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together

a national family magazine



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together

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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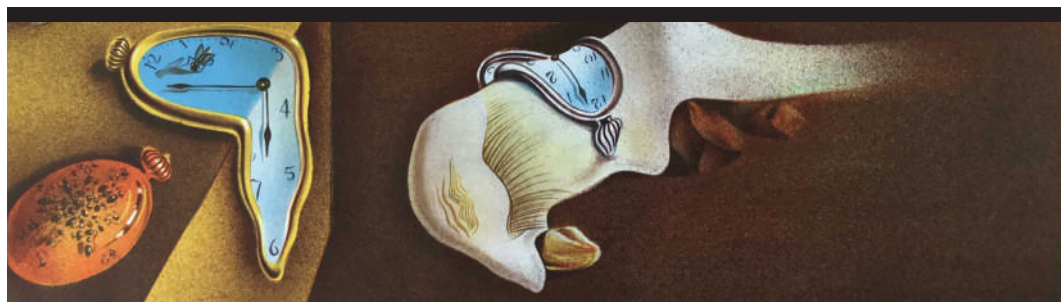
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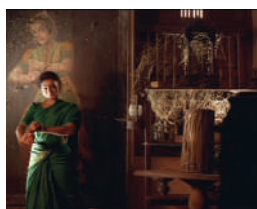


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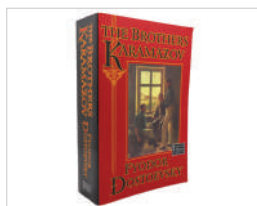


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Making and Unmaking of Public Memory

Is our public memory melting like the timepieces in Salvador Dalí's painting? Are we forgetting the causes we once collectively thought fitting to be engaged with?

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

From the fullness of memory the mouth speaks, the hands act, and people conduct themselves. If we need to know the reasons why persons speak what they speak, do what they do, or live as they live, try decoding their memories. We live from the past more than we live towards the future. Memories are vital for every species, more so for humans. We take in new information and store it in our brains, maintaining it and recalling it depending on our needs. This faculty of storing, retaining and reusing experiences and skills are informally known as memory. Everything we do or think depends on our memory, which is active every moment, receiving new information from our senses, updating existing knowledge using focus and attention, retrieving the stored experiences and skills, and planning for future activities that have not occurred yet.

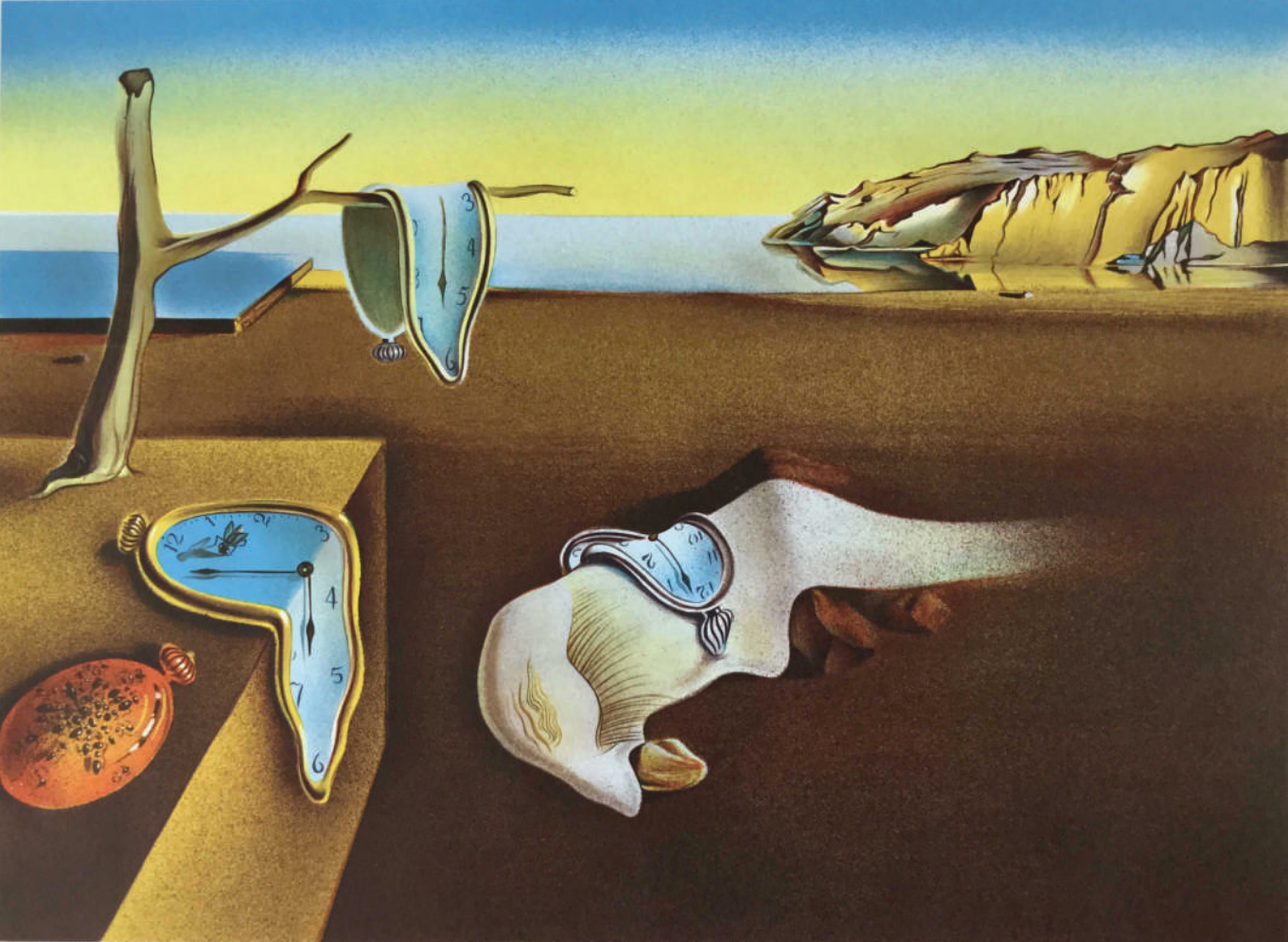
Public Memory

Public memory is the recollections and circulation of the past that happens among members of a given society. According to Matthew Houdek and Kendall R. Phillips, public memory entails the acts and processes through which memories move beyond the remembering individual and become shared, passed on, and in

this way, form a broader network through which people gather a sense of collectivity. We are a public, one might say, to the extent that we share a set of memories. While shared memories are rarely uniform, uncontroversial, or uncontested, the fact that certain individuals, events, places, and legacies are shared through this network of memory helps to craft us as a collective.

Public Memory Is a Constructed Reality

As an Indian I remember the wars India fought, how my country, its heroes, and people were always on the good side of good and evil; just side of justice and injustice; superior side of superior and inferior. I remember how we won our independence. I possibly remember by whom and when my country made progress. Today perhaps new narratives are competing to replace and swap memories of the above. As a Christian I remember how Israel was an elected people by God, how they repeatedly traversed to their freedom and redemption, when other nations even had to lose battles and let go lands. But curiously, all these happened hundreds and thousands of years ago; and I am not even 50 years old. Collective memory is a constructed reality. The repeatedly heard oral traditions; repeatedly read scriptures and literatures, and



Salvador Dalí's **The Persistence of Memory**, 1931

repeatedly reminded happening of the past construct our memory. These recollections are often not the perfect records of the past; rather they are what a community remembers; the way it remembers, the way it frames; and what it chooses to forget.

French sociologist Pierre Nora, known for his work on French identity and memory, contends that the nation-state employs the science of history to construct an official account that provides it legitimacy as the locus of identity and authority. As Nora writes in relation to the French experience: "History and memory were being brought together in such a way as to become another point of reference for the nation: in this sense, national history was becoming the French memory." Public Memory is one way in which the past is shared with

future generations, and most social collectives put energy into crafting and preserving an official history.

One Who Controls Public Memory Controls the Future

By establishing a new memory by repeating the forgotten past we can get a people to act differently. New narratives are created by altered and infused memories. One who controls the collective memory controls the future.

Humans have the impulse to mark memories in ways that will endure beyond their lifetime. Cave drawings, burial mounds, pyramids, and statues were all crafted at least in part with the hope that some aspect of their experiences—lives, deaths, battles, triumphs—would be recalled by others who did not experience them

directly. Various processes by which individual experience is crafted into things that can be shared, celebrated and repeated, become part of a shared, or public memory.

Today, in the era of post truth; statues, buildings, new names for existing places and institutions, etc. are fashioned to establish new narratives. New narratives propagated with statues, buildings, new names for existing places and institutions will give rise to new public memory. People move towards a future created by their collective public memory.

George Orwell in his book on totalitarian world of *Nineteen Eighty Four*, throws light on the 'the Party' which exerts absolute control in its ruthless and relentless measures to erase even the most private memories of individuals. The book proclaims loudly and clearly, "who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past." In the words of Walter Benjamin, "George Orwell understood the intrinsic connection between memory and emancipation on the one hand, and forgetting and enslavement on the other."

The Price of Melting Public Memory

Governments and establishments bank on the short public memory of people. We as a people zealously witness people on the street protesting, farmers committing suicide, violence against women, caste and religious atrocities, politicians/leaders with corruption and abuse charges, tall promises before elections. We speak about it passionately; some of us even take part in the protest. These are things happening in our country and elsewhere almost regularly. But the perpetrators capitalise on the short memory of people. Governments and establishments know how to lie low till everything dies out,

how to distract people with irrelevant stuff, how to disengage people by false propaganda and false sentiments. Most often people behave as perpetrators expect: people forget, people stop talking, people stop writing. People with the burdens of their daily life; with the need to make ends meet, get back to their routine life. And it's only matter of time, they happen again: people are protesting on the street again, farmers

continue to commit suicide, violence and abuses resurface again and tall promises are again heard through the loud speakers. The cycle repeats...

Surrealist artist Salvador Dalí's *Persistence of Memory* (1931) has three melting clocks. Dalí saw time melting away like a piece of runny Camembert cheese in the sun. Historically, Dalí was caught between two World Wars. He was stupefied with the theory of relativity developed by

Einstein in the beginning of the 20th century. The only clock that is not melting is the closed one; but that is being eaten by ants, which is a symbol of death and decay in Dalí's paintings.

The *Persistence of Memory* examines the subconscious world and attempts to delve into the depths of human psychology. By altering and manipulating concrete objects, Dalí allows the viewer to escape reality. Perhaps truth and reality are more disturbing than distorted reality and time. Three of the clocks in the painting may symbolize the past, present and future, which are all subjective and relative; the fourth clock, which lies face-down and undistorted, may symbolise objective time; but it is devoured by insects. Its deterioration is meant to reflect Dalí's views on the collapse of human notions of a fixed universal order. Doesn't this century old painting speak a million words about the era we are living through?

The naked, broken branch in the painting, which art experts identify as an olive tree in the context of other Dalí artworks, represent the death of ancient wisdom, as well as the passing

The Persistence of Memory examines the subconscious world and attempts to delve into the depths of human psychology. By altering and manipulating concrete objects, Dalí allows the viewer to escape reality.

of peace; reflecting strongly the political climate between the two World Wars as well as the unrest leading to the Spanish Civil War in Dalí's native country; and definitely a foreshadowing of parts of Europe getting under the ugly grip of fascist Nazi regime.

Is our public memory melting like the timepieces in Salvador Dalí's painting? Are we forgetting the causes we once collectively thought fitting to be engaged with? Are we forgetting the poor? We had thousands of Indians falling outside the ambit of National Register of Citizens (NRC). I know of a person, who has served an entire life in the Indian Air Force, and his family still not found a place in NRC. The distress and trauma of thousands continue. We had the Citizenship Amendment Act protests after the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was enacted by the Government of India on 12 December 2019. We had the arrest of Fr. Stan Swami and many others. We have the ongoing farmers protest.

At the heart of every issue we have a group of people who are vulnerable, people who prone to fall if not handled with care and compassion. The question that *The Print* asked in one of their opinion pieces recently should make us Indians uncomfortable, "Where is it cheaper to buy rice? At a village market in India, a country where 377 million people live below the poverty line? Or on the trading screens of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange?" Are we leaving the 377 and more million poor of India to the perils of the profit economy and the corporates?

It's Time to Remember People

You owe your success to those who ran with you, do not forget them. The great truth of human lives is that there are people living with you. In the case of our country it is even more pronounced and unique. We live with people vertically and laterally diverse. We

live with people who are lost and adrift in the intersections of society. A boy once asked Mahatma Gandhi, "what is democracy?" Democracy is, Gandhiji replied, in your winning the race and success, be mindful that there were others who ran with you. No one wins a race by running alone. In short Gandhiji was saying, do not forget the other. The tragedy is that we remember the other as market for our goods and services; we remember the other as vote banks.

Memory as Rhetoric

Who speaks louder, who wields power is remembered. Though it hurts us to hear; and we may question the validity of international surveys, analysis and ratings of our country, what others tell about us should ring a wake up call to introspect. Recently, in its annual report on global political rights and liberties, US-based non-profit Freedom House downgraded India from a free democracy to a "partially free democracy". A Sweden-based V-Dem Institute said India had become

an "electoral autocracy". India now has slipped to 53rd position in the latest Democracy Index published by The Economist Intelligence Unit, and it called India as a "flawed democracy".

Indian authorities sidelined the statistics and ratings; it was not even allowed to be discussed in the Upper House. Of course, democracy may have a multi-faceted definition, and thus someone looking at our democracy may be subjective and predisposed. But are we ready to remember the democracy the founding fathers of this great nation envisaged and put into documents. Are we ready to look at our country through its prism? There is a disconnect. There is definitely a loss of public memory.

We Need a 'Memory Boom'

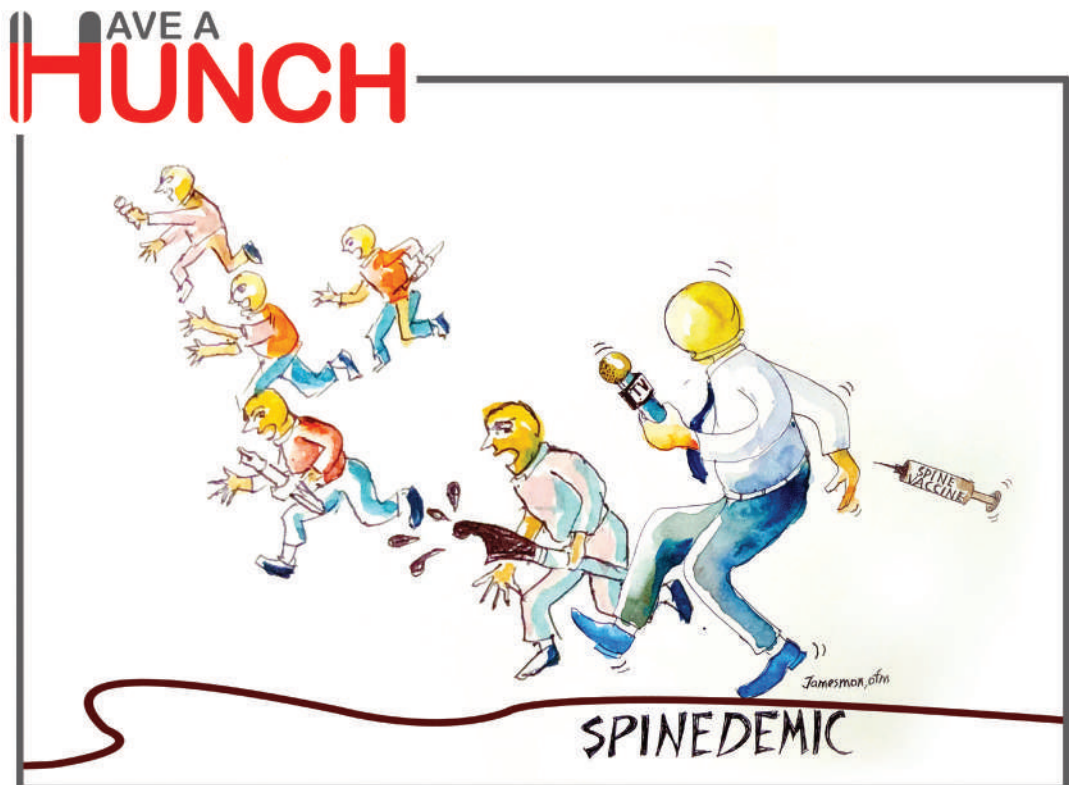
Over the last few decades, the prominence and significance of memory has risen within

The concern with memory is best understood in relation to its increasing fragility. On the one side, memory is becoming a weak commodity; and on the other side, there is a real fear of social amnesia.

conscious societies and nations. The concern with memory is best understood in relation to its increasing fragility. On the one side, memory is becoming a weak commodity; and on the other side, there is a real fear of social amnesia or forgetfulness. According to critics such as Pierre Nora, “we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.” There is a proliferation of false memories. In his book, in one of the chapters, titled *Memory Boom, Memory Wars and Memory Crises* by Silke Arnold-de Simine says, Memory is so precious; but has to be distinguished from inauthentic fakes: false, mistaken or implanted memories, prosthetic, second-hand, mediated or virtual memories, trivial or nostalgic memories, or simply memory scenarios whose veracity or relationship to the real is dubious. It is much more difficult to define what makes a memory genuine.

Since the 1980s people in America and in Europe have shown interest and made efforts to go back to memory sites, museums, exhibitions, and other artifacts of memory. This phenomenon is being referred to as the ‘memory boom’.

The survivors of World War I have faded from the scene, but their children, now elderly, have brought to young people stories about families and about what happened to them in wartime. These stories become interwoven with narratives about World War II, many of which were linked to the Holocaust. Bringing to surface these memories of both world wars, and of the Holocaust perhaps have made humanity aware of the futility of exclusivity, xenophobia and war; they have made people more tolerable, peace loving, and inclusive. India needs a memory boom. Bringing to memory our past famines, independence struggles, partition and wars.



The Price of Public Amnesia

As the public goes into collective amnesia, ably helped by those who control the daily narrative, we become silent enablers of the advancing fascist era. There is actually no neutral stand in extraordinary times like these.

JAMESMON PC OFM

Lest, We Forget...

They are still there at the border, protesting on our behalf. The public narrative is being cleverly managed by the compromised media, so that we forget at the end even the reason for the farmers' protest in the first place. This public amnesia is a curse that we are collectively responsible for. This weakness of the nature of public memory is gleefully celebrated by most of the mainstream media. This is the undoing of a great nation called India.

Clowning in Delhi

There is a book called *Clowning in Rome*, by Henry J. M. Nouwen. In an introductory note to the book, he writes: "The clowns are not the center of events. They appear between the great acts, fumble and fall and make us smile again after the tensions created by the heroes we came to admire. The clowns don't have it together—they are awkward, out of balance and left-handed, but—they are on our side. The clowns remind us with a tear and a smile that we are sharing the same human weakness. The longer I was

in Rome, the more I enjoyed the clowns, those peripheral people who by their humble, saintly lives evoke a smile and awaken hope, even in a city terrorized by kidnapping and street violence." Our farmers somehow resemble the clowns. They almost look like fighting a losing war. For many they are stupid, wasting their time. Who would consider holding a protest days and months long, in freezing cold and rain and even losing lives in the process. But that is exactly what they are doing. They are holding a mirror to us who partake in the produce of their labour and they like clowns have been going through the grind of farming. Their battle has been long and many have committed suicide for reasons we are familiar with.

Naming and Shaming

One of the deterrents that is used traditionally against criminals world over is the act of naming and shaming. But imagine the opposite! What happens when this act is used against the victim rather than the criminal. It could be done by a particular regime or law enforcement. You may



remember what the Lucknow administration chose to do in the recent past to remove forthwith the controversial 'name and shame' hoardings of those arrested during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. So the law enforcement that has the responsibility to protect the well being and rights of the victim rather than the criminal, now act on orders from above, who themselves are the creators and perpetrators of such monstrous laws like the CAA and ultimately the victims get named and shamed on hoardings in public spaces.

The farmers from the very beginning have been victims of naming and shaming. Instead of supporting their stand and struggle, some of the central ministers and media have been trying to discredit them, calling them names like terrorists, Pakistanis, Khalistanis, *andolanjeevi* and so on and so forth. The victims get named and shamed here while the foreign media from elsewhere have been reporting and supporting the farmers' movement and to a great extent, helping their cause. It is anyone's guess why the Indian media behave so!

Civil liberties in India have been sliding downward as found by the Freedom House in its report Democracy under Siege. This fall from grace is quite a serious thing when we look at it against the parameters of what creates a fascist regime.

Farmers' Wisdom

We are a generation that lacks the ability to wait. And our new found lifestyle is catered to by instant remedies and gratification. But nature and those who are close to nature have a different wisdom to offer. The present leader of the farmers' protest Rakesh Tikait reveals this wisdom in his own way! "A farmer sows seeds at the beginning of a farming season with a great deal of hope and then waits for several months before s/he can harvest. A full-grown crop sometimes gets destroyed because of a natural disaster at the time of harvest. However, the farmer does not lose hope. S/he will sow seeds again for the next crop" They are ready for a long haul. While we get impatient and seek for an instant or fast catharsis, life has a different pace and tempo. The farmers' approach to life and their farming wisdom is seen in the way they organise and sustain their protest. Their efforts are being highly lauded by international communities. Though they are not protesting, sitting on our shoulders or in our compound, we get irritated and restless because we want fast resolution. That is our problem, and not theirs!

Reading the Signs of the Time

Going with the signs, it looks like an Indian version of the fourth Reich is looming large ominously on the Indian horizon. After the defeat of the third Reich dreamed by Nazi leader Adolf Hitler of (un)happy memory, many nations have been toying with the prospect of a fourth Reich, where an aggressive, totalitarian, Nazi like establishment is envisioned. We have just witnessed the collapse of such a dream in the recent fall of the Trump administration. It was

a misfired adventure, greatly because the media there has some spine.

The Indian situation is different. If we observe closely, there is something cooking and it is becoming more and more obvious that an Indian fourth Reich is a possibility.

The BBC had recently reported that India's status as a democratic secular nation has taken a beating. India's long standing claims as a free country has changed to "partly free", according to an annual report on global political rights and liberties.

Since 2014 the freedom indicators have been on a constant decline. Civil liberties in India have been sliding downward as found by the Freedom House in its report Democracy under Siege. This fall from grace is quite a serious thing when we look at it against the parameters of what creates a fascist regime. Politics mixed with religion and hate is nothing but a cauldron of ethnic warfare and genocide! The venomous "we-they" orientation had proved devastating in the past and we are witnessing it today on a daily basis.

Silent Enablers

As the public goes to collective amnesia, ably helped by those who control the daily narrative, we become silent enablers of the advancing fascist era. There is actually no neutral stand in extraordinary times like these. One is either against it or for it. History and future generations will judge us for our stand. The former PM Sri. Manmohan Singh once said, "History will be kinder to me than the contemporary media." Will history find us on the right side in retrospect? Will it be kind to us too?

India as a Democracy in Times of Election

When the vast majority of the people have no ownership or control on the wealth of the country there cannot be economic democracy.

ALEX TUSCANO

India is the largest democracy in the world. The world is convinced that democracy has endured in India from the time it became independent. It was only during Indira Gandhi's rule that Indian went through a period of emergency when the constitution was held in suspension. But soon the elections were held and Indira Gandhi and the congress party were punished for their misdeeds.

There have been regular elections to the parliament, to the state assemblies and even to the local bodies, like municipalities and panchayats. It wouldn't be wrong to say that every year there are elections in India. Now we are witnessing the elections in four states and in one union territory. How do we view these elections, do they uphold our democracy?

Democracy becomes the central issue of governance of our nation. We are proud that from day one of independence India has adopted universal suffrage that gave right to all adult member of the country to vote and elect a government of his or her wish. But this electoral democracy has not delivered much.

"Even the universal franchise where we give one vote to one person in a country like India it poses a problem. Our way of life has been communitarian. Either we behave as a caste group or behave as a religious group or we behave as linguistic groups in certain situation. Our way of life is never based on individualism. The entire idea of democracy in the west is based

on individual rights – my conscience, my belief, my faith, and my family. Whereas in India, it is "I as a Hindu", "I as a Muslim", "I as a Brahmin", "I as a Lingayat", "I as a Dalits", "I as a Thakur"! Therefore, democracy with universal franchise on the one hand and communitarian way of life and outlook on the other hand is the situation in India. We tend to vote as Brahmins, for example, and not as individuals. Those who vote as individuals are a tiny minority. This leads the political parties to field candidates on the basis of castes and communities" (*Communalism and Democratic Perspective*, Asgar Ali Engineer.)

The essence of democracy does not consist in the casting of vote every five years. In a nation whose population is illiterate or mere literate, the people have been hoodwinked by the powerful and have defeated the idea of democratic election process. Our governments have never represented the will of the majority of the people. In majority elections not more than 50% of the people cast their votes. And in any election the parties that get barely 30% of votes out of the 50% of the voters, form governments.

The Normative Core of Ideal Politics

The normative core of ideal politics is to create a democratic ethos among both the voters as well as the political leaders. Voting has to be made one of the most responsible acts that has to be necessarily exercised in crafting the ethos of democracy. It is needless to emphasise that the

future of democracy depends on the creation of such ethos; ethos that is defined in terms of the degree to which the internalisation of democratic values takes place among the citizens. Such ethos defends these values by taking a moral initiative without waiting for the lead from political leaders. Citizens as voters should campaign among themselves for the candidates who can genuinely promise to strengthen such an ethos.

Politics with an idealist orientation is necessary to build the society around the distributive principle of justice and values of equality and dignity. Making political judgements and decisions commensurate with such ideal, thus, becomes a moral responsibility of both the voters and the political parties. In fact, parties do have higher levels of responsibility to convert these ideals not only into an agenda for

election campaigns but also to involve voters into the collective project of creating a democratic ethos, not just periodically but almost on an everyday basis. Voters as citizens, however, have their own responsibility to impress upon the leaders to integrate this agenda into their politics of electoral mobilisation. Citizens have fundamental responsibility to seize the deliberative opportunity to not only create and stay with the democratic ethos but also exert necessary moral pressure simultaneously on the political leaders to take equal responsibility to create and participate in the creation of democratic ethos. Did it not happen in the recently held presidential elections in the United States?

Democracy and Ownership

Further, when the vast majority of the people have no ownership or control on the wealth of the country there cannot be economic democracy. The poor are offered doles and freebees to make them vote for a particular party or



What we have been witnessing in the last seven years is outright denial of even rudimentary democracy.

candidate. The government keeps the poor on doles. Beyond this there is nothing they benefit from a democratic state. "Parties that invest too much not in persuasion but in creating illusion (abhas) among the people cannot treat illusion as a resource that is permanently available for garnering electoral support." (EPW, Vol LVI 8) For the rest, the governments implement the agenda of the industrialists and the corporate houses. The governments take away the land of the people and promise them 100 days guarantee of work. They are promised employment in place of their land. But this employment does not last long. When the rate of profit of the industrialist employers begins to fall, they fire the workers from employment. This leaves the vast majority of the people out from the development agenda of the state and therefore out of the democratic system.

The Panchayati Raj system and decentralisation of power would hold the hope for the nation to be truly democratic. But the problem is that whatever power the 73rd constitutional amendment has given to the panchayats is often usurped by the state level assemblies and bureaucracy.

When the citizens are kept in jail without trials or bails because they have expressed views opposite to the views of the ruling dispensation; or because they fight for the human rights and the rights of the Adivasis and Dalits are branded as urban Naxals and are put behind bars, in such situation where do we go to look for real democracy?

"The government has become more intolerant. We see this particularly in the context of farmers' protest. This is so, because these farmers represent a solidarity of conscientious activists across caste, class and gender backgrounds. This solidarity is rooted in a democratic assertion against incarceration of these activists, as well as challenges the state and party nexus aimed at dismantling the farmers' protest. The government, through its action, is inverting the essence

of a free and democratic society, where freedom from fear is now a fear of freedom." (EPW, Vol LVI No 8, Feb 20, 2021)

In a capitalist society the state comes in conflict with democracy. The state stands behind the corporates and big business at the expense of the rights and livelihood of the working masses. In the case of farmers' protest, the government is not willing to budge on the farm laws that clearly go against the long-term interests of the farmers. These people experience the state as repressive. "The state's passive response to violence and, some time, active involvement in such violence against women leads women to characterise the state as patriarchal. For Dalit women it is not only patriarchal but also Brahminical. For Adivasis, the state is both coercive and callous. For minorities, the state, led by the right-wing party is necessarily communal." (EPW, January 2, 2021)

What we have been witnessing in the last seven years is outright denial of even rudimentary democracy. Use of money and muscle power during elections has become common. As elections are approaching directing enforcement directorate, income tax raids, anti corruption squads against the leaders of the opposition parties have become common. These are used against the prominent leaders of the opposition parties to make them leave their parties and join the ruling dispensation so that the opposition is rendered powerless.

Sometime elections are rendered meaningless. By using money power and threats the elected majority is turned into minority and the elected governments are thrown into dustbins.

The idea of the Indian nation revolves around three major principles: secularism, socialism and democracy. These three are like three lions of our national emblem or three colours of our national flag. They are not stand-alone elements. Democracy is meaningless without secularism and socialism. Similarly, the two principles are hocus-pocus without democracy.

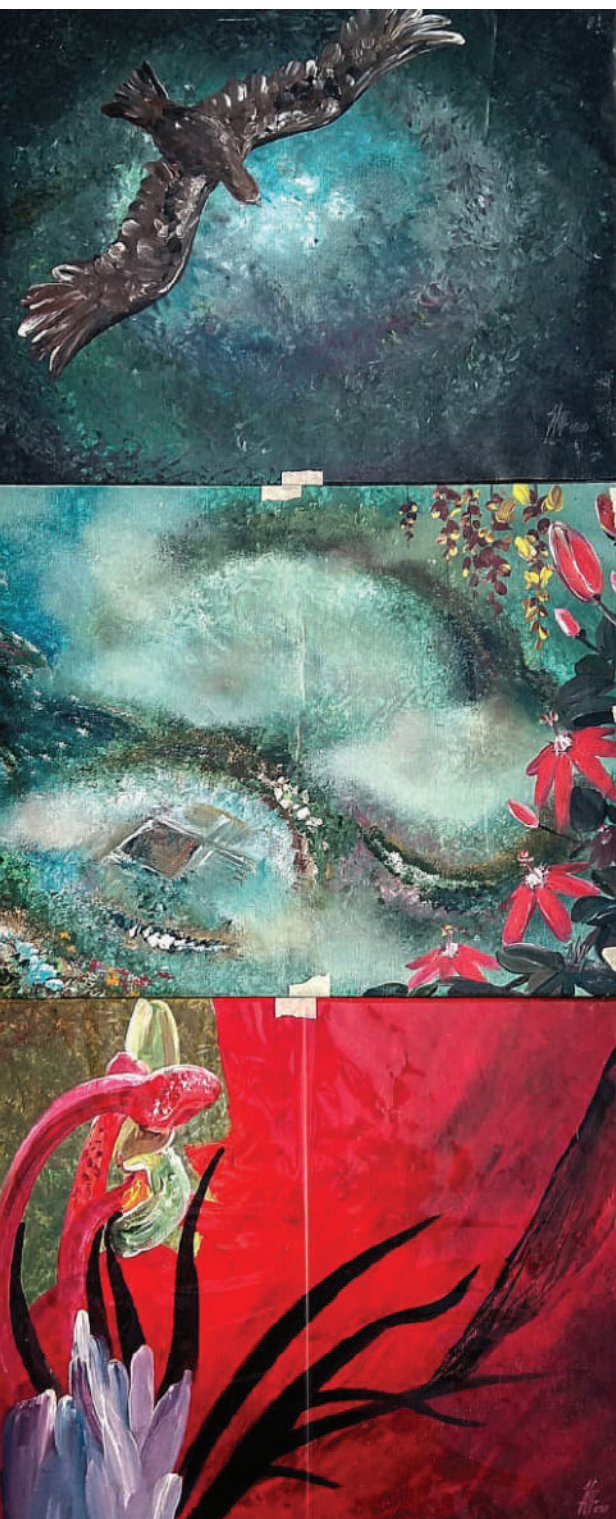
Deep Look

The situation is worsened in the current post-truth political environment where public consciousness is submerged under the influx of nationalist flamboyance and pageantry – lies rule the public. The Public today cries out, “tell us lies, we’re here ready to believe”.

JOSEPH JOYSON PALLIPARAMBIL OFM CAP

“The Eternal Silence of these infinite crowds frightens me”, wrote Nirad C Chauduri, about the dumbness of the English public of yesterdays (*A Passage to England*). Ironically, we in India now, are witnessing to an all permeating dumbness and numbness among the common folks in an all time strange, dire and complex political fiasco. The situation seems to be grave as we tend to ponder further over the farmers’ struggle, which eventually drew international attention albeit covert operations of the Indian rulers to bury the facts as deep as possible. “It’s none of my business until it burns my skin” - sort of blunt and blind attitude of contemporary Indian public and a consequent silence served great prop to the thuggish misbehavior of the rulers now-a-days.

Current government in their second successive tenure, turned further bullish with their thumping victory to crown and throne. No wonder, they rolled out poorly-cooked-out policies one after another leaving NO room for the people even to ponder let alone protest. It is in this context, we may place the plight of farmers who were compelled from within to take on to months-long protest leaving behind their otherwise routine farming activities. Three draconian farm laws enjoined



by the rulers challenging the very existence of the already tottering farm sector are in fact, an eventual consequence of a growing numbness creeping into the common Indian life. It became so order-of-the-day-kind that when we come to know “a farmer in the neighbourhood committed suicide”, is no more a surprise. What I, as a practicing painter, perceive here is all about our lacking right perception on right time. Right wing nationalists have paved way for a prevalent “don’t-look-at-it” attitude among the common people. It is here, I fall back to the vibrant experience at the CARP Art Camp held at a hill-top hamlet, Capuchin Shanthiniketan, Nadukani, Idukki, in the first week of December 2020. The Camp was titled Mud-n-Mind, giving enough room for discussions and deliberations on the farmers’ struggle. CARP convened the Art Camp in solidarity with the never-before-sort-of-strike. A favourable air brought about notable creative art expressions. On my part, a profound awareness within me that the public in general is prey to lacking sensitivity, urged me create a triptych which I titled, “Deep Look”. One may need silence to have a deep look. Nevertheless, silence does not follow the deep look, rather, a response by way of an expression with words or actions, follows. In my case, it was a creative expression, a painting. As for me, it was an expression of “breaking my silence” – deep look talking from within as loud as possible.

The triptych, Deep Look, is now in possession of the International Capuchin Historical Museum, Rome, Italy

The triptych done with three canvas boards, depict three visuals created in acrylic colours. Interestingly, there is a common thread of cognition passing through all the three.

I would like to believe that the people of India who lived through and were directly involved in the independence struggle had the temper to look deep into realities. There used to be an almost strong public attitude to be concerned for erstwhile socio-economic-political developments. In the post-independence scenario, one may observe that the aforementioned positive temper in due course declined as communal and right wing forces gained a growing tenacity. The situation is worsened in the current post-truth political environment where public consciousness is submerged under the influx of nationalist flamboyance and pageantry – lies rule the public. The Public today cries out, “tell us lies, we’re here ready to believe”. Going superfluous overruled deep looks to identify “what is what”.

Even as an average reasoning is quite fitting to grasp the vice behind the three malevolent farm laws, current Indian public mind which is under the sway of a fake nationalist psyche, sidelined the profundity of the genuine cause behind the farmers’ plight conveniently. Consequently, a lie-bound ruling party and their close circles gained upper hand over compelling issues and made the public consciousness miss the point of “deep look” into the core facts

related to the farmers’ agitation. The process of my creative response to this state of affairs giving expression to my meditation, angst and emotions, resulted in my painting, “Deep Look”.

The triptych done with three canvas boards, depict three visuals created in acrylic colours. Interestingly, there is a common thread of cognition passing through all the three. Even as each canvas serves as an individual composition, the set of three forms a single unit as far as the thematic expression is concerned. Orientation of all the three canvases is panoramic individually. The first or topmost canvas portrays a common brown kite with a full stretch of wing span up in the sky, tinted in a blend of bluish grey, directs the admirer’s look to the reality of earth deep down there. The second or middle composition is of an aerial view of the hilly terrain fringed with a twisted vine of Red Passion Flower. A third and the bottom-piece of the triptych is in fact, a painterly rendition of a macro-close-up of the red passion flower – hence, the “deep look”. The deep look gives a very close view with a factual perception of intricate details.

“How great are your works!
How deep are your designs!
The foolish man cannot know this
And the fool cannot understand” (Psalm 92).

Development Conversations

Developing strength and managing weaknesses should be the central theme of any development journey.

KENNETH LEAN



Development is an ever ringing buzz word in organisational circles. Most times though this buzz focuses on weakness as that need to be developed. But how does one lead to understand what a real development need is? Recently, I was asked to coach a Vice President of a large MNC; while briefing me, the HR Business Partner handed over a list of areas the leader needed change. These changes were a bit different from the manager's list, and the coachee had a totally different set of development needs for himself; whose agenda deems fit in this situation and who is right? How would one decode these briefs?

Most of us who are in the leadership development space come across these situations quite often. Some managers and HR Business Partners arrive at conclusions based on their perceptions, unfortunately. Ideally and most practically, it is crucially important to use scientifically proven diagnostics and interviews with concurrence to the coachee's self-awareness. When one is equipped with the grace of self-awareness, self development becomes an evening walk. The brief can be easily interpreted and the right intervention could be swiftly applied.

Interestingly still, a few line managers push their reportees to develop their weaknesses; just like making an elephant climb a tree. It

is at these junctures that I often wonder – isn't it better to not try to develop the weak area; instead focus on unused strengths and over used weaknesses? If a behaviour centric diagnosis can segregate the developable half strengths and half weaknesses from

deep hard wired weaknesses, it sure makes the job of development easy. Inevitably though, the very fact that the answers to development rests within a person, is a situation too real to escape; an expert only bring techniques and motivation to her/his development. The change hence, by all means needs to be owned and driven by the individual.

What then is the role of a consultant/mentor/coach in the journey of the leaders' development? I have always been a firm believer, that a good development conversation is the core to set the motivation path and the objectives of development clear. This development conversation needs to be honest, transparent and confidential. If a consultant/coach could very early in the process identify motivations and attitudes of the leader in question – it would make the conversation a lot more purposeful and enriching. Most significantly, the ability of a consultant to create 'eureka' moments for the coachee holds the motivation scale up. Consequently, the shining goals will ensure that the vision of the aspired development is never lost. The agility of the consultant in positioning stretching questions in making the leader see her/his own behaviour is critical to a good development conversation. To illustrate descriptively, during a recent third development meeting, a leader who was in denial mode for a while, suddenly saw the light on how his behaviour was hampering his growth and that of the environment around him. With this new discovery he wanted to change everything around him; the positioning of stretching questions threw open many windows

**Conversations are
always the first step to
growing a healthy mind.
A healthy mind is always
a required step towards
positive development
and fulfillment.**

of opportunity. It then took me some good mirror holding to make the coachee see the merit of whatever is written there.

Developing strength and managing weaknesses should be the central theme of any development journey. These are one of those challenges

why an instructor led training, at times is not effective. A holistically supportive environment that does not see development as a correction of weakness, is a big encouragement for a leader. Development should always be linked to fulfilling potential – which means it's a journey of discoveries – like a treasure hunt. Fittingly, the consultant's ability to create clarity of the context along with the coachee is invaluable in any discovery phase.

How can feedback be forgotten in any human communication? Feedback will continue to perpetually be a valuable tool in any development conversation. Here, feedback should particularly be constructive, unadulterated, credible and genuine. Feedback should be used to formulate a constant mechanism which can generate meaningful interactions with the leader right through the journey. The consultant could play a crucial role to more specifically help the leader use feedback efficiently. The consistent and competent contribution of the consultant, the line manager and other support systems play a pivotal role in creating the right stretch assignments, exposure and experience in the development process.

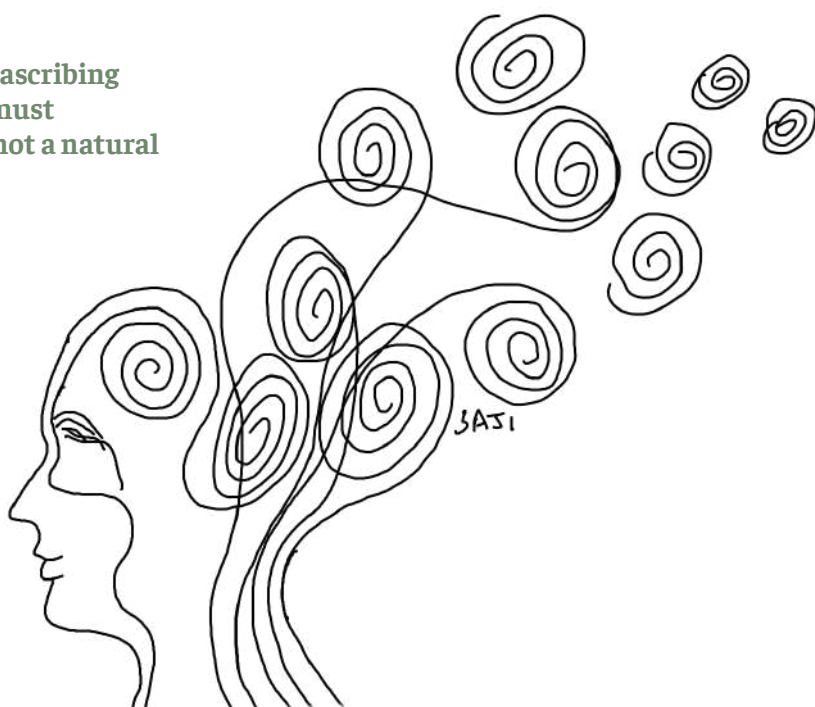
Eventually, this development conversation will give bloom to a meaningful development journey. Conversations are always the first step to growing a healthy mind. A healthy mind is always a required step towards positive development and fulfillment.

Every conversation if well intended is a development opportunity. Who then do you want to converse with today?

Dementia and Mental Health

The elderly ignore symptoms, ascribing them to ageing. However, we must understand that dementia is not a natural process of ageing.

MONICA FERNANDES



Enghed on by a friend, I enrolled for a free online beginners course on Dementia run by the Wicking Dementia Research & Education Centre, Tasmania. Initially I baulked at the idea since I have not appeared for an exam for over forty years! But then, I thought, why not accept the challenge? The classes were truly an eye opener.

Dementia occurs among the elderly. It is a broad term to describe a loss of memory, intellect, rationality, social skills and normal emotional reactions. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form accounting for 50% to 70% of all cases of dementia and is more prevalent among men. One rare form of Alzheimer's disease that is hereditary is Familial Alzheimer's disease (FAD). If a parent has a mutated gene that causes FAD, each child has a 50% chance of inheriting it. Alzheimer leads to neurons being destroyed and increasing prevalence of degenerative amyloid plaques or protein fragments called beta amyloid and tangles

which are dead and dying nerve cells made of twisted strands of protein which destroy vital cells in the brain. Cell to cell signals at synapses are blocked.

With dementia, the frontal lobe and the hippocampus get affected thus coming in the way of memory, thinking, planning and learning. As the disease progresses, the patient's personality changes. Regrettably there is no known cure for dementia. But it can be controlled and even prevented with a combination of lifestyle choices and drugs. I was surprised to learn that lifestyle changes are advocated to those in their twenties. Realistically this does not happen as youth are more concerned in living for the moment. Enjoy now instead of bothering what will happen 30 years from now. The elderly ignore symptoms, ascribing them to ageing. However, we must understand that dementia is not a natural process of ageing. Prof. Carol Brayne estimates that approximately 40–50% cases are preventable. If both parents suffered from dementia, there is a higher risk for the child.

Some of the signals of dementia are repeating questions, misplacing items and being unable to find them ever – sometimes accusing others of stealing, decreased judgment, withdrawal from work and society, having issues with solving problems, forgetting a familiar recipe, difficulty in completing regular tasks, confusion with time or place, trouble in understanding visual images, personality changes.

There are three stages of prevention/treatment—primary before the onslaught of dementia, secondary which consists of early detection and enhancing quality of life. Tertiary treatment includes interventions of medication and palliative care. Prof. Michael Valenzuela spoke of a cognitive lifestyle and inculcating healthy habits. A multivariate approach to risk reduction is recommended as enumerated here:

- It was observed that those with a college education have a better chance of reducing the risk of cognitive decline in later years than those without. This is because more neural pathways are used. The type of job one does is also important. Does it involve managing others or making decisions? Does it involve problem solving and out-of-the-box thinking? Post retirement pursuits such as contacting and meeting others by doing volunteer work, joining a club, or going to the church or temple and building larger social networks have better cognitive resilience. It's fun to broaden our horizons by learning a new skill as this involves exercising another part of the brain than hitherto used.
- While solving crossword and other puzzles do help, a better exercise is learning a new language with different rules of grammar. It is also suggested that the puzzles we attempt should gradually increase in difficulty. Computerised brain training was conducted for patients with dementia. It was found that an increase in the level of difficulty of the same exercises increased connectivity between the hippocampus (memory centre) and frontal lobe (planning and problem solving).
- Cardiovascular diseases brought about by smoking, excessive alcohol, diabetes, heart ailments, repeated strokes restrict the blood flow to the brain thus leading to dementia. Prescribed medication such as blood thinners helps to control some illnesses. It was suggested to avoid red meats and follow a Mediterranean diet rich in nuts, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, fish and olive oil.
- Use of drugs like cocaine affect general health and could increase dementia.

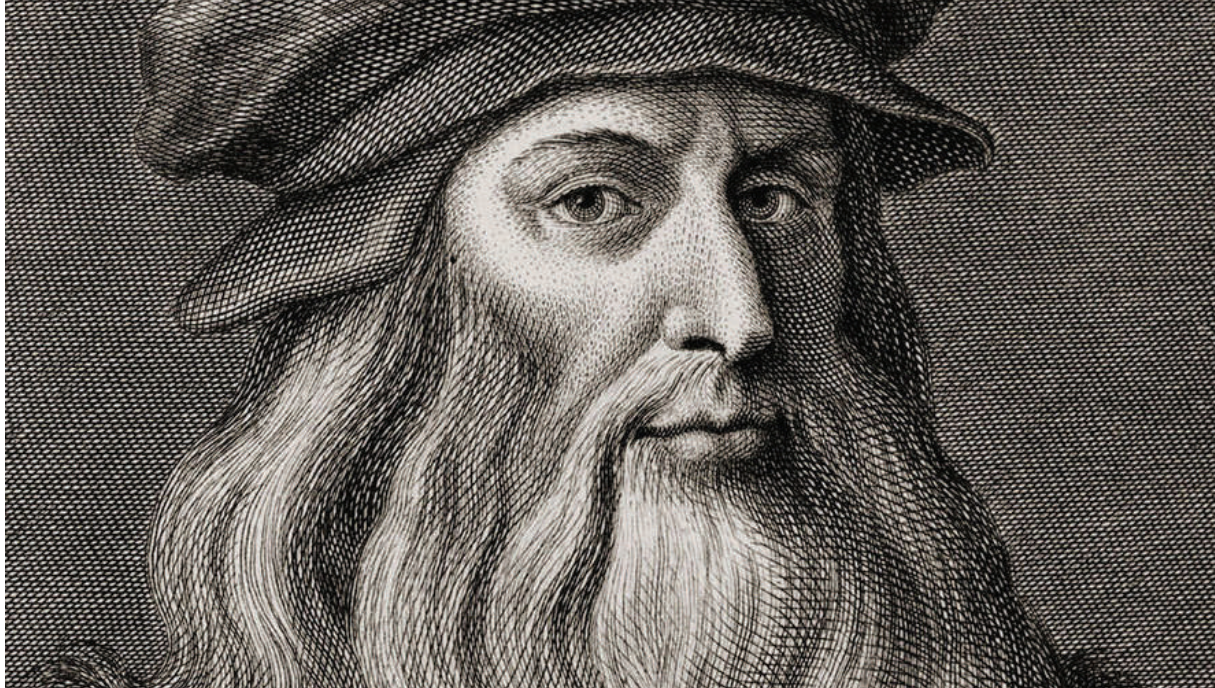
- Physical activity improves cognitive ability. Aerobic activity lead to increased heartbeats as our breathing becomes more rapid. Hence we should not saunter but walk reasonably fast, even for 10 minutes, take a break and then continue. Group dancing or ballroom dancing is also suggested as this involves learning steps and social contact with other dancers. It is suggested that we combine aerobic and weight/strength training.
- Repeated brain injuries such as in boxing could result in 'dementia pugilistica' due to a series of high impact concussions.
- Depression in late and mid life could cause vascular dementia and increase the risk of Alzheimer. Hence it is important to seek treatment and take the prescribed anti depressants.
- Good quality sleep is important for neurogenesis or growth of new brain cells in the hippocampus. A new discovery shows that sleep clears the brain of various proteins and harmful toxins including beta amyloid. Sleep improves memory. Obstructive sleep apnea, where the brain is deprived of oxygen for a shortwhile is a risk factor
- We need to control our stress levels as stress releases cortisol. When an excess amount of cortisol is in our brain, the function of the hippocampus is affected. As part of our fight or flight response, blood glucose, which is a source of energy, is diverted from the hippocampus to our muscles. In addition, cortisol interferes with the neurotransmitters' activities, which prevents normal memory function. Yoga, prayer, meditation are all ways to control stress.
- A study has suggested that the polluted air we breathe could also have an adverse effect on our brain.
- Researchers rely a lot on MRI scans of patients with Alzheimers. One such study unearthed a surprising fact. Some patients

with more brain damage (Group A) were able to function better than another group (Group B) with less brain damage. A study of their life history revealed that those in Group A had been more mentally active than those in Group B. Perhaps this resulted in Group A having a better cognitive resilience than Group B.

- It is interesting to know that a study was conducted among the West London Indian Asian population who had high risk factors such as diabetes, obesity, high BP and were in the age group of 40 to 70 years. Then the study expanded to those from 30 to 40 years. It was discovered that the participants were following an unhealthy lifestyle by consuming a lot of fast foods, not exercising, having a diet full of oil, all of which promoted obesity, elevated cholesterol and cardio vascular illnesses. Around 200 younger people of 20 years were then taught how to avoid the pitfalls of an unhealthy lifestyle.

The elderly should not be isolated or made to feel a burden non-contributing member of society. They should be enveloped with love in the family circle, as difficult as this may sometimes be. People suffering from Alzheimer sometimes get angry. This was beautifully portrayed in the movie *The Notebook*. It is not known whether this is due to changes in the brain or whether the person finds it a challenge to remember. Past memories are easier for them to access than memories of something that occurs recently. A friend sent me this very touching video of a prima Russian ballerina. The psychologist showed her a clip of her during a performance of the Swan Lake in her hey days. Suddenly she was transported to happier times and though wheel chair bound, started doing graceful hand movements just like she did several years ago.

While early prevention is preferable, it is never too late to change our lifestyle patterns in order to live a fuller cognitive lifestyle, irrespective of our age. Why not opt for a better quality of life?



Leonardo da Vinci

Leonardo wanted sixty beggars to accompany his bier. What was he trying to tell the world?

BOBBY JOSE KATTIKAD

The time will come when men such as I will look upon the murder of animals as they now look on the murder of men.
— Leonardo da Vinci

For the world Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) is probably known only as a painter. He also needs to be remembered as someone with extraordinary inner light. He did things which would be considered eccentric by others. He had the habit of buying and letting free the birds that were kept for sale on the street. The posthumous journey also had some glimmers of light. The head of state himself witnessed his last hours. Yet he wanted sixty beggars to accompany his bier. What was he trying to tell the world? Was it to proclaim that his destiny is no better than that of the men who accompanied him?

He remembers a childhood abandoned by

his father. His father was not ready to accept his mother who was from a poor background. The child's foster father was another who shared the same poverty. It was from there that he journeyed all this distance that we know. His passing from this world was in the throes of realizing that he was just a beggar. That alone is right if we understand our reality. Everything you say and everything you value is the gold coin you shed. Just remember Alla Picha Mollakka.

Jesus' Last Supper is now celebrated as Eucharist. That Greek word means 'thanksgiving'. It has been described as such since the first century. This is how Ignatius of Antioch and the martyr Justin marked that Supper. Life becomes more loving when we understand the principles of prayer as a time to be thankful. It carries within it only grains of tears. Yet why aren't the tears flowing when you touch life?



Madanapalli Tomato Mandi: Asia's Biggest Tomato Market

VALIGIRI SRINIJA

Madanapalli in Andhra Pradesh has arguably Asia's biggest tomato market. Over five thousand people work in this Mandi. Situated in Neeruguttuvaripalli, the Mandi was started by the Union Government in 1970s and is controlled by The National Agriculture Department of India. Tons of tomatoes come from different places like Kadapa, Ananthapuram, and neighbouring states including Karnataka. It sends tomatoes to Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, etc. Tomatoes are exported to other parts of the world too; and are quite in demand.

The prices of the tomatoes vary from ₹2 to ₹12 per kg and these prices are fixed through auction every day from 9 am to 10 am. During unseasonal time approximately 180 tons of tomatoes are registered, and during peak season 700 to 750 tons of tomatoes are registered; and at times it could go over 1,500 tones. The price differs depending on the size, colour and condition of the tomatoes.

The Central Government started selling these tomatoes online to help the farmers and increase their profits. The Market with its people and busy trade is surely a sight to behold.



Government-sponsored Endogamy

In the past, Government has come out with scheme of financial assistance for those entering into inter-caste marriages- with a view to eradicate caste distinctions, casteism and to bring about inclusivity in Indian society.

DR VASUDHA MC

The Karnataka State Brahmin Development Board, which is established for upliftment of impoverished Brahmins has launched two Schemes- Arundhati and Maitreyi both are meant for financial support for marriages among Brahmins. ₹25 crore budget sanctioned to the Board is being spent on such marriages which could be viewed as misutilization of tax payers money.

The amount sanctioned for supporting poor Brahmins in the form of scholarships fellowships, training and coaching for competitive examinations is being misused for promoting endogamy among Brahmins to keep them insulated and isolated from other sections of society; may be for the age old considerations of caste purity and pollution which are the very basic of untouchability.

In the past, Government has come out with scheme of financial assistance for those entering into inter-caste marriages—with a view to eradicate caste distinctions, casteism and to bring about inclusivity in Indian society. Contrary to this, the Arundhati and Maitreyi schemes appear to be meant for insulating and isolating Brahmins from other communities and promote their caste identity, which is against the ethos of secularism and ideal of inclusivity.

Marriage is a sacrament among Hindus and it should not be reduced to a contract between the couples on the one hand; couple and the Government on the other. Monetization of a sacred institution could



prove to be counter-productive and may also lead to unfair practices.

The bond of marriage is based on emotions, sentiments, compatibility and complementarity between the couple; whereas in this Scheme, it is made to last for three years with monetary incentive notwithstanding whether the marriage is compatible or a traumatic experience. Marriage is primarily a family affair and Government role in it may prove to be dysfunctional. Exclusive preference to Brahmin priests over Brahmin farmers and Brahmin cooks makes little sense and priests are relatively better off economically and many a time cooks and farmers work for priests. In a lighter tone, priests who sacrifice mundane pleasures, such marriages may be run counter to it. Further, the eligibility criteria fixed are such that many can seek eligibility through fraudulent means.

On the whole, the schemes appear to be lacking in logic and rational and retrogressive in implications. Marriage is not a means, mechanism, a strategy, or an instrument for achieving development; it is purely a domestic affair to be left to families and individuals to manage. There are other spheres and areas far more important and consequential than marriage that could be focused upon by the Karnataka State Brahmin Development Board such as Education, health, employment etc. so as to justify and be accountable for spending tax payers money.

On the pretext of financial incentives brides and grooms cannot be denied conjugal rights and restrict the scope for choice of spouse. The entire scene and schemes make no sociological sense and common sensibility.



The Prophet

**They teach us how to let go and let things fall apart without fear.
The role of the prophet is to lead us on an individual and collective level
through the necessary deconstruction of what I would call the false self.
The prophet's path is of descent and is never popular or easy.**

RICHARD ROHR OFM

The Prophet's Path

In spirituality, there are basically two paths, what I've called the path of the fall and the path of the return. The path of return has been the message of the priestly class. True priests talk of religion, communion, love, transcendence, connecting this world with the next, and generally offering a coherent world of meaning. In contrast, the path of the fall is directed and legitimated by the prophets, who teach us how to go into our shadows creatively and how to lose gracefully. They teach us how to let go and let things fall apart without fear.

The role of the prophet is to lead us on an individual and collective level through the necessary deconstruction of what I would call the false self. The prophet's path is of descent and is never popular or easy. It is about letting

go of illusion and toppling false gods. People usually like priests, which is why they are established and comfortable in almost all cultures, but the prophets are almost always killed.

The prophets are disrupters of the social consensus. What everybody is saying, whatever the glib agreement is, prophets say, "it's not true." They do this primarily by exposing and toppling what the Hebrew Scriptures called idols, things that are made absolute that are not absolute. The tendency of religion is to absolutise. I'm sure it comes from a deep psychological need for some solid ground to stand on, but the prophets remind us that God is the only absolute. And don't try to make the institutions of God absolutes either! Jeremiah said, "The Temple, the Temple, the Temple, don't you get tired of talking

The prophets are people who are imbued with God's love for creation and consequent passion for justice. The encounter with this love and concern brings forth from the prophet the courage to face what others turn away from—the unsustainability of a society that oppresses the poor.

about the Temple?" (see Jeremiah 7:4) This was a good Jewish man who surely loved the Temple but recognized that it, too, had become an idol.

Through Jeremiah, God reminded them: "In speaking to your ancestors on the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I gave them no command concerning burnt offering or sacrifice [in the Temple]. This is rather what I commanded them: Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk exactly in the way I command you, so that you may prosper" (Jeremiah 7:22–23).

I hope we can sympathize with the people of Israel who so often rejected their prophets. It's scary whenever we're offered a new synthesis or paradigm, especially for those who are heavily invested in the old. Opposition will rise, just as it rose around Jesus. People inside the status quo usually have much to lose. They don't necessarily have ill will; it's just that they're living in the only world they've ever imagined. Perhaps my favorite understanding of prophets is that they're lovers of spiritual freedom who

keep humanity free for God and God free for humanity. It is harder than you think.

A Positive Vision

The starting point for the prophets' imagination is an amazing, positive experience of God. Their divine encounter fills their heart not with cynicism, not with sarcasm, not with negativity, not with opposition, but with an ecstasy that has to be shared. That one experience of the Absolute is so absolutizing that it effectively relativizes everything else, including the religious trappings of the Temple, the priesthood, and even sacred texts. Rabbi Nahum Ward-Lev describes the experience of one of the earliest Hebrew prophets:

God also gave Amos a positive vision, an instruction for how the people can preserve themselves and their communal life: Seek the Living Presence and you shall live... Seek [God] who made the Pleiades and Orion and turns the deep darkness into morning and makes the day darken into night... Seek good and not evil, that you may live... Hate the evil and love the good and establish justice in the gate (Amos 5:6, 8, 14, 15).

Amos, animated by the grave understanding that the present order cannot stand, also bears an alternative vision for the future: seek the Living Presence, seek good and not evil that you may live. Burdened and energized, he leaves his flock behind and sets out for Beth El to bring God's word. The shepherd of Tekoa heads north in the name of the Shepherd of Israel.

Amos embodies the qualities found in all the writing prophets in the Hebrew Bible. The prophets are people who are imbued with God's love for creation and consequent passion for justice. The encounter with this love and concern brings forth from the prophet

the courage to face what others turn away from—the unsustainability of a society that oppresses the poor. At the same time, the soaring possibilities present in God’s loving attention to the world fires the prophet with the imaginative power to present the people with an alternative, life-giving future. Engagement with divine love, courage to condemn oppression, and imagination to envision an alternative future are three qualities that define the prophetic experience.

The work of the prophets is not done, nor will it ever be, but the example of Jesus and the experience of Christ in our midst empowers us to be prophets in our own time. Rabbi Nahum, who leads a multi-faith sacred community in nearby Santa Fe, New Mexico, urges us to find our own prophetic work:

While most of us are not yet prophets, we also know the presence of a great love, a love that includes the entire world. Awakened by that love, we too are aggrieved in the face of human oppression. A voice within us calls out, “This is wrong and cannot stand.” We yearn for a world in which all can flourish. Fueled by our own particular yearning, we occasionally entertain visions for how some small part of our world can be liberated into greater possibility.

Prophets as Poets

One of the great scholars of the Jewish scriptures was Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972). In his in-depth study of the Hebrew prophets, he included this description of the prophets which is really rather surprising. We often think of prophets as scolds, rather judgmental and cranky, but Heschel reminds us of their essential gifts of creativity and imagination:

The prophet is a poet. His experience is

one known to the poets. What the poets know as poetic inspiration, the prophets call divine revelation... The inspiration of the artist is what is meant by “the hand of the Lord which rests upon the prophet.”

What makes the difference between the prophet and the ordinary person is the possession of a heightened and unified awareness of certain aspects of life. Like a poet, he is endowed with sensibility, enthusiasm, and tenderness, and above all, with a way of thinking imaginatively. Prophecy is the product of poetic imagination. Prophecy is poetry, and in poetry everything is possible, [such as] for the trees to celebrate a birthday, and for God to speak to [humans]. The statement “God’s word came to me” was employed by the prophet as a figure of speech, as a poetic image.

One of the most recent encounters I’ve had with “poetic prophecy” occurred when Amanda Gorman, a young Catholic woman and United States Youth Poet Laureate, wrote and performed a poem for the recent Presidential Inauguration. It seems to me that many of her words connect deeply with words from the Hebrew prophets.

She begins her poem “The Hill We Climb” by asking in the style of the psalms of lamentation, “When day comes we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-ending shade?” She then references the sign of the reluctant prophet Jonah: “We’ve braved the belly of the beast; we’ve learned that quiet isn’t always peace.”

She transforms the seemingly unjust decree of Exodus 34:7 that God will “visit the iniquities of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation,” no longer holding God responsible for intergenerational trauma. Like the prophets of old, she holds us accountable for our actions:

Prophecy is the product of poetic imagination. Prophecy is poetry, and in poetry everything is possible.

“we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation... Our blunders become their burdens” (emphasis mine).

Like the prophet Micah, Gorman reminds us of God’s desire for mercy (see 6:8): “But one thing is certain. If we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy, and change our children’s birthright.” With the prophet Zechariah, she envisions a time of peace and plenty when “everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree and no one shall make them afraid” (3:10).

I encourage you to read and ponder the whole text of her poem.

I know not everyone appreciates or even understands poetry. I will admit it needs to be wrestled with sometimes, but I hope poetry can help us learn to appreciate the creative envisioning the prophets undertake through their relationship with God.

Envisioning a New World

One of the most prominent prophets in recent American history is Martin Luther King Jr. Like the prophets of Israel, he saw not just what was wrong with his nation, but how it might be restored to the promise upon which it was founded. The Reverend Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas writes about King’s prophetic vision for racial justice, suggesting that it was made possible by the “moral imagination” he learned through the Black church and faith. She writes:

A moral imagination is grounded in the absolute belief that the world can be better. A moral imagination envisions Isaiah’s “new heaven and new earth,” where the “wolf and the lamb shall feed together,” and trusts that it will be made real (Isaiah 65). What is certain, a moral imagination disrupts the notion that the world

as it is reflects God’s intentions. . . . [It] is nothing other than the hope of black faith. Such hope trusts that the arc of God’s universe does in fact bend toward justice.

In his famous “I Have a Dream” speech in 1963, King’s prophetic, moral imagination is on full display: Even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...

I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, that one day, right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together...

With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

A moral imagination is grounded in the absolute belief that the world can be better.

Becoming an 'Earthstruck' Human

An 'earthstruck' human, and not a 'human supremacist' is a worthwhile reinvention we could think of taking upon ourselves as we are coming closer to the celebration of the 51st Earth Day, on 22nd of this month.

A FRANCIS OFM

The anthropocentric (human-centred) worldview which has colonized the contemporary lifestyle, arguably, is at the root of the present planetary crisis. Originated as the traditional anthropology of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religious world, anthropocentrism epitomized human beings as the crown of creation. The trenchant criticism on the embedded culpability of this worldview which represents a 'human superiority complex' is that we tend to (mis)treat the rest of the creation in absolute servitude to us. This inflated egocentric (mis)understanding of human supremacy, endorsed by the Cartesian philosophical thought, capitalism and neoliberalism, has paved an unquestionable human pathway to unbridled industrialization, commodification and consumerism. It is undeniable that this easily-trodden pathway has increased the risk of denaturing, and imperiled the existence of the planet. Earth which is a finite planet is being plundered - all in the name of supplying resources to serve humans!

The Resource-hungry Human

Deconstructing our deep-rooted bias of 'human exceptionalism' is the urgent need of the time, if we wish to save our planet from the brink of collapse. Recognizing the urgency of this

deconstructing process, Thomas Berry, one of twentieth century's prescient and profound thinkers, as he is widely known, has called us to undertake a transformative journey of a "reinventing of human within the community of life system." He laments that humans, particularly, in Post-modern times misconceive themselves as an 'addendum', an 'addition' to earth; whether we see ourselves from our due spiritual or scientific traditions, we fail to comprehend the appropriate relationship we share with the earth. We behave as resource-hungry, and are little satisfied with the respectful use of the earth for the sheer benefit of fulfilling humanity's legitimate needs. The result is, as John Clammer points out, that we are drawn to 'gigantism', taking more than what we need and thus rapidly destroying the very basis of life. Our actions have caused dreadful environmental impact, such as the loss of biodiversity, resource depletion, climate change and stratospheric ozone depletion. Berry decries that instead of reinventing our relational ties with the earth as an 'interdependent being', we continue to evolve ourselves as a 'destructive force' to the planet. What is extremely intolerable about this unacceptable relational pattern is that we defend our culpability on the ground of the anthropocentric supremacy, that



is, life on earth is 'human-centred and all other beings are a means to human ends'. There are two misguided arguments we apply to dismiss anyone's concern over the nature and the magnitude of the looming ecological meltdown that our lifestyle is bringing on us.

Denial

The first argument is in line with an absolute denial, namely, the ecological meltdown is not true, it is a conspiracy. This argument is so rampant that we least expect where it comes from. It could come from anywhere and from anyone, just like we heard it coming from a world leader who was acclaimed to be advised by

the best scientific brains in the world, who kept tweeting irresponsibly that climate change is a hoax. This is also the shameless story of another world leader who denied the fire in Amazon rainforest, while at the same accusing the aboriginal communities responsible for causing it. Denial and accusation in the same breath! Greenpeace Brazil challenged the folly of his denial by projecting the data along with satellite images of the fire, stating that the 2020 fire was the worst ever in the Amazon, which burned 13000 sq km of forest. An antecedent to this kind of denial echoed with overriding environmental skepticism in India, too, in 2014: "The climate has not changed. We have changed."

Our focus on the current pandemic has de-emphasised many sensitive ecological issues of importance that the world was concerned about in the pre-Covid 19 times.

Delusion

The second argument falls in line with a delusional thinking, which states that we, humans, possess the innovative wisdom to resolve any crisis and we don't have to be overconcerned about the future of the planet. As empowering as it sounds, we know from experience that this argument is both ridiculously delusional and deceptive. Since 1970 or even before that, there have been alarming reminders that global biodiversity has declined nearly a third. We have not been able to redirect or stop the downward trajectory of the biodiversity loss. In fact, the loss has been accelerated than being controlled, or prevented! Contextually, the pandemic slaps us on the face with our delusional thinking. To date, the virus has affected 122 million (126,205, 685) and killed 2.7 million (2,769,615) lives. True, vaccines are being rolled out. But our ability to find a potential solution (vaccine), came at the cost of 2.7 million people's lives and a wide-ranging global suffering! Still, we claim audaciously, we are competent to handle any crisis!

Our focus on the current pandemic has de-emphasised many sensitive ecological issues of importance that the world was concerned about in the pre-Covid 19 times. One very important issue was about the 'ecological credit crunch' that was reported to be more crucial than the financial one that we were heading towards. It was indicated that we were overusing earth's resources nearly 30 percent more than earth could recreate every year. The glaciers are melting, and the sea level is rising. The Annual Report of the World Wildlife Fund, as early as the year 2008, provided us with the red flag of

warning, "We have only one planet. Its capacity to support a thriving diversity of species, human indeed, is large but fundamentally limited.

When human demand on this capacity exceeds what is available – when we surpass ecological limits – we erode the health of the Earth's living system. Ultimately this loss threatens human wellbeing." Agreeing to this prediction, the pandemic leads us back to read this report afresh. If we have our conscience alive in us, we would surely make a candid admission of our fault that our well-being has been threatened, and that we have caused to erode the health of the planet by pushing hard its ecological limits.

The 'Earthstruck' Human

Serving the legitimate needs and interests of humanity is far from serving its greed, or illegitimate needs. The human existential dependence on earth, by any crucible of argument, cannot be denied. Earth is our home and we find the legitimate fulfilment of all human needs from the bounties of earth. This undeniable existential dependence calls us to treat the planet with utmost respect, and with a responsibility-provoking consciousness towards its well-being and preservation, which the astronaut Michael Collins called as the consciousness of being 'earthstruck': Earth is to be treasured and nurtured, something precious that must endure.

An 'earthstruck' human, and not a 'human supremacist' is a worthwhile reinvention we could think of taking upon ourselves as we are coming closer to the celebration of the 51st Earth Day, on 22nd of this month.

Social Forces Triggering the Mind: An Analysis of *Manichithrathazhu*

AARDRA PADMAKUMAR

Human beings undergo several emotions and feelings. Fear is a very strong and deep emotion any person can undergo. Since human imagination knows no bounds, to every phenomena that is inexplicable or ineffable, they attributed a character, human or inhuman which was associated with supernatural powers. In cinema, this element of fear has been manifested in several ways. Horror movies exploit variegated themes ranging from sex and death, self and the soul, our own beastly nature inside, fears that exist within ourselves and our collective unconsciousness. What frightens humans at home and work, including aging, guilt, mortality, shame, and lost love; we tend to connect to the seen, unseen, and the invisible, the known and the unknown, the explained and the unexplained, mystery and science. The horror movies recognise that our fears are not just our own but a basis upon which we all can connect.

In Malayalam cinema, representation of the unknown has been manifested in several ways. The fear of the existence of the unknown, and man's journey to find the reason for its presence and to erase it has become the essence of many films. From the concept of Yakshi, to pretham, bhootham, and so on Malayalam cinema has come a long way in its representation of the unknown.

Manichithrathazhu (1993), hailed as one of the biggest milestones in Malayalam cinema which can be placed in the category of 'horror' as well as a 'psycho-thriller' is an amalgamation of traditional old beliefs of yakshi and modern Psychiatry. This movie produced after a period of around thirty years after the release of *Bhargavinilayam* (1964), first horror film in Malayalam in the concept of Yakshi; brings out deviancy in a much different light. Movies that came till then mostly had tantric rituals in order to get rid of the deviance, whereas



Manichithrathazhu brings out traditional ways of exorcism but also modern science and psychiatry into play.

The character Ganga enacted by Shobana is a representation of any modern woman.

Eager and curious on everything that stumbles upon her, the lonely mindscape of Ganga gives space to all the outside thoughts to grow inside her. Ganga is that educated modern woman married off to a traditional family where she is treated as an outsider from the very beginning.

The place where Ganga and her husband comes to is Madampalli tharavadu which is entwined in myths and ghost stories of Nagavalli. Here, the yakshi image is attributed to Nagavalli whom nobody has seen. It was Bhargavinilayam that was the abode of the yakshi Bhargavi and here it is Madampalli Tharavadu and thekkini to be precise which is believed to be the abode of the yakshi Nagavalli. The reference of the houses in both these films, and the well where Bhargavi is believed to exist

within, and thekkini which is believed to be the abode of Nagavalli, both suggests the confined spaces conferred upon women by the society. These women when let free can be fierce and strong and can question or fight back against the society, the fear of which makes the society to put her within the chambers of the four walls is what is shown through the image of thekkini. *Manichithrathazhu* is also a portrayal of the male dominated society and world that works by controlling women and her dreams. The major female characters in the movie *Nagavalli*, Ganga, and Sridevi, are representations of the suppressed females, Nagavalli 200 years back and Ganga and Sridevi in the modern period.

Nagavalli was killed by the kaaranavar of the tharavadu hundreds of years back estranging her from her dream and love that was dance and Ramanathan, which is no less similar to the estrangement of other characters such as Ganga and Sridevi who are estranged from their own worlds. For Ganga it is her individual freedom and fantasy world which is again interrupted

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and trespassed by the patriarchal forces and representatives of patriarchy including her parents and husband. Sridevi who is confined to the walls of her house due to 'chova dosham' (a belief where a woman with chova dosham is not likely to get married or people refuse to proceed marriage proposals), and is initially blamed for the misfortunes happening in the family. These three women characters, who belong to two different time periods are compared, the plight of them are more or less the same. Also Bhargavi (in *Bhargavinilayam*) and Nagavalli (in *Manichithrathazhu*) are both who got killed when they found their love and wanted to live with them. Ganga and Sridevi are two other representations of the women of the late twentieth century, though educated, has no voice other than to live according to familial wishes, otherwise of which, they will be stamped as deviant, which initially happened with Sridevi and later with Ganga. The patriarchal forces in action in the movie are the karanavar, Nakulan (Ganga's husband), Dr. Sunny Joseph the psychiatrist who comes to treat her and take her from the fantasy world she was in, the tantric expert Bharamaduttan Nampoothiri, and all the major male characters of Madampalli tharavadu.

Other than the repression of the female class, the film also throws light on the feudal lords and how it worked and how they treated the lowly. The kaaranvar character is a perfect example of a feudal lord of high caste and Nagavalli and Ramnadhan who are poor and belong to a low caste.

With strong importance on dance and music, the movie was a new experience for the audience when it came to the horror genre. The songs which are still haunting, and "Oru Murai

vanthu parthayaa" has become a milestone in Malayalam cinematic songs itself. In *Manichithrathazhu* the fear in the minds of the audience was not spoon fed, but slowly induced.

The sound effects ranging from opening of a door to screaming of a woman, the fear in the minds of the audience grew slowly even without seeing a ghost on the screen. The movie played with the psyche and the minds of the audiences reminding them of Nagavalli and Ganga could be any woman that they know.

A blend of comedy and horror together, with the evil forces such as patriarchy and feudalism, and a conflict between modernity and a traditional society *Manichithrathazhu* is a perfect example for social forces triggering the minds. Deviancy in *Manichithrathazhu* for the audience was a unique experience when compared to the ghost stories that were produced till then, which portrayed the ghosts possessing the protagonists and killing the evil through them.

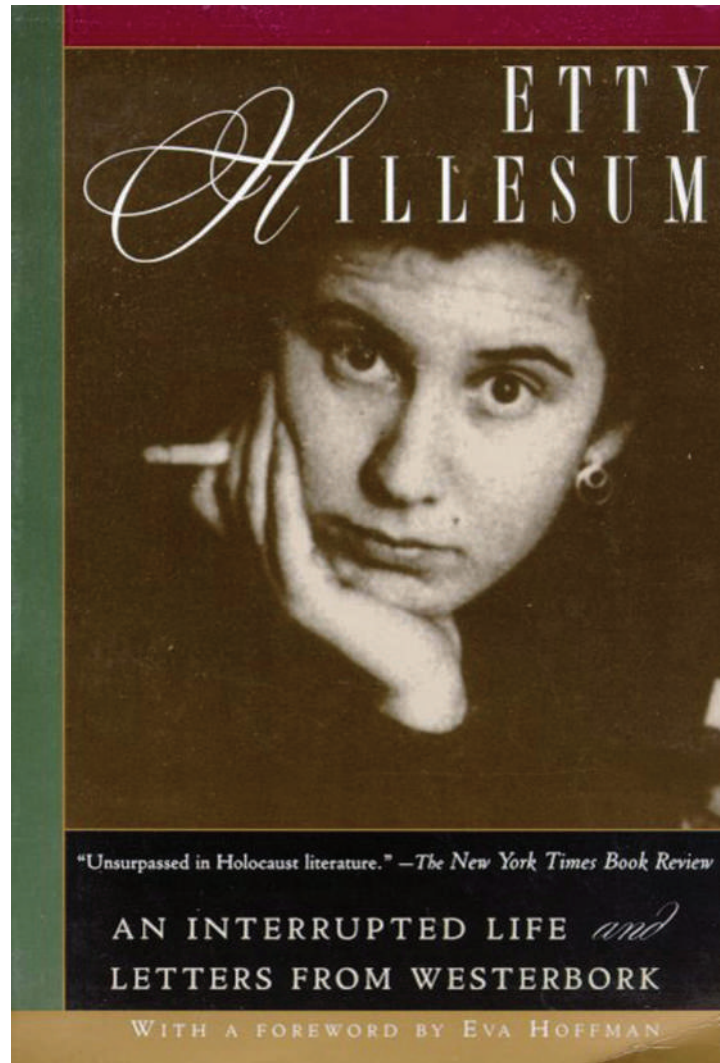
But when it came to *Manichithrathazhu*, audiences were too confronted with the psychology behind it, that everything that comes out as deviant is a play of our very own minds, wherein each and every one has a big role in it. Thus from Bhargavi to Nagavalli and Ganga, the tales come out as similar, the plight of women being similar, only the contexts being different, clearly showing the external actions ie, the patriarchal forces still playing a big role in their subordinations.

Many movies that came thereafter had the interference of a psychologist into the deviancy thus showing, it is the mind that gets affected be it a man or a woman, but most often a woman who is seen suffering, again showing that patriarchy was in and still in force for decades.

God Rises in Etty Hillesum

An Interrupted Life and Letters from Westerbork, by Etty Hillesum (1914–1943)

JOY PRAKASH OFM



Etty or Esther was a nonconformist Jewess in Holland. At university, she was very much geared towards reason and thought, while also having some addictions like smoking. Friendship with two men helped her become more free and mature. She went into therapy with one of them, Julian Spier, a disciple of Carl Jung, and so opened out the levels of emotion and feelings, imagination and memory.

Thus began an inward journey that helped her value her intuition, above all her dreams. “He attended at the level of my soul.” She said in her Diary. He gave her a New Testament and she often quoted Jesus, “Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.” Etty began to celebrate her birthday on the date she first met her psycho-chirologist, Julian Spier. She wrote in her diary, “On the third of February I was one year old. I think I’ll celebrate 3rd February as my

birthday from now on – it is more important than 15 January, the day my umbilical cord was cut.”

Delving into her non-rational, self-conscious side, helped her to become free. Under Spier’s tutelage she read the Bible, the writings of St. Augustine, Fjodor Dostoevsky, Rainer Maria Rilke and others. She could understand the deeper meaning, one that would transform her outlook on life, on God, and on her fellow human beings. She might now just sit, just be, free. A woman who had never really prayed says, “I sink on my knees and find peace.” Finally, she named the discovery of her deepest and best self, God. Finding God at the root of being was to experience belonging, connectedness and communion. So Etty became a free, universal person who had the courage to confront and to accept the awful reality of her times, and refused to hate. She went, in solidarity with her own people, to board the train to the concentration camp singing.

Victor Frankl says, “Our generation is realistic, for we have come to know man and as he really is. After all, man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz, however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright with the Lord’s prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips.”

Etty Hillesum, who died during the Holocaust in Auschwitz, had a sense of God which she cherished on her own, in spite of being brought up by unbelieving parents. Here is what she wrote on the night before being sent into the gas chambers. Shouldn’t our Christian belief become personal, like that of Etty?

On a Sunday morning, Etty made the following prayer from her death chamber: “Dear

“You are sure to go through lean times with me now and then, when my faith weakens a little, but believe me I shall always labour for You and remain faithful to You and I shall never drive You from my presence.”

God, these are anxious times. Tonight for the first time I lay in the dark with burning eyes as scene after scene of human suffering passed before me. I shall promise You one thing, O God, just one very small thing: I shall never burden my today with cares about my tomorrow, although

that takes some practice. Each day is sufficient unto itself. I shall try to help You, God, to stop my strength ebbing away, though I cannot vouch for it in advance. But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that You cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves.

“And that is all we can manage these days, and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well. Alas, there doesn’t seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help us but we must help You and defend your dwelling place inside us to the last. There are, it is true, some who, even at this late stage, are putting their vacuum cleaners and silver forks and spoons in safe keeping, instead of guarding YOU, dear God.

“And there are those who want to put their bodies in safe keeping but who are nothing more now than a shelter for a thousand fears and bitter feelings. And they say, “I shan’t let them get me into their clutches.” But they forget that no one is in their clutches who is in your arms. I am beginning to feel a little more peaceful, God, thanks to this conversation with YOU.

“You are sure to go through lean times with me now and then, when my faith weakens a little, but believe me I shall always labour for You and remain faithful to You and I shall

“Everyone must be turned into a dwelling dedicated to You, O God. I shall try to find a dwelling place and a refuge for You in as many houses as possible. There are many empty houses. I shall prepare them all for You, the most honoured Guest.”

never drive You from my presence.

“I have strength enough, God, for suffering on a grand scale, but there are more than a thousand everyday cares that leap up on me without warning like so many fleas. So I scratch away desperately and tell myself, “This day has been taken care of now, the protective walls of an hospitable home still surround me like a well-worn, familiar piece of clothing, there is food enough for today and the bed with the white sheets, so don’t let me waste even one atom of my strength on petty material cares. Let me use and spend every minute and turn this into a fruitful day, one stone more in the foundations on which to build our so uncertain future”.

“The jasmine behind my house has been completely ruined by the rains and storms of the last few days, its white blossoms are floating about in muddy black pools on the low garage roof. But somewhere inside me the jasmine continues to blossom undisturbed, just as profusely and delicately as ever it did. And it spreads its scent round the House in which You dwell, O God. You can see, I look after You, I bring you not only my tears and my forebodings on this stormy, grey Sunday morning, I even bring You scented jasmine. And I shall bring you all the flowers I shall meet on my way, and truly there are many of those.

“I shall make You at home always. Even if I should be locked up in a narrow cell and a cloud should drift past my small barred window, then I shall bring you that cloud, Oh God, while there is still the strength in me to do so, I cannot promise You anything for tomorrow, but my intentions are good, You can see.

“And now I shall venture out upon this day. I shall meet a great many people today and evil rumours and threats will again assault me like

so many enemy soldiers besieging an inviolable fortress.” Her diary is a continuous, animated dialogue with herself, a constant drive toward her own truth. She knew how to follow subtle movements of her feelings and how to question and

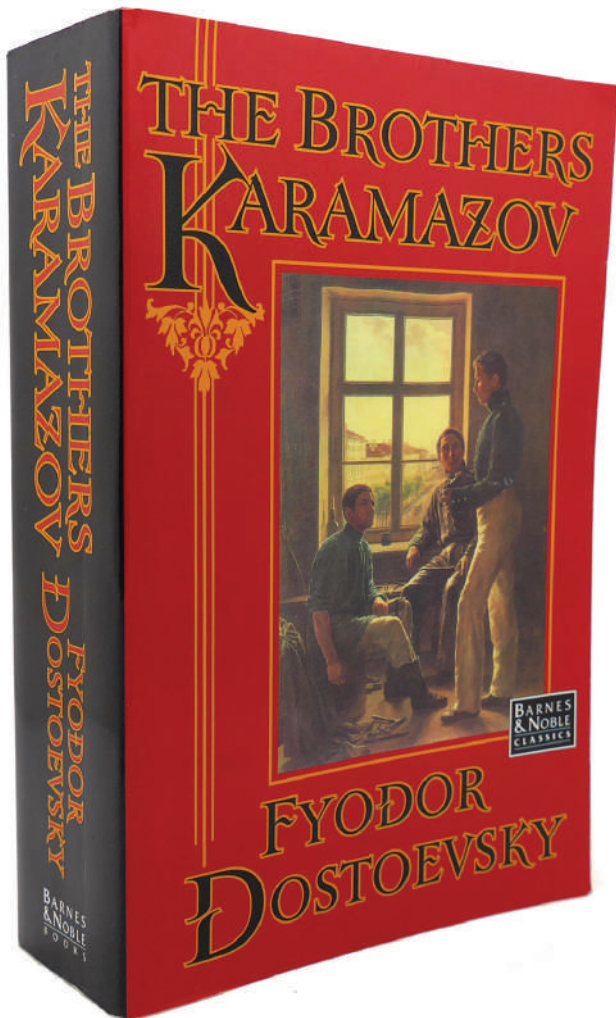
criticize herself.”

Once she was yelled at by a young Gestapo officer. She wrote in her journal, “I felt no indignation, rather a real compassion and would like to ask, “Did you have a very unhappy childhood, has your girlfriend let you down.”

At one moment she said, “Everyone must be turned into a dwelling dedicated to You, O God. I shall try to find a dwelling place and a refuge for You in as many houses as possible. There are many empty houses. I shall prepare them all for You, the most honoured Guest.” Etty had a deep sense of the beauty of each person; she felt that each one was carrying the mystery of God in a capacity to be, to love and to be loved.

Pope Benedict XVI, during his General Audience of February 13th 2013, made the following observation: “I am thinking of Etty Hillesum who died in Auschwitz. At first far from God, she discovered him looking deep within her and she wrote, “There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there, too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then he must be dug out again” (Diaries, 97).

The global closure of our churches, lockdown from the House of God, silence in our prayer spaces, and exclusion from the source and summit of the Christian life have been a trial for the living communion of the faith. Etty reminds us that God is deeply ingrained in the very fabric of our being, he comes alive even in the darkest hour of night as the Dawn!



Saved by His Memory

One should read *The Brothers Karamazov* for the challenge of approaching some of life's most difficult questions

SANJEEVY RAJA

Birth of Dostoevsky the writer

In 1849, a young writer had been arrested along with other members of a secret utopian society, in the court the accused even expressed that there was no conspiracy behind their thoughts but everything was in vain, they were sentenced to death. Fortunately, the emperor changed the sentence but ordered that the reprieve be announced only at the last minute to the prisoners. After eight months, on 22nd December, the young writer along with other members were taken out to what they thought would be their execution. They were driven to a parade ground in St. Petersburg. There the death sentence was announced, they were all given a cross to kiss. First, three of them were set against the posts to carry out the execution. They were summoned in threes; the young writer was in the second row and there was not more than a minute left to live.

The man who was a standing first in the first row, looked down to see his mother land one last time and expressed, "My life is going to be taken, it is going to end, I am going to be shot". The order was going to be followed by the soldiers. The young writer who was standing in the second row, was 28 years old, he was in silence, he wasn't showing any emotions but the young writer in his mind remembered his brother, at the last minute, it was him, him alone, and it was only then that he realized how much he loves him, then he also succeeded in bade farewell to his friends who were beside him.

Finally, the death sentence was repealed, they read to them that His Imperial Majesty granted them their lives. On hearing the grant, the first one in the first row knelt down to the ground with heavy heart and kissed his motherland with tears. With shivers the young writer thought to himself, "To be a human being among people and to remain one forever, no matter in what circumstances, not to grow despondent and not to lose heart — that's what life is all about, that's its task."

Dostoevsky the writer was born at the moment with a courage to face this world, he believed he can live in this world, the actual sentence that he received was 8 years of penal servitude which the emperor reduced to four years followed by exile, conditions in the Siberian prison, where he served the first part of his sentence, were much worse but he knew life is a gift to be lived, celebrated and cherished with love. His life wasn't easy at all even after leaving the prison but the same life has become the subject of *The Brothers Karamazov* and his other masterpieces like *The Idiot*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Notes from Underground*, etc.

The Brothers Karamazov

The Brothers Karamazov does have moments of humour which erupts at the most unexpected moments but there is greed, lust, suffering and known darkness of unknown depth in souls. *The Brothers Karamazov* is more than an account of murder, investigation, trial; whose story is told to extract readers senses. Dimitri

Karamazov, the son of his father's first marriage, is sensual, impulsive, a Hedonist, he enjoys gambling, women and alcohol but at the same time he believes in God. So constantly he has the internal conflict in him, he has two half bothers who equally are his opposites: Ivan, the atheist intellectual student, and Alyosha who is a compassionate young novice who wants to be a priest. But their father Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, the "wicked and sentimental" who haven't raised them is the victim of the murder. And there is Smerdyakov who is rumoured to be Fyodor Pavlovich's illegitimate son. The conflicts within this family and in them are tied in the first half of the novel, the consequences of their passion and suffering are released in the second half of the novel. Again, this novel is book of great contrast, you have horror and suffering on one side, and you have two beams of light on the other side that say how to fix the world. The greater part of the novel is made up of dialogues and monologues hence Dostoevsky's characters emerge independent of him. Dostoevsky introduces the readers his poetic flights, indefinite expressions, wandering syntax in moments of pain and suffering. The coexistence of faith and unbelief is prevailed in the novel but its artistic expression appears in the opposed figures of elder Zosima and the Grand Inquisitor. The Grand Inquisition is an important part of the novel as it expresses ideas about human nature and freedom and its fundamental ambiguity. Each major character in the novel has a distinct way of speaking because their narration is from a personal angle. One of the major Character in the novel is Alyosha, who is not much of a speaker but he is a hearer of words, a messenger with a compelling directness which comes from humility. Memory becomes the motif of the final chapter for one of the few reasons, Alyosha is saved at his darkest moment by his memory of the elder Zosima, as Zosima was saved by the memory of his brother's voice. Finally, one should read the *Brothers Karamazov* for the challenge of approaching some of life's most difficult questions.

The Night

RUMEENA MIRZA

Take a closure
To your undying thoughts
That keep your nights all awake
Through the journey that you make

Washing away the dim view
With you I be forever
When my heartbeats sing a tune
While by midnight comes out the lune

Early this morning I await
Emitting your rays of happiness
Even if life's going wrong
Effortlessly it sounds like a beautiful song

Away we walk a thousand miles
And the destination is such a surprise
As the moon that glares on the sea side
After the waves with the heavy tide

Flowering the buds of assurance and
Fading away our memories
Fallen in the world of ours
For you were born from the stars





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