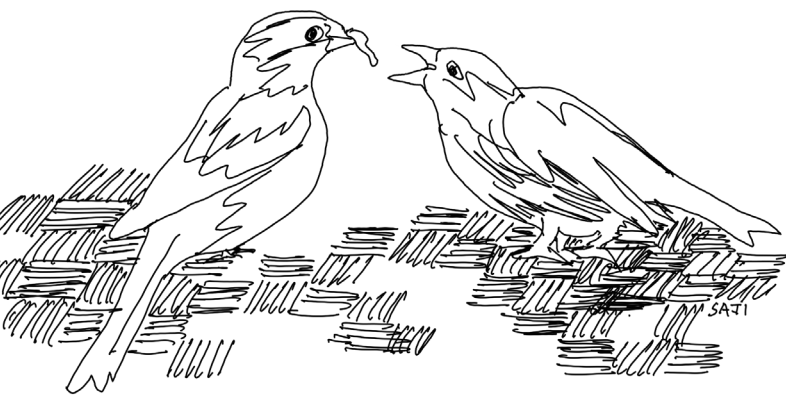
What The Sparrow Lived Though

I have heard it said that there is lots of kindness in this world. People are sometimes more kind to their pets than their own family members. If this is true, then I must admit that I have been unlucky to face only ignorance, indifference and sorrow.

I opened my eyes one glorious morning to see Mother sparrow looking with concern at me. As soon as she saw me awake, she chirped her happiness, and flew away to get me some worms. Under her loving care, I flourished, and the day soon came when she decided, literally, that it was time to spread my wings, and fly high....

Thump, crack, ouch. Waves of pain rolled through me, and I had trouble deciding where I was and what had happened... Oh no! What I had thought to be an entry into a cool living room, turned out to be a spotlessly clean glass door that had completely foxed me. I dashed against the glass and took a nasty fall. Crack. Oh, oh, oh, what was that now? I tried to fly back to the safety of my mother's comforting arms, but alas... my right wing had bent and horror of horrors. I could no longer fly. Sobbing [chirping] with consternation, I hopped left and right, trying to search for my mother. Where was she? Why had she deserted me in my hour of need? My eyes were too full of tears; my head spinning too much; and my ears roaring with so much pain that I just did not hear the plaintive cries of my mother's wailing grief. Finally, when my first sobs subsided I felt a soft touch on my lips—it was my mother offering me the juiciest worm she had been able to get to tempt me to forget my tears. I seized it with greed, for by now, I was feeling weak with hunger, and almost reeling on my tiny toes. After feeding me, she patted me and soothed me, and then flew away to get me my next meal.

So it continued for the next few days. Early morning, my mother would be at hand to give me my breakfast with the first rays of sun throwing its bright beams across the world. Soon, she would bring my second meal, then the third, and so on through the day, till it was dusk, and time for my beauty sleep.



However, my heart was not in my food – it was in the far away horizon beckoning me with whispers of the wind about the beautiful sights that awaited me out there in the big, big, world. The songs that I would hear when I was taking lazy dives in the wind; the smells that I would experience when I ventured out further, and further... the smile of happiness on my parents faces when they realized I could hold my own in this big, big world, and could fend for myself; the tasty juicy big fat worms that I would dig out and eat by myself.... These and other such thoughts would pass through me, and I would feel waves of longing over leading an excited, happy life like my siblings, drinking in the sights and sounds that they took with such serene indifference whilst I longed for them with such sad intensity, and my spirits would droop, and so would my head and body... The food would not go down easily – I would choke thinking about what could have been, what sights I might have been seeing, what pranks I and my siblings might have been playing, and I would long for a black-out from my present misery.

Till one fine day, I made the ultimate decision and decided that this sort of a frustrated, dejected life was just not worth living.... I would rather give up my life, than keep pining forever. When my mother came in search for me, I did not crawl out from behind the safety of the flowerpot I was hiding.... I let her trills of anticipated happiness at coming to meet me slowly turn to desperate squeaks at being unable to locate me, and then wails of sorrow at visualizing the worst case scenario—that I had been

She did not give up hope so easily—everyday, for the next few days, she would make surprise visits to the balcony, and give questioning cheeps to me requesting me to answer her, though by now, I was too weak to respond, and could barely hear her.

pounced upon, and been eaten up by a predator. However, she did not give up hope so easily—everyday, for the next few days, she would make surprise visits to the balcony, and give questioning cheeps to me requesting me to answer her, though by now, I was too weak to respond, and could barely hear her, as if it was a sound from another world altogether. My head was literally in the clouds, wool gathering, and visualizing the sights and sounds that I would get to see in my next life, my next incarnation...

Till my last day on this vicious, unfriendly earth arrived.... I got up feeling a funny mixture of sorrow and hope. Sorrow that I would be leaving my mother, my only source of tenderness in this cruel world; and happiness that I would let my soul soon soar to the sky, beyond the limits of the universe and the mind.

And so I breathed my last, and departed from this world with my mother's cries ringing still in my ears.

What Its Mother Experienced

The birth of a child is not just the fulfillment of a desire to carry forward one's name, it is also a wonderful feeling to know that you are blessed enough to join in the creation of a living, breathing, entity that you can love, cherish and bestow all your affection on; and a squeak of joy when your child recognizes you is such music to the ears, which only a parent, especially a mother can really identify with.

My first born came into the world one bright and sunny morning, when it broke out from the egg shell that was covering it, and which I had been protecting with such trepidation from the rooks and crows on the branches of the neighboring trees, and gave a tentative, inquisitive, hesitant chirp to herald her arrival in this world. My look of concern turned into an outpouring of merry happiness, I chirped with delight till my partner got weary of my non-stop chirping, and gave a gentle nudge requesting me to stop attracting the attention of my inquisitive neighbors. I flew to the nearby public gardens to get a juicy worm for my little one.

It gobbled up the same greedily enough, and I flew back to get another, then another.

And so the days passed, and the day soon arrived when I decided that it was time for my child to spread its wings, and fly high, and discover the wonders of the beautiful world it had been born in.

I had decided that for its first flight, its destination should be a nearby place; and so it was that the balcony of the building that was closest in line with the branch of the tree we were perched on beckoned me forward, as the best place to land, since there were a few potted plants in that balcony on which my young one could hop and skip about.

Little did I know about the impending tragedy that was in store for me till it struck... my little one was so dazed by the new sights and sounds it encountered, and so fascinated by the beauties around, that it failed to register where it was headed till it dashed against the door of the balcony it was heading for, and spinning out of control, fell to the ground with a loud thump.

I was in tears; I wailed my grief and kept crying out to my child asking it to reply whether it was ok, and trying my best to see what injury it had sustained... when I finally realized that it had sprained its wings after that nasty bump, I was relieved that it was alive, and depressed that it had hurt itself so terribly on its very first solo flight. After I saw that it had quietened down a little, and was no longer gulping its sobs in sorrow and fright, I went to get it some food, which it gulped down hungrily.

Life became a round of flights from the tree to the balcony, and the balcony to the tree...my little one was gradually regaining its inquisitiveness and hopping around from one plant to another soon enough.

Gradually, however, I realized that the impact of the strike had not just been physical; the injury that my child had incurred had a psychological aspect to it too... slowly, I could feel that my child was feeling frustrated and left out at not being able to take in all the sights and sounds and new sensations that its new life would have offered it if it had been a healthy, normal, child; and I could feel it withdrawing into itself, and

becoming an introvert though it was always extremely glad to see me when I carried across its daily nourishment to feed it....

Till the dreaded day that my child disappeared from sight, I lived in the constant hope that my prodding would have an effect on my baby, and it would recover both in body and in spirit. One day, when I got it a small grain of rice that I had found nearby, it did not respond to my chirping, and come gladly to greet and meet me. My chirping brought out the owner of the house in the balcony: she looked out to see what the frantic chirping was about, but my child refused to reply to my pleas to respond. I kept circling around the balcony the whole day, without any success. Next day, dawn found me hovering around the balcony, and the whole day was spent in a fruitless search for my little love, who may have disappeared out of sight, but was never out of my mind even for a second. I kept on my search for a number of days, till drooping with sorrow and frustration; I finally realized that my little one had been snatched away from me forever, and ever... ■

Little did I know about the impending tragedy that was in store for me till it struck...



LET IT BE

RIAN MARK PINTO
14 years old

Let it be as it is,
May it be hers or his.
Do not change it,
As it does not rightly fit.

Things are important as they are,
Even if it feels from senses they are far.
All the things should not be made different,
Not always do they require an amendment.

Changes are good,
But they are not a should.
They are sometimes necessary,
And sometimes a worry.

They can be good or bad,
Can also make people sad.
So let it be as it is,
May it be that or this.

Together let's leave things without change,
Even though they might sound strange.
Let us keep in mind always that old is gold,
If you change it unnecessarily for free it's
been sold.

Some things might sound foolish,
And some as bad as rotten fish.
But there is a reason why it is like that,
Most of them for good and against bad.

By this, a legacy will remain,
Younger ones our ideas will gain.
Ancestral tricks will be passed down,
All works will be easy and without a frown.



LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR AT THE SERVICE OF THE ELDERLY POOR!



In 1839 in cold winter, Jeanne Jugan met and found God in the face of a poor elderly woman, blind and paralysed. She gave her bed to the poor woman, opened her home and her heart to her. Since then, many elderly people were welcomed by Jeanne Jugan and her daughters who are called "Little Sisters of the Poor" present all over the world in 32 countries. Jeanne said, "It is so good to be poor, to have nothing and to count on God for everything." She literally lived her saying and taught her daughters to trust in God's divine Providence.

**"Whatever you do to the least of my brothers you do unto me."
Would you like to take care of Jesus in the elderly poor?**



**If you hear the call to follow Jesus in the footsteps of Saint Jeanne Jugan,
COME AND SEE!**

Little Sisters of the Poor

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