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together

a national family magazine



**India, Indians,
and the Idea of
India**

ALEX TUSCANO

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**This Land Is Your Land. This Land
Is My Land. This Land Is Our Land.
Because We Belong. But How?**

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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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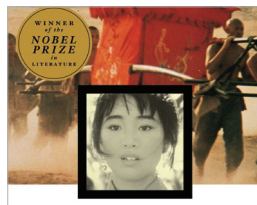


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DR SREEVIDYA SURENDRAN

The Expansive Idea of India

The promotion and propaganda of 'one country, one language', 'one country, one religion', etc. is fundamentally against the fabric of India.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Value of an individual, a society, or a nation could be determined by its relationship to truth. One's history could be traced back to one's journey to truth, or one's journey away from truth. One comes to an existential standstill when the question of truth is about one's own identity. Though it is a long debated question, at least once in our life time, as people living in India and as people who have grown up with the rich insights and multilayered culture of India, we stand in wonder asking the question, what is the idea of India? Many voices, images, and people rush to one's mind attempting to force an answer. All seem right at once. But a second thought puts us back to the same existential struggle; we start with the same question again, what is the idea of India? In 1946 Jawaharlal Nehru said, 400 million separate individual men and women, each differing from the other, each living in a private universe of thought and feeling make up the idea of India. Today we have 1.26 billion separate individual. The idea of India is an expansive one.

India as a Nation-State

We have many nations living in our nation-state called, India. A nation refers to a group of people bound together by common language, identity, ethnicity, history etc., they need not

be a country. When a nation organises itself under a government, which is considered as the ultimate authority, it begins to be also known as a country. The terms 'country' and 'State' are often interchangeable. Culturally connected people who identify themselves as a nation can do so while simultaneously being part of a country. Several native American groups identify as nations; but they ultimately belong to the State. India in fact is a collection of nations; that is, peoples with their own ethnic identity. The country and its government has a responsibility to respect it while deliberating issues and in policy making. The promotion and propaganda towards 'one country, one language'; 'one country, one religion', etc. is fundamentally against the fabric of India. If we are not mindful and respectful to the cultural, social, religious and linguistic fabric of India, nationalism becomes detrimental to the population of India. Then to be considered an anti-national, one only has to be a Dalit, or a Muslim, or a Christian, or a Kashmiri etc. the list will eventually extend to LGBTQ, or to rationalist or to environmentalist etc. On that account it definitely is incompatible with democracy.

The founding fathers of our nation had predicted the mess we would get into if we embrace rigid nationalism. Rabindranath Tagore

had persuaded people away from it saying, nationalism is a menace, it would steer India to unimaginable problems. Tagore emphatically held that patriotism is not his spiritual shelter. His refuge is humanity. He would not allow patriotism to triumph over humanity. Tagore in Gitanjali prays, where world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls, into that haven of freedom, my father, let my country awake.

Indian Neo-Nationalism

Indian nationalism had its positive results in Indian independence struggle. And it was characterized by people, irrespective of who and what, came together against the colonial rule. But in contemporary times Indian nationalism has taken on interesting twists and turns. Giving emergence to neo-nationalism. It is the idea of a nation-state where you emotionally belong to, you belong with your beliefs. It does not bother whether all in the nation-state finds space in it. It divides and divorces people. It separates people across imagined and reinforced narratives and borders. It is the imagination of a people that we belong, we are together. That perhaps is fine until someone uses it to exclude others within; and fight and destroy others without. Nationalism slowly slips into licensed terrorism. Therefore nationalism cannot be the end aim, instead one world without domestic narrow walls must become the end aim.

Nationalism is an imagination, it is an idea. Benedict Anderson writing about nationalism uses the term imagined communities. Don't dispense it saying it is just an idea. According to Karl Marx, "an idea becomes a material force when it grips the masses." Nationalism is such an idea, an imagination. Nationalism is one of the most gripping, most potent idea in modern history. It works stronger than armies and weapons. It has the potency to kill and destroy. Unchecked nationalism can become a breeding ground for fascism.

The Intersectionality in India

India is one and many at the same time. India is complex. We have linguistic, cultural and religious differences. But what should be noted

is that these pronounced sections of India also intersect with other sections like gender, economic and caste discriminations. As Kalim Siddiqui in his research, A Critical Study of 'Hindu Nationalism' in India published in Journal of Business & Economic Policy in June 2016, noted, Indian Muslims and other minorities and intersectional groups endure lower levels of education, income, political representation or government jobs than the majority Hindus. No majority includes everyone. Whichever section we consider as the majority there will be at least a small minority who don't belong. All who lived in Germany were not Aryans. All who lived or living in India are not Hindus.

The Idea of India in the Era of Post Truth

Anyone who has got the history right cannot be a nationalist; at least can't be a nationalist on narrow lines. New narratives have high jacked history. Building narratives has become a political and business strategy. Corporates invest in narrative building. Corporate news channels, with its well decided biases and its convincing presentations of fake and framed news, are fixing the idea of India. Truth has become fragile and complex in the hands of post truth.

How to survive the post truth era, the corporate era, the fascist era? Meet people. Encounter cultures. Meet people from the other side of truth. Do not claim that the moon rises only on our campus; instead take courage to go to other campuses and discover the truth about moon's rising. Protest to one's own self, one's own community that unless we meet the other, go to other campus, we would refuse to conclude the certainty about the truth.

We proudly sing that we all are Indians; but all of us do not sing it in the same language. All of us devoutly pray to protect our people and country from all harm; but we all don't pray in the same worship places or rites. We all celebrate every success and festivals our great nation with abundance food and camaraderie, but we all do not eat the same food. Our differences need not divide us. There is nothing in India that is common to all the Indians, except the spiritual conviction that we are Indians.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Wish Such Reflections Reach the Vernacular Press Too

Dear Editor,

Soon after reading the October issue of the *Together* magazine, I wanted to write to you a 'thank you' note; but somehow or other delayed doing so. Now after reading your January editorial, *The Polarity of Progress*, I decided to express my appreciation and gratitude for this "new" presentation of this magazine. I am very happy that you have chosen the themes of promotion of goodness, inclusivity and shared humanity to talk about and realize that we are here to live a shared humanity. Congratulations to the Team!

Your first editorial *Inclusivity: The Magic Is in the Other Being Present*, is much appreciated by all of us who read it. It highlights a vital but often overlooked fact in our discussions. This is a much needed learning for us in today's context. Inclusivity, has as you rightly termed, the magical power to open our eyes to the reality before us. The presence of the excluded/marginalized 'other' does make a contribution to the widening of the perception and understanding of those present -if there is good will; and the final outcome would be wonderful!

After reading the editorial, *Polarity of Progress*, I wished that such reflections reach the vernacular press for many more people of good will to think and become proactive on such issues affecting our shared humanity. Your poignant reflections on the naked truth of the progress trap is deeply disturbing and raises the question what could I/we do? What you have shared about Käthe Kollwitz is very inspiring and thought provoking. I am thinking of asking our sisters to read and then to share our thoughts and a possible follow up.

Mary Lily FMM

Palamaner, Andhra Pradesh

It Is a Rebirth

Dear Editor,

Bravo. I received the *Together* carrying the Editorial on Inclusivity, It is presented well and powerfully. The magazine: size, layout, and the features show that it is a Rebirth. I firmly believe and wish that you will carry it further for common good of the families—the backbone of the society.

Arok Sunder ofm

Brave and Unconventional

Dear Editor,

I am a subscriber of the *Together* magazine since long. I wish to express the appreciation in the new change that has occurred in the magazine lately. The recent editorial on Anomalous Covid-19 is really worth reading. Your reflections of spirituality and Christian religious services in the context of Covid-19 is very brave and unconventional.

Covid-19 has brought me only close to God even if I have not attended religious services even once in the last year. Spiritual priests who have an inclusive and unthreatened approach, is something which I really look for in Roman Catholic Church.

Dr. Priya Baby

National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bangalore

Inclusive and Socially Committed

Dear Editor,

Thanks for the new issue of *Together*. It is a great piece with contextual issues of importance. Your editorial is as thought-provoking and capturing as always. Glad to see many women writers. The woman in traditional dress of the Nyishi, reiterates the magazine's perspectives of inclusivity and social commitment. The cover story *The History and Anatomy of Farmers' Protest* is a big story with a feel of great read! Together, no doubt, is making many new roads by walking through unprecedented paths which many had never thought of in the past. All the best as we look ahead.

Austin Francis ofm
Canada

Dashing New Outlook

Dear Editor,

I have received the latest issue of the *Together* magazine this morning. It has a dashing new outlook and diverse articles. Though you have a couple of cartoons, I suggest some more humour-articles, jokes and most of all I miss Bro. Juniper.

Anette D'Cruz

We have been receiving many short messages and e-mails of appreciation and encouragement. Our sincere thanks to all. You are most welcome to discuss further on our articles. We will publish your opinions and perspectives in the *Letters to the Editor*. We strongly believe, that the more we talk (openly and genuinely) the more connected, clarified and inclusive we become. — **The Editor**

AVE A HUNCH



India, Indians, and the Idea of India

The country lost its maternal immunity late in the sixties with the waning of the founding generation. The losing immunity came of age in the nineties, perhaps its most difficult time lie ahead.

ALEX TUSCANO

The character of a nation is defined by the character of its citizens. The nation today is in search of people who will put nation before themselves, who believe that their destiny is intrinsically linked up with the destiny of the nation; the people who do not want to use the nation to build their destiny but build their destiny by first building the destiny of the nation. "Citizenship is an attitude, a state of mind, an emotional conviction that the whole is greater than the part. And that the part should be humbly proud to sacrifice itself that the whole may live", says Robert A. Heinlein.

"The idea of India" is hotly debated during these days when alternative "idea of India" is being put forward by the contending section of the Indians. They argue that those who are speaking of 'idea of India' think India came into existence only after independence. They argue that India existed since thousands of years. But there is a big fallacy in their argument. This fallacy is because they confuse India as a geographical territory and India as a political entity.

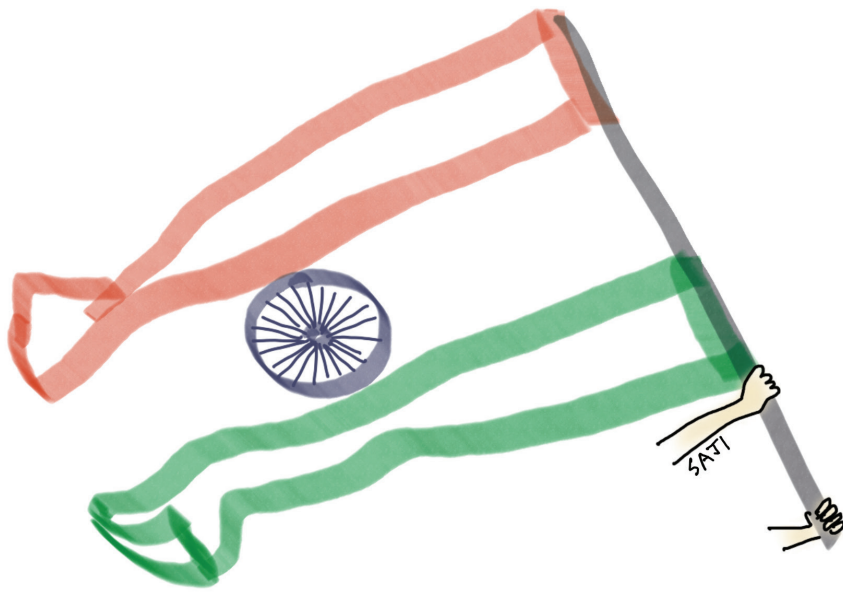
The geographical land called India existed from, not only thousands of years but also from millions of years. The fact is, what existed thousands of years ago in the geographical land, now called India, is not the same as what this land has come to be. It is the history that will tell us how this land has evolved from primitive reality to the modern 21st century India.

Before the British arrived in India there were many war lords, kings, and emperors who ruled on different parts of this land. There was the Maghada empire, the Marathas ruled over huge territory of India. In the south there was a Chola dynasty, Pallavans, Maharaja of Mysore, Haidar Ali, Tippu Sultan. From the coming of the Muslim sultans, Babar, Akbar ruled a huge territory of India. The British arrived in India and they went in war with many of these rulers and defeated them. They made a treaty with some which allowed them to keep their territory under their control but would owe allegiance to the British rules. When the British rulers consolidated their hold on the entire territory of India it was in their interest to unite the territory of India. Such united territory did not exist before the British rule.

Emergence of Nationalism

During the freedom struggle and with the influence of western education the sentiments of nationalism took roots in India. The leaders of the freedom struggle were looking for an identity of Nation State as the British was a nation state and empire. The idea of Nationalism strengthened the freedom struggle. Under the leadership of Gandhi all people of different origin, cultures, religions and economic classes got united to fight for independence from the British rule.

Hence the idea of India, as we have today,



existed from thousands of years is a fallacy. It is only through the rise of nationalism and finally achieving independence from the British rule that India as a Nation state came into being.

The leaders of the freedom struggle searched for the idea of India. The founding fathers of our nation inspire and instill in us the idea of India. There was near unanimity among them about how our nation should be moulded. During the freedom struggle the people of India with every shade of ideology had identified themselves with the Indian National Congress. The manner in which this movement functioned during the struggle for independence indicated what idea they had for the nation that they had laboured to bring forth.

We are a nation that is blessed with many great people who have fought for great values and dedicated themselves to build the nation along these values. We should salute these leaders, Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, Maulana Azad, Jyotiba Phule, etc.

“Men and women in every age and society want to make their own history, but they do not make it in an historical vacuum. Their effort, however innovative, in finding solution to their problems in the present and charting out their future, are guided and circumscribed, moulded and conditioned, by their respective histories, their inherited economic, political and ideological structure. Our past, present and future is inextricably linked to it.

By the very definition of making history is in the context of our past and our vision for the future. India set on its path, on its own as it were, after independence, i. e., from 1947. But this path has deep roots in the struggle of the people for independence. The political and ideological features, which have had a decisive impact on the post-independence development, are largely a legacy of the freedom struggle. It is a legacy that belongs to all the Indian people, regardless of which party or group they belong to now; for the force which led this struggle from 1885 to 1947 was not a party but a movement. All political trends from the Right to the Left were incorporated in this movement.” (Bhipin Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, K.N. Panikkar and Sucheta Mahajan, etc.)

The vision for the future of Indian was set by the Constituent Assembly which with long strenuous deliberation drafted a Constitution for India. At the heart of the constitutional document was the indelible faith in Indian Nationalism. The visionary founders espoused to deliver the promise of freedom to the masses. The primary aim of the constituent assembly was fostering the goal of social revolution and this was matched only by an interest in securing ‘national unity and stability’. The engine of this social revolution emerged from both the pressing needs of the newly independent country and the Indian National Congress’ long experience of anti-colonial nationalism. The leaders of the Congress successfully transplanted the goals

of freedom struggle as constitutional maxims. According to Nehru, 'Indians did not default their tryst with destiny'. The fundamental rights and the directive principles are the 'conscience' of India.

Along the history, in the context of emergency of 1975, and in 1992 the demolition of Babri Masjid, there was increased demand for further democratization and empowerment among the economically and socially deprived.

The founders' vision of social revolution, national unity, and stability through democracy that formed the 'seamless web' continued to both influence and pose problems for their successors. The country lost its maternal immunity late in the sixties with the waning of the founding generation. The losing immunity came of age in the nineties; perhaps its most difficult time lie ahead.

Can India be a great democracy, strong in itself and, in the eyes of the world, when so many of its people are denied the promise of the Preamble? If the constitution of India was the finest expression of Indian nationalism, why did it not enchant two of the most significant communities of India, the Muslims and the Dalits? The Indian nationalists were at the heart of the founding document, the constitution. Such nationalists believed in democratizing power, in accommodating differences and in integrated pluralism and, above all sought to uplift the down trodden through a social revolution.

What are the outstanding features of the freedom struggle? A major aspect is the values and modern ideals on which the movement itself was based and the broad socio economic and political vision of its leadership (this vision was that of a democratic, civil libertarian and secular India, based on self-reliant, egalitarian social order and an independent stand as against the rest of the world.

• Democratic ideas and institutions in

India: The Indian National Congress was fully committed to and organized on a democratic basis and in the form of a parliament. Having experienced the British authoritarian and despotic rule which did not give any space for freedom of speech and press, the national leaders were whole heartedly committed to drive out not

only the British rulers out of the country but also their despotic rule and replace it with democracy, freedom of speech and freedom of press. The national movement did not see the democratic values to be practiced only after independence, but these values were built in the functioning of the movement itself. There were no decisions taken in the congress without thorough discussion and through consensus. Every resolution was put to vote. People were free to disagree and dissent. Mahatma Gandhi even congratulated those who had the courage of conviction to vote against a resolution.

• **From the beginning the nationalists fought against the attacks by the state on the freedom of the press, of expression and of association.** They made the struggle for these freedoms an integral part of the national movement. The defense of civil liberties was not conceived narrowly, in terms of one political group, but was extended to include the defense of other groups whose views were politically and ideologically different. Gandhiji thus writes on the total civil liberty, "Liberty of speech means that it is unassailed even when the speech hurts; liberty of the Press can be said to be truly respected; only the Press can comment in the severest terms upon and even misrepresent matters. Similarly, freedom of association is truly respected when the assemblies of people can discuss even revolutionary projects." "Civil liberty consistent with observance of non-violence is the first step towards SWARAJ. It is the breath of political and social life. It is the foundation of freedom. There is no room there for dilution or compromise. It is water of life." (B. R. Nanda, Mahatma Gandhi - a Biography.)

Nehru was known for his deep commitment to civil liberty. He kept the civil liberty at par with economic equality and socialism. He wrote, "If civil liberties are suppressed, a nation loses all vitality and becomes impotent for anything substantial." (S. Gopal, Jawaharlal Nehru – a biography vol 1.)

Alex Tuscano is founder of Praxis Research and Training Centre. He began a school near Bangalore to empower the rural children to be able to participate in nation building.



COVER STORY

This Land Is Your Land. This Land Is My Land. This Land Is Our Land. Because We Belong. But How?

SUMIT DASGUPTA

There is no political or social force stronger than a national or group identity. The idea of liberal individualism may seem more dominant but its antithesis that which balances it, is nationalism, tribalism or group or national identity. The nation one belongs to is for most people one of the first and most fundamental ways there to find even if they don't acknowledge it. But what drives this identity? Is it a natural allegiance to those geographically or culturally closest? Or has it developed through the arguments of what utility does national identity have?

Primordialism

One of the first groups of theories of national identity is Primordialism. It is a term first used by Edward Shils who in an influential article written in 1975 argued that national identities with natural ineffable bonds and are the ties of blood. All primordial national identity explains through

congruity, customs, relations, and language one is born into naturally. Primordialism emphasises that national identity is a priori that it is not a changeable social construction but an inevitable force. A strong emotional connection and kinship that drives everyone in unison.

Clifford Geertz another primordial theorist writes that they have overpowering coerciveness in and of themselves. But let's not give all the credit to Primordialism because over the years since its inception it has come under a lot of criticism, for not fully understanding invasion, colonialism, land acquisition and slavery. In an often-quoted article *The Poverty of Primordialism* by Jack David Eller and M. Coughlan argue that evidence disputes the idea that there is anything natural about these ties and that there is strong evidence that they are socially constructed. The authors argue that the language of primordialism implies that national identity is a spiritual, mystical, and unchangeable phenomenon and it has been here since the beginning, withstanding the vagueness of the meaning of beginning. National identity for primordialists, is something that affects you that you don't have any control over.

Enter the Modernists

Modernist theories of national identity generally critique primordialism because they argue that national identity developed roughly over the last two centuries simultaneously to modern phenomena like Capitalism, Democracy, Urbanisation which led to Peri-urbanisation and Industrialisation. In other words, national identity is not a natural or biological inclination. Ernest Gellner is by far the most influential theorists of nationalism. For Gellner modern nationalism, is a clear result of Western Industrialisation in the 19th Century.

Instead of being born into a family roll of cattle butchers or carpenters, a citizen can be "transformed" by the state to suit their requirement. While it is true for America or European countries it is not so easy to understand the nuances of class and caste

difference of India through the same lens. Gellner writes, "A modern society is, in this respect like a modern army, only more so. It provides a very prolonged and fairly thorough training for all its recruits, insisting on certain shared qualifications: literacy, numeracy, basic work habits, and social skills... The assumption is that anyone who has completed the generic training common to the entire population can be re-trained from most other jobs without too much difficulty."

In other words, a shared national culture is necessary for citizens to be mobile and within that culture education, especially universal literacy is key and national identity is essential to modern industrial societies. For example, if I'm from Bangalore and I move to Mumbai I can be sure that things will work in roughly the same way.

Benedict Anderson

Gellner's theory is laid out in the book *Nations and Nationalism* published in 1983; and in the same year another influential book by Benedict Anderson titled *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and the Spread of Nationalism* also was published.

Benedict Anderson defines the nation as imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. He describes the nation as imagined because as he writes, "The members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them yet in the minds of each lives the image of their Communion."

Now, what comes to mind when we hear the term "Anti-National" is someone who is not a fellow patriot and an Indian. But how do we see the members of our own country in either a negative or positive light? How do Indians relate to national identity? Think also about the relationship between the nation as an idea and the concept of the border, for instance even in India where the ocean naturally creates this division, at least in the southern half of it,

but the idea of border only becomes a reality when we use words to describe what is or isn't a national boundary. The current tensions between India and China could elaborate on that even more so. We have never walked along the border of India and it may not be absolutely accurate but we are educated to believe that this patch of land defines us. Anderson suggests that the modern age of nationalism began in the western Europe in the 18th century for a complex variety of reasons including of print capitalism meaning that the wide circulation of reading material to the masses in one common dialect rather than exclusively Latin brought dispersed locales together through a new and shared language. Anderson argues the newspaper began to present the nation as a continuous story with characters coming and exiting the stage at different times on top of this you assume that imagined others in the community. We have read the same story and we share a cultural code.

Anderson's studies look into Asia and Latin America asking why in the former, nationalism in Vietnam, Cambodia and China were at odds with each other when they are all communist countries. And in the latter asking why nationalism developed on a continent with roughly a shared language. Anderson argues that the combination of capitalism and print media created these imagined geographical networks. For example, even in a semi-industrialised society people walking the same path, wearing the same uniform, eating the same sanctioned food, going on the same sanctioned bus and getting information from the same newspaper create a certain shape of intangible stories and bonds that create an illusion of imagined community. Nowadays this is being done by state sponsored TV news channels in the country.

An important question to ask at this point is how Anderson describes our Imagined Communities as political. In one sense as he writes, "Regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail the nation

is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately this fraternity that makes it possible over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings."

Another question to ask is how does an imagined community become so real in the minds of its individual members so as to render such sacrifice as unquestionable and even expected? For Anderson the answer lied somewhere in the construction of nationalism. For example, the state can construct a nationalist sentiment through the idea of the "unknown soldier"—the unknown soldier representing not so much a person but an ideal and becomes the site onto which discourses about the nation come together that one can and should sacrifice their lives for the nation. Anyone by this logic can either be excluded from the national consciousness or be villainised.

The Invention of Tradition

The historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, through a Marxist reading of nationalism in the book *Invention of Tradition* argues that national myths are perpetuated through repetition and continuity of the past which justifies itself through an ability to conserve. A kind of, 'it's worked before so we should keep doing it' mentality. So, nationalism helps to legitimize the status-quo.

Of course those with power are usually the ones to decide on what path does long-standing or successful and so what encounters for elites might not do for the disenfranchised for a Marxist like Hobsbawm. Then nationalism is inherently linked to class; so nationalism and national identity are of course powerful phenomena sometimes encouragingly so and sometimes dangerously. Understanding how and why they function may help us to learn to read and pacify some of its most dangerous effects or expand upon some of its most useful.

Sumit Dasgupta is an assistant professor of Communication Studies, and a close observer of politics and culture.

If You're Good Enough, You're Old Enough

It makes me laugh when some companies (many of them large ones) relate leadership with mere experience. Little do they know that many of those hired “experienced” leaders are nothing but growth breaks and stumbling blocks within a growing organization.

KENNETH LEAN

A serious looking, well clad senior brimming with experience is the first picture that comes to mind when one thinks of a corporate leader. No longer is this picture relevant. A 30-something, jeans clad, restless, technology savvy youngster is ready to replace this portrait. A closer look into the talent growth/leadership development programs are still reluctant to put a young sharp talent above the women and men she/he was reporting to till recently. Is this a lack of boldness or conviction?

In recent times, the number of youngsters starting new enterprises is on the rise. The use of technology to disrupt conventional businesses is making many of these youngsters not only rich but also relevant. Armed with ‘out of the box thinking’, disruptive algorithms, the boldness to die make these young entrepreneurs successful. It’s time established corporates redefine their thinking in these lines.

The 60’s through the 90’s, lots of universities and schools gave birth to entrepreneurs. The breeding ground for entrepreneurs has now shifted well outside the confines of educational arenas with the advent of the internet. If

one could go through the more successful entrepreneurs of the last decade, the young ones are climbing up fast and high. What makes them really tick is their faith in technology to scale their thoughts and to communicate to their markets. If one goes a little deep into the personalities of these individuals one could discover many traits that senior leaders dream of, is deep embedded in these young guns. Fearlessness, the ability to challenge norms, a strong conviction to take on established market leaders, the boldness to dive and test uncharted waters are the tools in the hands of these outstanding young turks. Why are corporations failing to identify these smart young women and men?

Talent spotting is becoming a rarity in the corporate world. If spotted, then nurturing them is certainly non-existent. The frustration that many of these youngsters have bottled within them has thankfully burst out into business ideas. It makes me laugh when some companies (many of them large ones) relate leadership with mere experience. Little do they know that many of those hired “experienced” leaders are nothing

but growth breaks and stumbling blocks within a growing organization.

I vividly recall a discussion with a CEO of a company who was interested in creating a vibrant workplace for the organization. When I suggested that he should have a discussion with a 30 year old concerting colleague of mine, he seemed amused and asked me, "What experience does she have to have a discussion with ME?" I calmly and firmly replied to him that she might not have all the answers but she certainly will have more questions for you that you will not have answers for and those might be the most important questions in this context.

The corporates could take a leaf out of large democracies like France and Canada who have handed out the reigns of very large countries to very young leaders. These young leaders are a breath of fresh air among the hard-nosed grumpy experienced old order of leaders. This is spreading to many other countries. The solid experience of brick and mortar thinking seems to be of the past. Are boards listening to this change? When are job descriptions of CXO's

going to change in line for the new order? It's time CHRO's/HR captains open gates and start making space for dynamic young ones to lead organisational thinking.

A few days ago, I was spending time with a young CEO to discuss the dynamics of his future organisation. All of 32 years, this young man displayed all qualities a 50-something leader would possess. Only thing I found missing were the grey strands on his head and the black suit on his shoulder. I am sure a leader can live without these externals. The more I see and coach these young leaders, the more confident am I of the future industry.

The day our leaders and organizations start listening to the voices of these young promising women and men, the desired change and transformation begins there. Leadership is not about age but on how good you are. If you are good enough, you are old enough.

Kenneth Lean is Group Director and Exec. Coach at Mercuri Urval. Speak with him on +919611293000; or write to him at kenneth.lean@mercuriurval.com



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Pinch and Punch of Petroleum Products

DR. VASUDHA MC

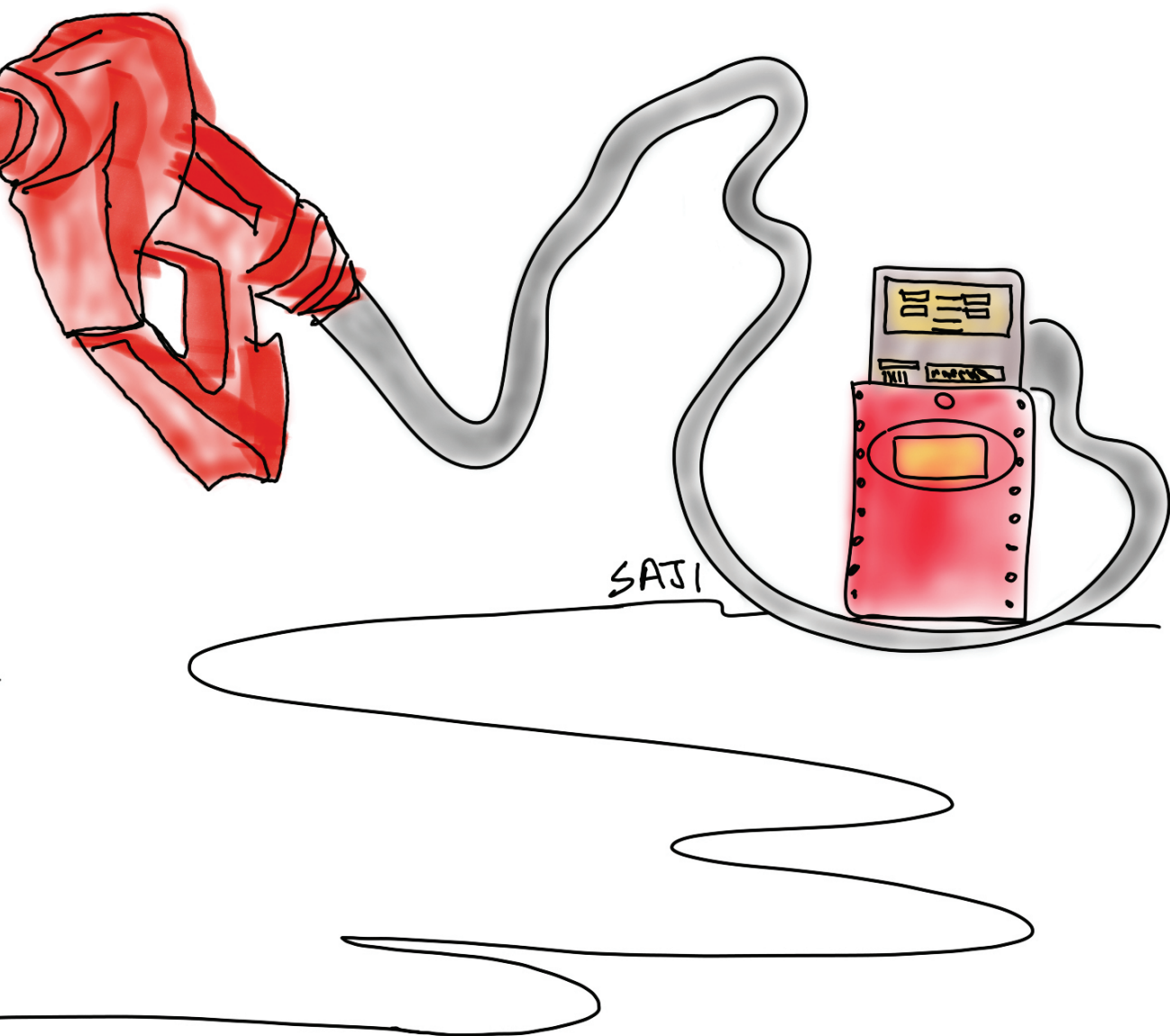
The government cannot function without revenue but they should not mindlessly exploit one source alone. Crude oil at \$65 per barrel would make petrol available at ₹28 per litre. Say that central government levies ₹35 per litre as tax. Then the state government charges 32% of ₹28 (around ₹9) then the road tax of ₹7 and distribution charges 3–4 per litre, transportation cost on the depending on the distance. This adds up to ₹90–100 and sometime even more then ₹100. So, it is evident that government tax is the main component of the end price of petrol and diesel.

Now coming to the problem, Petroleum, cigarette, and liquor are the most heavily taxed commodities in the country. Tax on cigarette and liquor could be with a positive impact of preventing smoking and drinking. But taxing petrol and diesel is counterproductive because it has the inflationary impact on the essential commodities. Further, commutation is not a luxury because it is essential for people to earn their livelihood. It is like taxing the livelihood



on the one hand and promoting inflations in essential commodities on the other which is rather difficult for common people to overcome.

By making LPG available at subsidiary rate or through welfare scheme (Ujwala) scheme makes it rather inescapable for government to make it much dearer for other sections of the society which is not included in the scheme. It is actually middle class which largest consumer of LPG which gets hit hard. So, it is better to make renewable energy at the affordable price to



overcome hardship faced by common people. In the 90s when crude oil in international market was \$100 barrel, petrol was being sold for ₹60 per litre. It makes no sense now when the crude oil is \$60 per barrel, the petrol price has crossed more than ₹100 (in U. P) and in Karnataka around ₹94.

This shows that the current problem with regard to the price of petrol is squarely or solely owing to the mismanagement of tax regime, which requires a thorough revision instead

of taxing petrol and diesel that are essential commodities which makes still other essential commodities go out of reach of common man. The government needs to relook and reduce tax on petroleum products. Making people addicted to use of LPG and later on taxing them for their dependency on their LPG (Ujwala scheme) is frustrating.

Dr. Vasudha MC is a professor of Sociology and a keen observer of social structures and dynamics.

Weaving a New Herstory at Home

The shift towards inclusivity that embraces the visibility of women is definitely, happening; but it is painfully slow and moreover, stymied by many contemporary realities.

A FRANCIS

Beyond the momentum of the celebration of the International Women's Day, some countries dedicated a full month as National Women's History Month to honour the contributions of women to respective nations and the world, at large. Countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America have been celebrating it in the month of March, where as Canada opted for October. We might wonder why many countries don't have national celebration of Women's History Month! On the upper arc of that intriguing musing curve, we could place another relevant question: 'If women's history is part of the social history, why do we set women's history apart?' We could perhaps take a leaf from the wisdom of Erin Blakemore, who authored the book, *The Heroine's Bookshelf*: "Until 20th century, history books focused on society's powerful – white, wealthy, male." Despite human history is built by all kinds of people and more than half of them are women, in the traditional ways of recording the social history, women are as much as marginalized as the disregarded, the anonymous. With this 'culturally determined and psychologically internalized marginality of women', as rightly pointed out by Gerda Lerner, the Austrian-born American historian, we could also observe the socio-political phenomenon, that the world has been celebrating heroes;

sheroes have been deliberately ignored. By the way, the word 'shero' has been around for a long time; but just like the incredible share of women in history, the word too is ignored.

The tremendous effort of placing women in history, a major focus that women's movements all over the world are single-mindedly committed to is, no doubt, transforming our social history from a monographic and monolithic male-oriented account to an inclusive one that is predicated on the diversity of people, sexes and orientations. This shift towards inclusivity that embraces the visibility of women is definitely, happening; but it is painfully slow and moreover, stymied by many contemporary realities, all across the globe.

Our lived realities of today become the indelibly woven history of tomorrow. In the context of weaving women's history, we cannot keep silence about contemporary lived realities that perpetuate suffering and alienation of women.

Misogynistic Household Killings

Heard about the term 'everyday terrorism?' Myrna Dawson, a Canadian professor, attributes it to the misogynistic household killing. That is, killing of a female in a domestic and household context by an intimate partner or a family member.

Referring to the spike in gender-based violence against women and girls during lockdown, the UN Women broadcasted in April 2020: “We see a shadow pandemic growing, of violence against women.”

The first time I read it, I thought it was a ‘misnomer. It sounded rather hyperbolic and extremely far-fetched! With broad strokes, I dismissed it as nothing more than ‘magnification,’ a cognitive distortion that denotes exaggeration of a negative event. Fair enough, my male chauvinist self hidden underneath a well-trimmed politically correct persona sneaked out with an instant social analysis, “A typical streak of feminism! They make a mountain of accusation out of a molehill of petty mistakes and shortcomings of every man.” Here we go again!

Reading further on Dawson, I could not, however, lean too long on my dismissive, stereotypic self reminder -cum-social analysis narrative. My skepticism, coupled with a personal research interest, propelled me to the UN Women’s Report 2020, Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women. I was literally struck by a disturbing one-liner statistic: “Daily 137 women are killed globally by a member of their family.”

Good heavens, 50,005 women a year! Wait a minute, this data captures only the femicides committed by intimate-partners and immediate family members. Just the tip of the ice-berg!

The Shadow Pandemic

COVID-19 has contributed a new term to our everyday English lexicon, the ‘shadow pandemic’. Referring to the spike in gender-based violence against women and girls during lockdown, the UN Women broadcasted in April 2020: “We see a shadow pandemic growing, of violence against women.” Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the executive director of the UN Women, explained that the violence against women and girls has skyrocketed to three times more than before.

Did we get the math? Well, prior to the pandemic, there were 243 million women and girls aged between 15 and 49 were subjected

to sexual or/and physical violence in a period of twelve months. Now, do the math of multiplication. Sunita Toor, an academic criminologist, women and children’s rights activist holds the view that the vast majority of victims neither come forward to report the violence they suffer nor they seek help. If that is the case, I don’t think our math could ever be correct, because the reality exceeds the math of multiplication!

Making of ‘Heroic Male and Degraded Female’

In proposing a solution for tackling violence against women, Madhumita Pandey, a lecturer in criminology offers an interesting perspective to the etiology of male violent behaviour. Using a developmental lens, she underscores the male-dominated home environment as the seedbed of misdirected masculinity in boys. Reflecting on her upbringing, she points out that in childhood/adolescent period onward the degradation saga of a female begins: “...when boys enjoy new privileges reserved only for men – such as autonomy, mobility, opportunity and power. Whereas girls have to start enduring restrictions. Their parents curtail their mobility, monitor their interactions with males and in some cases even withdraw them from school.”

Home is the place where everything starts from, and so it does with the making of the ‘heroic’ male and the ‘degraded’ female, if I may borrow these terms from Judith Herman, psychiatrist and the author of the classic, *Trauma and Recovery*, to describe the kinds of pathological accommodations that we set our children up for. This means, there is much, so much, to change in our homes when we are thinking about ensuring women’s place in history, celebrating our sheroes, and above all, ending violence against women, whether it is verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual or/and lethally physical. The starting point to these changes, certainly, is our commitment to weaving a new herstory in our homes!

A Francis is a certified clinician and supervisor in psychotherapy, and marriage, family and couple therapy and works in a multicultural community setting of the Greater Toronto, Canada.



Pandemic of Politics

The diabolical tactics employed to anesthetize the consciences of the common citizen in a nation such as ours is a plain disaster.

GERRY LOBO OFM

The new Corona Virus Pandemic broke out in China in 2019. This deadly Virus, killing thousands per day, gradually crept into other nations following the same pattern and landed up in our country in the early days of 2020 infecting the whole land and leaving many its victims. However, even before the onset of this deadly pandemic, our country had been infected and suffocated by a deadlier pandemic than Covid-19. One might baptize it as, the “Pandemic of Modi-Shah Politics.”

Being a far devastating virus, this political pandemic has degraded the human body as well as the human soul. Rupturing the unitive fabric of the Indian society, it has wounded the entire nation itself. By disregarding the basic human rights, it has birthed a culture of death through communal violence. By silencing the sacred and free democratic speech, the voice of the people, the pandemic of politics has created divisive forces of power. It has let down the common citizen into the ditch of economic and social poverty by way of massive unemployment and mental distress. On the opposite side, the same pandemic has promoted economic empire builders to prosper at the cost of even a frugal meal earned by the sweat of a labourer, the

hard toil of a farmer and the agony of a road-side vendor. If Covid-19 pandemic struck down humans, physically causing a mortal blow on thousands in a second, the political pandemic of a majoritarian government has cancerously eliminated thousands more. As a consequence distress and death are the only visible signs on the very citizens without whom a nation is but an illusion.

More than the Corona virus pandemic, the haze of the political pandemic is sparse, effecting not merely the physical breathlessness and bronchial malady but also causing the human malady of an unhappy, uncertain and unpredictable breathlessness among a very large part of our Independent nation. What if a nation is drowned in an inimical political power ambition, seeking to destabilize the legitimately established governments down the lane? Where is the polity of a “sovereign nation” with its “sacred Constitutions”? The pandemic of politics is eventually passing from the government of the people, for the people and with the people to that of an autocratic fundamentalism by snubbing the voice of a nation. The pandemic of politics is real; it is annihilating systematically the public institutions, peace-loving communities,

sacred religions and their contribution to humanity, migrants and emigrants, families and neighbourhoods. It is a pandemic which is stumping down public opinion of the commoner by subtle threats, but freeing the highly favoured ones who support the game-winners in the political arena for egoistic motives with a hypocritical feeling for the “national security.”

The citizens of our nation have weathered bravely the onslaught of Covid-19 pandemic in the best possible way, not only by being vaccinated but also by their disciplined sense of movement and other use of safety measures. However, weathering the deadly pandemic of politics has not been easy as the virus of aggressive religious war through the media propaganda is sweeping the nation rapidly ever since the majoritarian dispensation at the helm of affairs is controlling the destiny of a free nation. The mind of our people is not without fear and their heads cannot be held high! Fear had gripped people during the hype in Covid cases. But that fear being slowly vanished, the fear of voicing out for justice is far from being diminished. Democracy seems to be paving the way to a two-pillared strong willed conqueror. Pandemic of politics is truly a monster without size. It is visibly apparent in every human sector and yet, like the virus, elusive from the human sight but deeply experienced by every individual who desires a happier and healthier life. With the courts generously providing beneficial safety valves, the executive is only affirmed in its intentions and fortified of its resolutions on a daily basis to rule with iron fists and direct its course to its own final ends, but not towards the well-being of millions.

Covid-19 Pandemic may not be anyone's invention, as some supposed it to be in its initial spread in China killing thousands within a short span of time. Scientific advancement of today could have the possibility of inventing diseases and causing deaths. If so it would only reveal the evil intentions of human brain. God forbid! On the other hand the political pandemic of the powerful ruining happy and peaceful human existence today is an outright diabolical manipulation of the pillars of democracy and the truncating of the foundations laid by

the sacrifices of other-concerned historical personalities. Certainly this does not speak well of our renowned nation! Diabolus works with diverting the focus of individuals and families, institutions and organizations, societies and corporations in order to exhibit the hollow achievements of the powerful political clout and to maintain a false peace. The diabolical tactics employed to anesthetize the consciences of the common citizen in a nation such as ours is a plain disaster - humanity eliminated from bare humanity! The physical masks to protect oneself from the Corona virus is a must and unquestionable. However, masks of blatant lies and false pretensions, shallow promises and boneless laws such as the farm laws framed and passed by the majoritarian Government, are to be abhorred, so that truth may speak the Truth and silence may pronounce the Justice from the roof-tops!

Covishield vaccine administered by the Government today is a laudable initiative and for a worthy cause. Sacred human lives will be saved by this vaccination project, for sure. However, without a conscientious effort by the political powers at all levels of our society to undo the hypocritical manoeuvres and poisonous ideologies in the name of God are erased by inoculating the vaccine of affirmation of life and confidence into the hearts of people, the human generated pandemic of slow death brought about by the vested interests will persist until the entire human face is effaced and ‘man will be wolf to man’!

Every citizen who loves his or her fellow citizens bears the responsibility, not only to eradicate Covid-19 but also and more importantly to destroy the ‘poison of the powerful’ who generate the ‘pandemic of politics’ by electing conscientious, just and compassionate leaders. From the experience of living under the powerful majoritarianism politics, the citizens of this nation must now learn to learn to view reality from a larger perspective and judge the course of time. To be sure, the ‘poison of the powerful’ will never last long. History reveals the truth!

Gerry Lobo OFM is a professor, writer and scholar in Franciscanism and Spirituality.

Pourakarmikas: The Green Army of the City

IN PICTURES

KRITI M KAUSHIK

Back in school, I was part of a movement called the CMCA (Children's Movement for Civic Awareness). I do not know about others, but it surely made me aware of a lot of the wrongs we do, unintentionally, the 'I did it because they did it' kind, and the mistakes we have been committing under the name of 'tradition and culture'. In addition to all this, we also learnt about the importance of our Pourakarmikas. Pourakarmikas are civic workers who sweep streets and pick up garbage from our neighbourhoods in Bengaluru city. This city produces 5000 metric tons of solid waste per day—an average generation rate of 0.5 kg per capita per day.

It is they who have played a pivotal role in maintaining cleanliness of every city. Hats off to them for working tirelessly even during such

tough times like the pandemic, compromising their own safety. Can one imagine life without them? Our homes and surroundings would have turned into dump yards if not for these people. Rather than sympathising with their plight, it is high time we started empathising with them.

Despite the Swacch Bharath campaign, the innumerable announcements about, and rise in awareness about climate change, nurturing the nature and everything else being done to save the environment, there are people who do not seem to care. They litter constantly, and expect somebody else to clean up their mess and, this 'somebody' are ultimately the Pourakarmikas. Wouldn't it be better if we helped them keep the city clean by doing what we should, rather than being irresponsible and burdening them further?







The Gift of Hearing

In India four out of hundred children are born with hearing loss. Regrettably many cases are not detected and the child's lack of response to sound is misinterpreted as low IQ.

MONICA FERNANDES

Like me, the majority of you would be able to see the print of this magazine and feel its glossy surface. We are able to hear our favourite song and perhaps sing it. Furthermore, we are able to enjoy the fragrance of a mogra flower and relish the taste of a well prepared bhel puri. The gift of our five senses is something we take for granted.

A teacher once asked her class to name the Seven Wonders of the World. Pat came the usual answers of architectural marvels created by man. One bright little girl, however, answered that the wonders were God's generous gifts of love, laughter and the five senses including that of hearing. For those who are profoundly deaf from birth and their families, hearing opens shut doors to endless possibilities of learning and activity once out of their reach. During these days of online studies,

a deaf child is severely disadvantaged. The gift of hearing is indeed one of the seven wonders. Hence the invention of the cochlear implant is indeed a miracle.

The miracle workers at Holy Family Hospital (HFH), Bandra, Mumbai are none other than Dr. Chris de Souza, MS, DORL, DNB, FACS, FRCS, and his team of ENT surgeons, audiologists, a speech therapist, a social worker, a co-ordinator and the nuns of HFH who have extended full support to this noble endeavour. Dr. Chris and his team received a papal blessing dated 11th December 2020 for their work in restoring the hearing of around 200 patients, mainly poor and marginalized children.

The cochlear implant program at HFH is open to all, irrespective of community, location in India and income group. Each cochlear implant, including training, costs around Rs. 8 lakhs. Generous donors such as Salman Khan, Ratan Tata, and other smaller donors have enabled these operations to take place on underprivileged children. On his part, Dr. Chris waives his charges. A gurdwara has offered its services to provide food and accommodation for Rs. 100 a day for those hailing from other parts of the country. Generous donors have pitched in to defray these nominal costs for those who cannot afford them.

The cochlear implant is a device that directly stimulates the auditory nerve endings through electrical impulses conveyed through tiny wires. It consists of two units. The external unit is outside the ear. Its function is to collect sound waves through a microphone and transmit them digitally to the implant which is an internal device that bypasses the damaged portion of the inner ear. After the operation, extensive speech training has to be imparted to the recipients.

In India four out of hundred children are born with hearing loss. Regrettably many cases are not detected and the child's lack of response to sound is misinterpreted as low IQ. Experts say that it is better to operate on the child at an earlier age as a child who cannot hear is unable to learn to talk and it becomes a challenge to teach the child. To address this issue, HFH has

an audiology department which is housed in a cheerful room with attractive paintings. It has state of the art equipment that facilitates the very accurate evaluation of the hearing of new born children. This is needed because very small children cannot speak and are therefore unable to tell anyone if they can hear or not.

I was privileged to be invited to a program for children who have received implants and their parents on 3rd March 2020 which is International Hearing Day hosted by HFH. After brief talks parents of children who have received cochlear transplants were invited to speak briefly. The beaming mother of Mohd Azam had good reason to call Dr. Chris the 'Godfather' of deaf children. Mohd was treated as a Special child prior to the implant. He is now going to a normal school where he is progressing well. The cochlear implant has enabled Radhika to pursue Bharat Natyam. I met Radhika's mother and she proudly told me that Radhika will be performing shortly in Karnataka. The excitement on the faces of the young recipients of the implants was palpable as they came forward with their parents to be felicitated. The children then performed for us. They joyfully danced, sang and recited poems for those present. What a delightful way of celebrating the gift of sound!

It is not only children who have benefited from cochlear implant. Implants have been successfully conducted on older patients as well. This is, however, more prevalent in the West and is yet to catch on in India. At the function Dr. Chris spoke about a young lady who was severely hearing impaired. This lady, the sole bread winner of her family, was about to lose her job when she started getting deaf. She went through with the cochlear implant and was thus able to save her job.

The cochlear implant unit has been functioning throughout the pandemic.

For enquiries, HFH may be contacted during day time working hours at 9820166426/8850417360; email id : cochlearimplantholyhospital@gmail.com. Useful sites to visit are www.soundz4life.org and www.cochlear-implant.in.

Silence Is Golden

What is spoken in the air loudly may fail to make sense but not the silence aptly used at the right moment.

ROSHAN LOBO OFM

Many of the things in nature happen in silence. The natural world functions harmoniously without making much noise. The beautiful docu-series titled *Our Planet* narrated by David Attenborough, the famous British natural historian amazed me. It showcased the splendid beauty of habitat in our planet from the frozen world of Antarctica to the lush green lands of North America relying on each other for their survival and how climate change is adversely impacting this very survival. Throughout the documentary, the different episodes bring out the silent functioning of these habitats and this functioning is very vital for the sustenance of our planet.

Many living species barring us function silently and harmoniously, contributing to the betterment of each other. For instance, ants march in silence gathering things to build their hills or big predators move in silence to grab their prey. In contrast, we love the noise. Without clatter and clamour, we can't imagine our life. Ludwig Wittgenstein noted that "without a border, there would be no world. There would also be no world without silence." In a world engrossed in noisy affairs, silence and quietness scare. The greatest challenge for someone so used to keeping busy and noisy is how to remain silent for a minute. In paying homage to the departed bigwigs, it's a usual practice to maintain a minute's silence. But how hard even that is. Someone can shut my mouth or I can refrain from speaking and be able to observe external silence but who will be able to slow down the flow of thoughts in my mind? Seen that way, the complete silence of a whole

human person is a very hard task.

We love talking and chattering. Words uttered in the air bring out sound and if I rattle around with words it becomes noise. Silence is the absence of words, sound and noise. The very absence of something is deprivation. Something is meant to 'be there' but it is 'not there'. In silence, sound or noise is deprived of its opportunity 'to be there'. The absence of something indicates weakness. Does the absence of sound or noise in silence indicate that it is weak? Is silence weak?

Silence is powerful because at times it can speak in volumes and convey the depth of words without being uttered. What is spoken in the air loudly may fail to make sense but not the silence aptly used at the right moment. Silence at an appropriate moment, with appropriate people and for an appropriate purpose can be a powerful medium of communication. Silence in such sense communicates something very meaningful which words fail to convey.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of declaring St. Joseph as the patron saint of the Universal Church. Hence, Pope Francis has dedicated this year to St. Joseph. The silence of St. Joseph is worthy of admiration. He was not in the limelight but a man of silence and his silent work accomplished many things in God's plan of salvation. He was careful not to steal the limelight from Jesus.

To remain as the centre of attraction, people go to any extent. If we bombard people's minds with ideas and can make an opinion out of every trivial issue, we are counted genius. Without being in the limelight a lot of work can be



accomplished in silence. During the pandemic, a lot of frontline workers have slogged tirelessly and more importantly 'silently' for others without wishing to be at the limelight. There is nothing uttered much about them. Some of them were recognised but many of them remained hidden and unnoticed. Yet their hard work brought tremendous success. Their silence and dedication were the key indicators of their hard work.

Silence is powerful because it is the medium in which divinity is experienced. How to understand a great mystery like God? Prophet Elijah experienced the presence of mighty God in the sound of sheer silence. Silence becomes the answer to many of life's questions. The constant search for the great existential questions of life makes me a seeker, questioning the very answers that I find in search of such questions makes me a reasoning person but maintaining silence by accepting my inability to probe deeper into the mysteries of life that baffle human mind make me truly an enlightened soul. Silence was and is found to be a conducive solution to life's mysterious 'Bermuda Triangles'.

Today there are concerted efforts to silence

the voice of people who speak against injustice and atrocities of the 'privileged'. *But what if by causing "silence" within myself I make myself deaf to those sounds that I'm to hear "there"*, asks Henryk Elzenberg. That's precisely what the privileged ones do by remaining deaf to the sounds that are meant to be heard. Neither they speak nor let others speak. This kind of silence is uncalled for. But maintaining a healthy silence is important for anyone in a noisy world of ours.

The ability to speak when needed and remain silent when situation demand is a challenge. Knowing when to be silent and when not is a sign of wisdom. If I remain silent when I am supposed to speak and if I speak when I am supposed to be silent, the very purpose of speech and silence is defeated. It is better to be silent when I do not know how to respond to a situation that overwhelms me than speak. Ludwig Wittgenstein was right when he said "Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent" because silence is golden.

Roshan Lobo ofm is a Franciscan priest and has a deep interest in family and society.

Life of Determination and a Journey of Transformation



The young family was deserted by their father when Alphonsa was only a toddler. Her mother, unable to take care of Alphonsa, left her in an orphanage run by the Sisters of Charity.

DR NIMMIE SCN

The charming Alphonsa Mathew, a volunteer with Sister Gracy Thombrakudy SCN in ministry to the migrants, has at last found her way to influence the civic system by taking a plunge into local politics. The retired school teacher, Mrs. Alphonsa Mathew was recently elected as councillor in the administrative body of Calicut District, Kerala. **Sister Sincy Sebastian SCN** interviewed Alphonsa after she was inducted into the local administrative body. As she normally is, Alphonsa gladly responded to all her queries and here is a summary of the conversation.

Growing up under the tutelage of the Sisters of Charity, young Alphonsa was determined to leave her mark in the society. She knew that education was the only way to reach her goal.

The petite woman Alphonsa Mathew is a mother of two grown up daughters one of whom is settled in Canada. The fact that Alphonsa does not reveal any trace of the forgettable childhood she had is itself an inspiration. The young family was deserted by their father when Alphonsa was only a toddler. Her mother, unable to take care of Alphonsa, left her in an orphanage run by the Sisters of Charity. Alphonsa dedicates all her accolades to the sisters who cared for her from the day she entered the orphanage. The sisters of the orphanage identified a natural leader in Alphonsa and had always backed her to hone her leadership skills.

Growing up under the tutelage of the Sisters of Charity, young Alphonsa was determined to leave her mark in the society. She knew that education was the only way to reach her goal. That she did. Qualifying herself with a teacher's training, post graduate degree in English along with a bachelor's degree in Education, Alphonsa cleared the Public Service Commission examination with ease. She served as a teacher and Headmistress until her retirement a year ago. Reflecting on her profession, Alphonsa feels that her original motivation was to impart gospel values to all her co-workers and students. She went out of her way to render assistance to any one in need. She continued to respond as an instrument of God's peace to many broken families. Again, the Sisters in the orphanage were her source of inspiration. Married to a farmer, Mr. Mathew, she felt her husband's supportive hand at every stage of her progress. When Alphonsa needed a caretaker at home to attend to her two lovely daughters, Mathew, her husband could always be relied upon. Alphonsa feels that Mathew was her partner in every sense. From raising the daughters to steadying

the family financially, Mathew and Alphonsa were truly partners.

Then there was a time in her life that called her to go beyond her familiar zone. That is when she joined hands with Sr. Gracy Thombrakudy SCN and sensed her mission to be voice for the voiceless. During her journey in the ministry to migrants, she witnessed the discrimination meted out to the migrants by the locals. Moved with compassion and determination to fight for their rights, she opted to walk hand in hand with Sr. Gracy to bring justice to the migrants. It has been one of her most satisfying period of life she says.

Then Alphonsa realized that just being a social activist is insufficient to bring justice to the poor and the needy. To influence a system for a change, she needed to enter into politics to raise her voice against the atrocities done to the marginalized of the society. She is well aware that only through political intervention can she achieve her goals in reaching out to those in the periphery.

As one who believes in the phrase, 'Walk the talk', she is confident that she can continue to help the migrants. Alphonsa believes that she can bring about a change in the existing policies for the migrants and monitor their welfare programs. Alphonsa wants the society to see the face of God in each person and particularly in the migrants who contribute immensely to the economy of the state, and wishes that every person offers selfless services to bring about justice and values of the reign of God.

For Alphonsa her life began with a determination and it led her to a journey of transformation.

Dr. Nimmie SCN is a professor of mathematics; works towards women empowerment.

Learning How to See

RICHARD ROHR OFM

Every viewpoint is a view from a point. Unless we recognize and admit our own personal and cultural viewpoints, we will never know how to decentralize our own perspective. We will live with a high degree of illusion and blindness that brings much suffering into the world. I think this is what Simone Weil (1909–1943) meant in saying that the love of God is the source of all truth. Only an outer and positive reference point utterly grounds the mind and heart.

One of the keys to wisdom is that we must recognize our own biases, our own addictive preoccupations, and those things to which, for some reason, we refuse to pay attention. Until we see these patterns (which is early-stage contemplation), we will never be able to see what we do not see. No wonder that both Socrates (c. 470–399 BCE) and Saint Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) declared self-knowledge to be the first and necessary entrance way to wisdom. Without such critical awareness of the small self, there is little chance that any individual will produce truly great knowing or enduring wisdom.

Everyone sees the world from a certain, defined cultural perspective. But people who have done their inner work also see beyond their own biases to something transcendent, something that crosses the boundaries of culture and individual experience.

People with a distorted image of self, world, or God will be largely incapable of experiencing

what is really real in the world. They will see things through a narrow keyhole. They'll see instead what they need reality to be, what they're afraid it is, or what they're angry about. They'll see everything through their aggressiveness, their fear, or their agenda. In other words, they won't see it at all.

That's the opposite of contemplatives, who see what is, whether it's favourable or not, whether it meets their needs or not, whether they like it or not, and whether or not that reality causes weeping or rejoicing. Most of us will usually misinterpret our experience until we have been moved out of our false centre. Until then, there is too much of the self in the way.

We all play our games, cultivating our prejudices and our unredeemed vision of the world. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and other scholastics said that all people choose as objective good something that merely appears good to them, foreseeing the postmodern critique by 700 years. No one willingly does evil. Each of us has put together a construct by which we explain why what we do is necessary and good. This is the specialty of the ego, the small or false self that wants to protect its agenda and project itself onto the public stage. We need support in unmasking our false self and in distancing ourselves from our illusions. For this it is necessary to install a kind of "inner observer." Some people talk about a "fair witness." At first that sounds impossible, but with patience and practice, it can be done and even becomes quite natural.

Recognizing Our Biases

People can't see what they can't see. Their biases get in the way, surrounding them like a high wall, trapping them in ignorance, deception, and illusion. No amount of reasoning and argument will get through to them, unless we first learn how to break down the walls of bias.

Confirmation Bias: We judge new ideas based on the ease with which they fit in with and confirm the only standard we have: old ideas, old information, and trusted authorities. As a result, our framing story, belief system, or paradigm excludes whatever doesn't fit.

Complexity Bias: Our brains prefer a simple falsehood to a complex truth.

Community Bias: It's almost impossible to see what our community doesn't, can't, or won't see.

Complementarity Bias: If you are hostile to my ideas, I'll be hostile to yours. If you are curious and respectful toward my ideas, I'll respond in kind.

Competency Bias: We don't know how much (or little) we know because we don't know how much (or little) others know. In other words, incompetent people assume that most other people are about as incompetent as they are. As a result, they underestimate their [own] incompetence, and consider themselves at least of average competence.

Consciousness Bias: Some things simply can't be seen from where I am right now. But if I keep growing, maturing, and developing, someday I will be able to see what is now inaccessible to me.

Comfort or Complacency Bias: I prefer not to have my comfort disturbed.

Conservative/Liberal Bias: I lean toward nurturing fairness and kindness, or towards strictly enforcing purity, loyalty, liberty, and authority, as an expression of my political identity.

Confidence Bias: I am attracted to confidence, even if it is false. I often prefer the bold lie to the hesitant truth.

Catastrophe or Normalcy Bias: I remember dramatic catastrophes but don't notice gradual decline (or improvement).

Contact Bias: When I don't have intense and sustained personal contact with "the other," my prejudices and false assumptions go unchallenged.

Cash Bias: It's hard for me to see something when my way of making a living requires me not to see it.

Conspiracy Bias: Under stress or shame, our brains are attracted to stories that relieve us, exonerate us, or portray us as innocent victims of malicious conspirators.

I see almost every one of them within myself—at least at some point in my life. How can

I let go of that? How can I move beyond that? I don't know any other way to be free of all these biases except through the contemplative mind.

"Whatever is received is received according to the manner of the receiver." Thirteenth-century scholastics such as John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) intuited this. What it means, in other words, is that we don't see things as they are; we see things as we are. We see the things we want to see, the things that confirm our assumptions and our preferred way of looking at the world. Brian elaborates today on how confirmation bias, which he believes is the most powerful, operates:

We all have filters, [such as] What do I already believe? Does this new idea or piece of information confirm what I already think? Does it fit in the frame I've already constructed?

If so, I can accept it. If not, in all likelihood, I'm simply going to reject it as unreasonable and unbelievable, even though doing so is, well, unreasonable.

I do this, not to be ignorant, but to be efficient. My brain (without my conscious awareness, and certainly without my permission) makes incredibly quick decisions as it evaluates incoming information or ideas. Ideas that fit in are easy and convenient to accept, and they give me pleasure because they confirm what I already think.

But ideas that don't fit easily will require me to think, and think twice, and maybe even rethink some of my long-held assumptions. That kind of thinking is hard work. It requires a lot of time and energy. My brain has a lot going on, so it interprets hard work like this as pain.

Wanting to save me from that extra reframing work, my brain presses a "reject" or "delete" button when a new idea presents itself. "I'll stick with my current frame, thank you very much," it says. And it gives me a little jolt of pleasure to reward me for my efficiency.

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Choices

The most perplexing and perhaps shocking thought is why human choices are so diverse, given the same opportunities.

BOBBY JOSE KATTIKAD OFM CAP



Life is like a buffet! Everything under the Sun is served. Life deserves the right choices because you already know what works for your wellbeing. What a great responsibility freedom is! The most perplexing and perhaps shocking thought is why human choices are so diverse, given the same opportunities.

The assassin of Abraham Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth had a very famous brother, actor Edwin Booth. The man, who thought he had slipped into irreparable humiliation by

his brother, withdrew from the public space. One day, Edwin Booth, who was standing at the Railway station, saved the life of a young man who slipped from the platform on to the tracks. A few days later he received an official note: 'It was Robert Todd Lincoln, son of Abraham Lincoln who was saved by your timely intervention. He kept that note with him until he died. This is the first time I've read this story from Max Lucado's book 'He Chose the Nails'. He reads this in conjunction with the basic tenets of the Bible - life and death are laid before you. The narrow path and the wide path, the front door and the back door, the crowd and the little flock, the house built on a rock and the house built on sand - so many choices that life puts on your plate.

It all ends on the cross. Two types of approaches occur from either side of the cross. Almost everything was common between those two convicted thieves. The same crimes, the same punishment, the same crowd around. Even the distance to Jesus' cross is equal. And yet this is how things happened. Like the poetic saying: 'two men look outside the prison bars; one Sees Mud, the other stars'.

One of the criminals hanging on the cross cursed him; Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us! The other scolded the first and said, "Do you not fear God?" You are in the same judgment as he is. And indeed we have been condemned justly. We have been rewarded according to our crimes. But this man has done nothing wrong. Looking at Jesus he continued, "Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom!" Jesus replied: Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

The Mighty Migrant Workforce

Their work is very crucial for the development of urban infrastructure. But their income and living conditions are subhuman.

ALEX TUSCANO

Who are the migrant workers? They are an unintended part of every city and town of India. If they were not available, all the cities and towns would have come to a standstill. They provide labour to remove garbage of our cities. They clear the sewage of our cities. They provide domestic help to households. They construct houses and the malls of our cities. The factories are being constructed by them. They build bridges, railways and metros. We have seen them standing precariously at an infinitely high places on high rise buildings under construction, risking their lives. The reports of their deaths in sewage tanks, falling from great heights and dying, falling under the collapsed scaffolding and dying, they being run over by recklessly driven vehicles, often by drunken drivers cease to stop. To sum up, the migrant labourers are life line of the cities and towns. But the irony is that, most often, nobody loves them, nobody cares for them. They are not trusted and they become victims of suspicion, if there was any murder and dacoity around they would be the first one to be arrested.

Migrant workers have come from the villages

of Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. There are also migrants within each state. Labourers from Kalaburagi, Raichur, Beedhar come to Bangalore city looking for jobs. Their native places are drought prone and economically backward areas. Most of these people are landless, they work as agricultural wage labourers and when there is no work in their villages they move to the cities in search of work. Some are marginal farmers with land for just one crop. Given the agrarian distress and farmers' suicide, the rural economy is not able to give them yearlong employment. The only option to them is to migrate to the cities for work.

Migrant Labourers—Industrial Reserve Army

The migrant labourers are essential and most indispensable part of the workforce of India. They are called "industrial reserve army". In order to facilitate industrial development Special Economic Zones were created by different state government in the rural areas. Agricultural land was acquired by displacing the farmers from their land and turning them into landless labourers. Similarly, vast tracks of

forestland were taken away from the Adivasis, who enjoyed customary right to this land, for the purpose of mining coals and minerals. These Adivasis were displaced from their homes and lands to fend for themselves. They were forced to migrate to the cities in search of work. But they did not become redundant. On and off they were called for work for a period of time and sent back to the rank of unemployed masses. Once proud landowners and farmers they became migrant labourers. They were compared with the reserve army. They are required in the agricultural economy as well as in the industrial economy. They may have work in the rural area during the time of sowing and harvesting. They are also required in the urban centres for construction activities. Construction industry is one of the biggest industries in the society and it employs the largest working force. But this industry will give employment only seasonally. During rainy season the construction activity takes a break. The migrant labourers go back to their villages and the agriculture would be waiting for them to employ them. These labourers do not have permanent houses in the urban centres. Their main stay is in their villages. But they have no permanent work in their own villages. They are like “*dhobi ka kutta, na ghar ka na ghat ka*” (*The dog that belongs to a washerman (dhobi) does not belong either to the home (of the dhobi) nor to the ghat (where the clothes are washed)*).

The migrant labourers contribute immensely to the urban economy. About 30% of the Indian economy depends on the migrant labourers. In their absence from the cities small scale industries will not survive.

Their work is very crucial for the development of urban infrastructure. But their income and living conditions are subhuman. Agriculture cannot proceed without these workers but their wages are miserably low. Every construction work before getting approval will have to put substantial amount of money in “Workers’ Welfare Fund”. This fund goes into the treasury of the government. Every worker will

have to be registered with the workers’ welfare board. Now the question is whose welfare this fund is being utilized? In times of crisis the workers get no assistance from the workers’ welfare board.

The migrant labour is a permanent component of our workforce. But they always remain at the receiving end. During the situation of crisis, they suffer the most, not just having to starve but receiving inhuman treatment from their employers and from the state.

But the main issue is not that the migrant labourers are shelter less or hungry. The issue is that they are the victims of an unjust system.

The government has kept huge amount of money to build new parliament building. The Government has sanctioned huge amount of money to build a bullet train from Mumbai to Ahmedabad. Government will give huge bailout package for the big industries to tide over the crisis caused by this shutdown.

Already Niranjan Hiranandini, the president of the Industry body of real estate developers has made it clear that they would need \$ 200 billion, with the ability to go up to \$ 300 billion. He says they would require \$ 100 billion immediately and then after four months another \$ 100 billion and after 8 months the third instalment of \$ 100 billion. \$ 300 billion would mean Rs. 22.89 lakh crore. This is indeed a mind-blowing figure for India to cater to. Where will this money come from? We have heard of huge amount of NPAs, (non-performing assets) with the bank. The most of the non-performing assets have been declared as bad loans and written off. This is an annual feature with the banks. Vijay Mallya, Lalit Modi, Nirav Modi, Mehul Chausky, to mention a few, have escaped our country with huge amount of money borrowed from the bank in fraudulent manner and sitting pretty in overseas countries. We have been made to believe that these industrialists and capitalists are the saviours of the world. It is time we notice the crucial works done by the migrant workers in our cities, localities, and even in our houses.

Midnight Miracle

NANDITHA MURALI

The night was still young when Ashe got off her car and entered the opening event of the Harley Art Gallery in Compton Avenue. She walked in, looking dazzling as ever in her luminous silk gown, and was immediately greeted by a woman, “Ashe, you made it! How does everything look?” The woman was dressed in a radiant emerald green dress and looked like she was in her mid-30s. Ashe said, “Lacy, you’ve outdone yourself this time, everything looks beautiful.” Lacy smiled and replied, “Oh I’m glad you feel so, I hope the party goes well. Now excuse me while I welcome the Dursleys, I’ll be with you soon.” She hurried off to welcome a couple who had just walked in. Ashe walked into the large room and accepted the glass of champagne that she was offered. She sipped on her drink while walking around the room, admiring the artworks that the white walls flaunted all around the room. She was always a lover of art, especially for the kind of depth each of them held. Ashe looked around, impressed with the grandeur of the gallery. The high ceiling was adorned with hanging pots full of jewel-toned flowers, flashing their vivid shades across the entire place. The whole room was illuminated by the baroque crystal chandelier that stood majestically in the center. Exotic-looking flowers ornamented the tables around the room too. Ashe stopped in her tracks when she smelled something familiar. Familiar but haunting. The scent was so fragrant and intoxicating. She turned around and her gaze fell upon the white flowers that were arranged on the nearest table.

The flowers lay there innocently, unaware of the memories attached. She could never forget the scent that followed her everywhere, clinging onto her even when she fell asleep. Her worst memories flooded back to her; the same ones she had been trying to forget for about a year now. Despite all her effort, she was taken back to the night when it all happened.; to the night these flowers will always remind her of.

It felt like time slowed down when Ashe raised her knife and plunged it into his stomach. Leo laid there struggling, his eyes out of focus. His shrieks collided with her loud, booming laughter, echoing in their room. The room was filled with pictures of Ashe and Leo smiling and in love. The one next to the lamp showed Ashe in a long, silky white gown, holding Leo's hand, who was dressed handsomely in a tux. The contrast between the picture and the present moment was terrifying. His face held layers of emotions – terror, fear, betrayal, and pain. Her face betrayed a maniac's expression – almost hungry looking at his wound. Her long hair fell on him, surrounding his pale body, rendering him helpless. Her lips were stretched wide, bearing an intoxicating smile that revealed her perfect set of teeth. The black dress that she was wearing made her look as graceful as a queen but there was nothing graceful about what she was doing now. Every physical feature of hers intensified her beauty but her eyes held a darkness that seemed almost unreachable. It showed no mercy at all. It almost seemed like it had the effect of turning him into a stone, like that of Medusa's eyes. He lay there helplessly as his screams slowly dissolved into the deep night, leaving room only for death that was settling on him painfully. Her eyes explored the dripping blood that had been smeared all over his shirt. The fresh blood reeked of death, mixed with the fragrance that filled the room. It belonged to the majestic flowers that stood boldly on Leo's table. Its aroma grappled with the stench of the fresh blood seeping from Leo's body. The crimson shade matched the painting of a sunset that was hung above the bed, looking down upon the horrific scene. If the four walls could talk, it

would speak of the violent story it had witnessed in this tiny room. The window next to the bed revealed a dark, moonless night. The streets were in grim silence, as if aware of the gruesome affair that had taken place – Ashe's fall from grace.

She towered over him, the knife still in her hand, dripping his blood onto the sheets, and continued smiling. The look on her face was unsettling and disturbing. Her face betrayed no remorse for her dying husband. She looked at him and the smile quickly faded away. The last thing that Leo saw was this terrorizing expression. She whispered, "How dare you?" over and over again, in a low, dangerous tone. "How dare you ruin our marriage like this? Was I not enough for you?" She went on, her eyes out of focus as if speaking to a wall. "I trusted you, I guess I deserved this for trusting you so much. You deserve all of this for what you did. You deserve being left here to rot." She stepped away from him slowly, still unable to comprehend everything happening around her. She picked up the white flowers from Leo's table and placed it on the open slit of his cadaver and wrapped his lifeless hands around them. The room looked almost like a dramatic scene on a stage.

She was brought back to reality when she heard someone say, "Oh I see you're admiring the Kadupul flowers. You have a great eye for flowers! It's one of the most expensive flowers." Ashe smiled, "Hello Arnold! Oh yes, my husband was a part of the floral industry, so I have an eye for them." Arnold replied, "Ah yes, I'm truly sorry for your loss." Ashe said, "Oh that's okay. It's been almost a year now, I'm in a better place. He'd have liked seeing this I think." Arnold replied, "Oh yes, these flowers are truly magnificent. I wonder how Lacy got her hands on them, they are hard to come by, especially these Kadupul flowers." Ashe smiled and said, "Oh Lacy knows her way around everything. They truly are beautiful, and they smell great too." Arnold immediately replied, "Oh yes, the fragrance is also called the Midnight Miracle." Her smile widened deeply, amused by the name of the fragrance, and said, "Ah, midnight miracle indeed."

The Tail-Gazing Fish

The head swollen with self-confidence for the future may not properly recognise the value and wisdom of the tail end.

K M GEORGE

The ancient Egyptian symbol of Ouroburos or the Tail-devourer is the image of a snake that eats its own tail. It represents the end and the beginning of everything. In unending repeated cycles of death and rebirth, destruction and construction, decay and renewal, the image of the tail-eating serpent probably emerged from the ever-repeating cycles of nature. It implies eternity and perfection.

Later the Greeks adopted it as the symbol of time and history. Everything goes in circles. "What goes around comes around", says old wisdom.

Ancient Indian concept of repeating Yugas expresses a similar cyclic world-view. Even modern historiography doesn't completely deny the wise saying that history repeats itself.

In mainstream cosmology today, the Big Bang and the Big Crunch are part of our scientific "mythology". Space, time and everything in it began at a singularity point, some 13.7 billion years ago, and might end in a Big Crunch at another singularity point (only to begin anew the whole cycle).

Then there is the linear view of history- the concept of the straight line. According to this there is a beginning point and an end point for the whole universe and everything in it. History moves from the starting point to the end point thus making it a line.

There is also the Spiral view that combines the cyclic and the linear. The wheel, for example, has a cyclic motion that repeats itself. But it can also make a linear progress on the ground as when a wheeled vehicle moves ahead.

Rituals and belief systems of all religions



seem to be shaped to a great extent by their notion of time - cyclic, linear, spiral or their combinations in different degrees.

In a recent painting with the title "The Tail-Gazing Fish" the artist represents in a rather surrealistic way a puzzled fish that beholds its own picturesque tail. The tail can stand for the collective past, the total heritage, the complex history. It can also suggest the last part of the fish's body far behind the head, representing all those who are socially ignored, underestimated or looked down upon as worthless and mean.

Yet the tail acts as the rudder of the fish for its twists and turns, and thus has a critical role for its body movement. The head swollen with self confidence for the future may not properly recognise the value and wisdom of the tail end. In any critical transition and maneuvering necessitated by a pandemic or natural catastrophe the tail shows it's inevitable worth.

In the painting, faced with a change of age, the fish-head gazes at the colourful tail, may be for the first time, and together they assure the integrity of the fish-body.

As we finish a year of untold distress and darkness for humanity, and transit with cautious optimism to a hopefully brighter age, let all proud heads turn around and gaze at the humble tails - in economics, politics, family and society in general. Let us reconstitute the one body that is fragmented. Let us not devour our tails as in the myth of Ouroburos, but unfold them in all their multi-potential colours. Then there is some hope for a just world economy, a peaceful geopolitical order, joyful family bonds and true happiness.

Drishyam 2: The Resumption—A Befitting Sequel to the Masterpiece

NIKHIL BANERJEE

Malayalam film industry is not unfamiliar with sequels. The success of films encourages filmmakers to carve niches to fit in the sequels that most of the times are widely accepted by film enthusiasts. Many films have open-ended climaxes leaving the viewers and their imaginations to ponder upon how the story can end or continue. The CBI Diary series, Mannar Mathayi films, Kireedam (1989) and Chenkol (1993), Harihar Nagar Series, etc. are some of the hit sequels and series in Malayalam cinema so far. With new trends and genres rising in the industry and with the advent of OTT platforms, Malayalam films too have found their scopes into a wider platform and audience.

Drishyam (2013) one of the biggest hits Malayalam industry witnessed within the era of the New Generation films, paved its own unique way to the entire cinematic world. Drishyam, a film that could be placed within the genres of a thriller as well as a family drama, has been remade into all South Indian languages, Hindi, and even Chinese. The huge unexpected success of the film had always made the audience demand and ask for its second part. Many social media posts and writeups have come up about how the life of George Kutty and his family be, after the death of Varun Prabhakar,

the only son of IG Geetha Prabhakar (retired in Drishyam 2) played by Asha Sarath. Finally, after all the anticipation, Drishyam 2 got released on Amazon Prime, with around a million views in a day or two. For a movie like Drishyam, where the plot of the first part seemed to be compact and complete; how the second part would be, was waited with so much curiosity. Without disappointing the audiences, the sequel turned to be one of the finest sequels the entire industry has witnessed so far.

Critics compared George Kutty to Walter White and referred him as a 'classic criminal' as Murali Gopi's character referred him in the film. George Kutty is an ordinary-extraordinary family man in pursuit to save his family from any external forces, and no actor other than Mohanlal could have done justice to a character with such intricate layers. Like how in the first part of Drishyam, a man who studied just up to fourth grade ended up winning against the intelligence of the police force, in second part too, the strategy and his strength to save him and his family continues. The first portion of Drishyam 2 seemed like a warming up to the unexpected twists and turns the second portion had to offer.

With more intricate details, Drishyam 2 set



after six years, has lot more to offer than any ordinary sequel. The entire family living in the trauma of the past, only George Kutty's younger daughter Anumol (played by Ester Anil), seemed to have moved a little ahead in life. George Kutty's progress and success from a cable TV operator to a theatre owner and a film producer does not seem to have brought happiness to his family. George Kutty's and Rani's elder daughter Anju (played by Ansiba) is still petrified with police sirens and has seizures. Rani his wife beautifully portrayed by Meena, who is so tensed and scared when George Kutty has to travel, calls their neighbor Saritha for sleepover.

What is striking about George Kutty is his ability to handle the emotions of the past. His strong change in character of deceiving Rajan and Vinayachandran and others who were part of his journey to hide the crime, do not come as wrong when seen in the context, and this noticeable change could be brought to a comparison with Walter White. Jeethu Joseph's

vision of Georgekutty and his character has fallen in the places and fitted the conundrum so perfectly.

All actions of George Kutty are in defense of his family that have become part of an unfortunate crime. As Fyodor Dostoevsky has pointed out in his masterpiece Crime and Punishment, "Pain and suffering are always inevitable for a large intelligence and a deep heart". As the plot tightens and as police start getting more and more clues, Jeethu Joseph's George Kutty is forced to hide the truth and leave no clues. It is clear to the audience and investigators, that there is no bigger punishment than carrying the burden of conscience all their lives. Drishyam 2 -The Resumption is a great storytelling and movie experience and a sure comeback for the entire Malayalam film industry after the numbness of lockdown and the pandemic.

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An Axe to the Frozen Sea: Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum*

I don't like book reviews. I prefer to go in blind. But this book deserved a word, not of praise but of caution. It will not negotiate, it invades. It does not forgive, it demands vengeance.

DR SREEVIDYA SURENDRAN

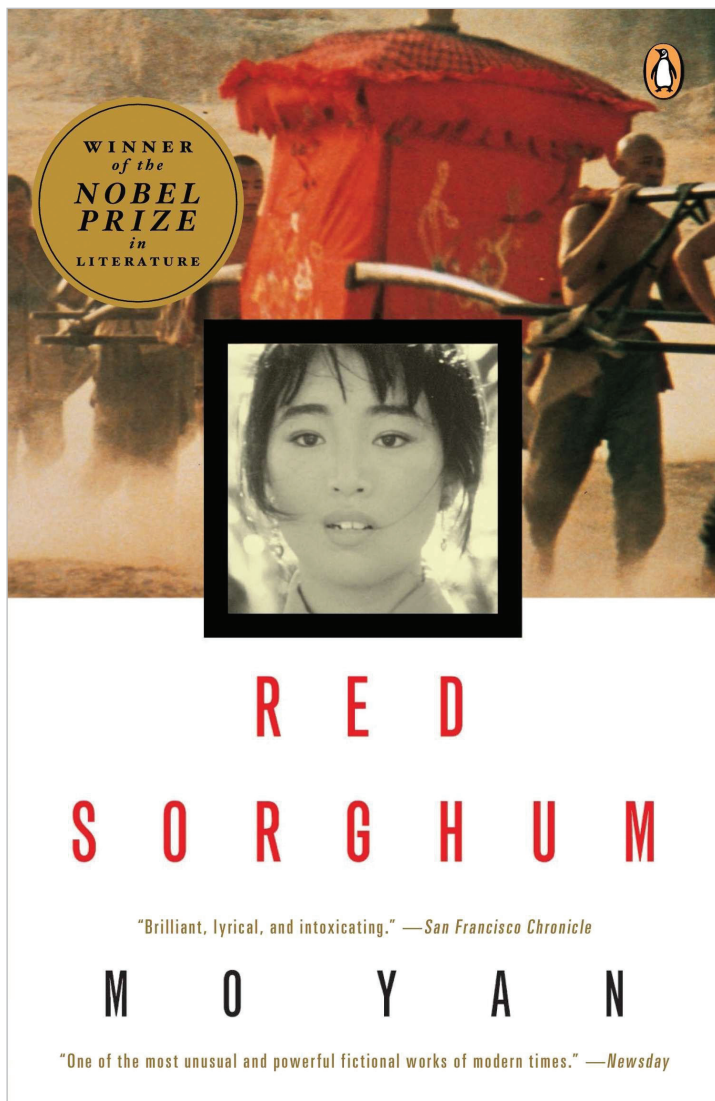
I usually do not do book reviews, neither do I enjoy them. I am of the general opinion that one should go at a book like one goes at the world in general: blind. We must be allowed to figure out if we like a book or not, with no external help. After all, life doesn't come with instructions, or a warning. So why expect that when we enter the world of a book? The blurb and common experience are vague suggestions at best.

But every once in a while, a book comes along to remind you of your supreme naivete. To remind you that sometimes you need a warning. Like I said, I don't like book reviews. I prefer to go in blind. But this book deserved a word, not of praise but of caution. It will not negotiate, it invades. It does not forgive, it demands vengeance. It cannot give, it drowns. And most importantly, it stays.

Reading *Red Sorghum* (1986) is an exercise of agonised fascination. Employing a terse spare style, Mo Yan is as ruthless as his characters and seems to take the untold-- or rather the excruciatingly described-- violence

of the tale in the same matter of fact mien as they do. He does not give the reader any respite, from the unremitting visceral reality of surviving. Watching a movie allows you the ephemeral comfort of closing your eyes to avoid the horrifying. The book will not brook such cowardice. And so, regardless of the fact that your insides are cringing, you continue reading, you continue living. Just like the characters in the book.

Red Sorghum details the saga of three generations of a family that brewed liquor from the hardy, unglamorous *Red Sorghum* that grows in the province. And "red" is the shade that colours the skin of the writing. Set in the North-East Gaomi province of rural China, the book spans the perilous years of the Second Sino-Japanese war and the Cultural Revolution, and records the evolution of the local liquor baron and bandits into resistance fighters. But don't let this general arc fool you into thinking you are going to meet the rural Chinese version of the *Guardians of the Galaxy*. The characters that people the pages of *Red*



Sorghum are far from good but create a larger-than-life tarnished heroism through their sketchy actions. The origin story of the family itself is a far from glorious. The grandmother, the chief protagonist of the story, was brought to the rural province to be wedded to the leper son of the local distillery owner. She and her lover, the celebrated “commander” Yu, successfully murder her fiancé and in-laws to take over the distillery and run a flourishing business. Until the Japanese arrive and threaten everything they know and have built from the ground up. The narrator is the third generation of a family with dubious morality, but with legendary courage

and valour based on a code of honour forged in the fires of war and cut-throat competition. The Japanese invasion sets up a bloody background for the gritty, grey heroism that is equal parts admirable and horrifying. The story opens with a teenage narrator joining his foster father in an ambush against the Japanese and watching his family members getting shot and wounded. A few paragraphs later, his grandmother washes her bleeding blood-stained face in a vat of *Red Sorghum* wine which she later drinks from and gives her grandson. A few more pages into the text, a wounded uncle smashes the head of a mule with a hoe. meanwhile the *Red Sorghum*

turns red in the blood-red sunrise... This is the warning. Turn back now, or brave the fire.

The book weaves together myth, history and folk-lore to create a tapestry of visceral violence coupled with startling beauty. The story flits between past and present—flashbacks and fore-shadowing side by side—twisting notions of time and reality in the weft and warp of the narrative fabric. Mo Yan's story-telling brilliance shines through as he effortlessly melds magic realism with the bone-searing reality of over-the-top violence. He creates a world of such overwhelming excess, that the image of an exhumed corpse shining golden with shimmering motes of dust, seems more plausible than the reality of decay. At no point of time does the author glorify the past or the characters. However, he presents an array of people so wilfully alive, it makes the reader ashamed of living a half-life. Whether it is Commander Yu, or the Grandmother, the characters are unapologetic and ruthlessly self-serving: they will do whatever it takes to not just survive, but also to live as fully, as authentically as they can, regardless of how morally flawed that might be. The *Red Sorghum*, growing wild and free across the magical vista, serves as a fitting metaphor for the people of the story, who only stop when they are dead, just as we can only stop reading at the end of the book.

After the first reading of the book, you are left breathless and gasping—like you took an unwise gulp of raw liquor. The effects of the book though, deny the numbing effects of alcohol. On the contrary, one is left overly sensitised—like our skin is not enough to contain all that we feel, all that we are and can be. The book drains you, stretches you taut and thin, and then fills you to breaking point with too much. It brings home the fact that you know nothing, can never know and that you should pray that it remains that way; because to know is to never be able to ignore. To never be content with the common. And to know that the “common” is privilege. In our sanguine smugness and misplaced faith

in reason we tend to analyse, assimilate and file away experiences only to be fished out as convenient anecdotes. The reality of the episode fades with time, repetition and with this basic act of classification, and we begin to use these instances only as precedents to support a case. We are argumentative and competitive and rarely, if ever, dwell on a moment long enough to allow it to seep into the bedrock of our psyches. And then, suddenly, you are reminded that realities are real, not manageable instances. No matter how much you ‘manage’ them, its graphic nature can never be veiled. Mo Yan does not shy away from the realities of war and the darkness of human nature. But his characters are indomitable in the face of extreme horror and determined to live, and love life with a rapacious hunger. Kafka said, “A book must be an axe for the frozen sea within us.” Get ready to have your sea smashed to pieces.

Red Sorghum is a story of survival, the earthy unapologetic survival of a weed that bursts through concrete. The closing pages of the book describes the changed landscape of the province-- Mo Yan's only lapse into blatant allegorical eloquence. Filled with a deep and abiding guilt at the inadequacy of the tame present to live up to the past, the author finally helps you name that terrible ache in your chest, so smothered by horror and shock. It is shame: the shame of not being that original, the true seed of the earth that ought to stand tall and proud instead doomed to the boxed existence of pet rabbits. And yet, underneath that crushing realisation, is the cold comfort that we too came from this cruel, loving, avenging earth and will return to it no matter how many times we are exhumed from our rest or fight its reclaiming tug: the fiercest flame and the smallest spark both return to the same hearth; this too is true.

Ah literature, the love of my life.

Dr. Sreevidya Surendran is a sound academician and versatile artiste. She is an assistant professor of English Literature.

The foundation of the Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph's of Tarbes was in France.

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The Lord is inviting you, dear friend, to be part of our family.

May they all be one.
JOHN 17:21



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