

NOVEMBER 2021 | VOL. 15 | ISSUE 11 | ₹ 30

# together

a national family magazine

## OTHER PATHS TO SALVATION

ART • ECOLOGY • EDUCATION • FREE SPEECH...

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**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](mailto:editor@togethermagazine.in) before the 15th of every month.

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# Paths, Journeys, and Salvation

What we are born into and what we are grown into may engage in inner battles. Many find meaning in what they are grown into: perhaps, art, music, literature, caring for others, caring for the earth, educating ourselves and others, speaking out the truth.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Taking steps forward in hope and anticipation is human. The great human journey, with its trials, challenges and emotions makes all of us equal. Some, like in the proverbial story of Akbar and Birbal, journey on seeing a light miles away, others move by the lantern held up to see one step at a time. Both see. Both move. But do all arrive?

## Our Seeing Limits Us

Rene Magritte, the best Belgian surrealist artist of the 20th century has art works that question the accepted perceptions. He paints a tobacco pipe and writes at the bottom, 'this is not a pipe'. He paints another work, The Son of Man, with a large apple covering the man's face. Yet another painting called, The Blank Signature, has a lady riding on horseback through thick woods. But interestingly at certain places we can see through the woods and at other places we can see through the horse and the person. And Magritte has many works where concealment is placed on the subject. Perhaps it was his lingering emotional expression of his mother who got drowned when he was 14 and whose body was brought ashore with her face covered. But Magritte's later words threw clearer light on what they all meant.

Rene Magritte famously said, "Everything that we see hides another thing". In physical sphere, everything that we see hides much more

behind. It is true of spiritual and moral realms too. What we see hides things behind it. Our eyes stop at what we see. Our mind stops at what we see, and we seldom explore further. Or again our mind sees what we look for, and no further.

## Go Deeper

We begin life at a spot: a spot not of our choice. On the one hand we have our genetic positions; and on the other hand we are born in to a social, political, religious context. And further we grow up into specific professional and vocational charismas.

What we are born into and what we are grown into may engage in inner battles. Many find meaning in what they are grown into: perhaps, art, music, literature, caring for others, caring for the earth, educating ourselves and others, speaking out the truth. What do we do when these ground on which we stand come in conflict with the religion, social practices that we are born into?

I would say go deeper, or go higher, in what you genuinely find meaning. Every genuine, honest going down and deeper reaches you to the same inner reality. Digging a well is a ceremonious event. The water diviner, after possible calculations and sheer intuition, declares, 'dig 30 feet deep and you will find water'. One cannot expect, though easy and faster, to find water by digging 3 pits of 10 feet each. One has to go



deeper and deeper in the same place. Going deeper is the key.

If we refuse to go deeper, even the most religious things, be it even prayers and worship rituals, will become paths to perdition. And it would be only matter of time, such persons and societies fall apart.

## Humanity Needs Regrouping

Dominant cultures are deep in caste and class equations and discriminations. The suffering of the subjugated on bases of gender, class and caste goes with out saying. The dominant class also is victim to the illusion of false promises of its ideology, false promises of its rituals and practices. It took the hippy culture to question the illusion of the ideal and the perfection of dominant, structured and institutionalized social, religion and political groups.

I am convinced that with the given structures of religion and society, we may not get over the violence and cruelty of the discrimination. We must give rise to new groupings. It is interesting to see when students are made into groups with a new purpose, they find it much easier to go beyond their religious and social groupings to collaborate and be inclusive. New groupings of people like generation y, generation z, etc. give people a different identity than the identity of the class and caste struggle. We could have meaningful groups of artists, people caring for the earth, people speaking out the truth, and the list could go on. And these groups can constantly be open, so that members can move out and in, like the circles formed by dances of varied tribals in Chottanagpur terrain.

## Courage to Re-center

While travelling, we are so much dependent on GPS navigation maps. Google maps give us a sense of safety. Even with the upgrade on Internet bandwidth and detailing of the maps, it is not rare that we loose signal or maps go unclear; and the map app comes to a dragging halt. We stop for a while. We re-centre ourselves and then the landmarks around become clearer and the indication to the destination is once again shown with clarity and precision. Re-centering process in a GPS navigation system reconsiders and re-reads factors around us. At times we have to take a new path, take a U-turn. Leaving the possibility of spontaneity as we journey on helps lighten the burden and stress of the journey. Therefore, Life must be open to the permanent possibility of radical change, expansion and novelty. If something is open to the permanent possibility of radical change, expansion and novelty, then it cannot be defined and prefixed. Steve Jobs would say it differently, "Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice." Life is layered. Being too certain about a thought, an opinion, a religion, perhaps is anti-life.

Salvation is the state of being saved or protected from harm or a dire situation. We as humanity, often belonging to varied institutionalized religions, perhaps need deliverance and salvation from their ideas and processes of salvation.





# Finding God in the Arts

When we choose to 'behold' things instead of begrudging them, we begin to see that everything is a revelation of the Divine — from rocks to rocket ships, from a Rembrandt to a Rothko.

RICHARD ROHR OFM

I've always loved beauty and art. When I was on the road and I would have an afternoon off after a conference, I would almost always go to the local art museum. It was a contemplative practice and something I could do by myself. I think artists are often the first to rely on intuition. Artists do not insist on full understanding before they write a piece of music or start painting. They trust the unconscious, and that's what engineers and scientists aren't primarily trained to do. They only proceed by evidence. I'm grateful that my doctors proceed with logic, evidence, and reason; yet in my experience, it is the artist, like the mystic, who intuitively Reality first.

The sixteenth question in the old Baltimore Catechism was "Where is God?" and it was answered straightforwardly: "God is everywhere." We cannot not be in the presence of God! Where would we go? As the psalmist says, if we go up to the heavens or underneath the earth, we still can't get away from God (see Psalm 139: 7–10).

John Duns Scotus (1266–1308), one of the great Franciscan teachers, said that God did not create genus and species; God only created what Duns Scotus called "thisness" (in Latin *haecceity*). Each creature is a unique aspect of the infinite Mystery of God. He said that until we can experience each thing in its specific "thisness," as artists so often do, we will not easily experience the joy and freedom of Divine Presence.

The doctrine of "thisness" is saying that we come to universal meaning deeply and rightly through the concrete, the specific, and the ordinary. We cannot know something spiritually by saying it is a not-that; we can only know it by meeting it in its precise and irreplaceable thisness and honoring it there. 'Finding God in the Arts' seek to do just that. The principle here is "go deep in any one place and you will meet all places." God is here, and everywhere!

## We Are Called to 'Behold'

When we look at art, we are usually quick to judge its value according to our own preferences based on style, color, size, location, and even country of origin! However, there is another

invitation—one that goes beyond our likes and dislikes—and that is to simply 'behold' it. Many of the apparitions in the Bible begin with 'behold'—usually uttered as a command, an invitation, or perhaps a call to a different style of attention. In a sense, it is a giveaway that, in fact, we can and need to 'switch gears' once in a while to be ready to perceive what is about to come at us. Someone who is truly beholding is silenced with the utter gratuity of a thing. We let it give us a leap of joy in the heart and in the eye.

Once we decide to behold, we are available for awe and wonder, to be present to what is, without the filter of our preferences or the false ledger of judging things as important or not important. A much broader, much deeper, and much wider field of perception opens up, becoming an alternative way of knowing and enjoying. The soul sees soul everywhere else too: "deep calls unto deep," as the psalmist says (42:8). Center knows center, and this is called 'love'.

Beholding happens when we stop trying to 'hold' and allow ourselves to 'be held' by the other. We are completely enchanted by something outside and beyond ourselves. Maybe we should speak of 'beholding' because, in that moment, we are being held more than really holding, explaining, or understanding anything by ourselves. We feel ourselves being addressed more than addressing something else. This radically changes our situation and perspective.

I invite you to 'behold' something today. In my experience, you will seldom be disappointed. Find a bit of ordinary beauty—a print, a sculpture, a photograph—in your home, online, or at a museum—and gaze at it until you see it as one instance of a manifestation of the eternal creativity of God. Allow your 'beholding' to move the work of art beyond its mere 'relative truth' and to reveal its inherent dignity, as it is, without your interference or your labels. It becomes an epiphany and the walls of your world begin to expand.

## The Artistry of the Blues

My friend Barbara Holmes describes the creation of blues music as an act of radical critique that can bring its listeners into a



contemplative and holy space, far closer to God than we might be otherwise.

Like the familiar laments in the Psalms, blues artists forthrightly engaged the issues in life that the church would not discuss... The lyrics were straightforward and sometimes raunchy, but they captured the life experiences of the listeners. While gospel music promised peace in the hereafter and the promise of God's presence, the blues became public theology, communal inquiry, and a critique of the church...

Encounters with a skewed justice system inspired Blind Lemon Jefferson to sing "Hangman's Blues." Ma Rainey sings "Blues

and Booze." They sang about alcoholism, family support, and incarceration, issues that never came up in the weekly sermon, unless it was to rail against sin. The blues gave musicians an opportunity to sing their lived theology.

The contemplative moment comes as the cause of the blues is considered within the broader context of God's inexplicable absence or startling intervention. Under every stanza is the silent and unspoken question, "How long, oh Lord, how long will your people continue to suffer?" Suffering is no longer emerging from the crisis of the institution of slavery; it is coming from the angst of living with meager means and few skills to negotiate relationships.

Art also carves pathways toward our inner isles of spirituality. When we decide to live in our heads only, we become isolated from the God who is closer than our next breath. To subject everything to rational analysis reduces the awe to ashes. The restoration of wonder is the beginning of the inward journey toward a God who people of faith aver is always waiting in the seeker's heart. Each artistic moment is just slightly beyond our horizon of understanding. What a gift it is, this lack of understanding. Perhaps we are confounded so that we might always have much to contemplate.

### **A Theology of Making**

I am struck by the deep awe, reverence, and devotion that modern artist, Makoto Fujimura brings to his creative process. He describes how he takes inspiration from the Gospel story of the 'woman with the alabaster jar'.

"I experience God, my Maker, in the studio. I am immersed in the art of creating, and I have come to understand this dimension of life as the most profound way of grasping human experience and the nature of our existence in the world. I call it the 'Theology of Making'. It has become my point of reference for a lifetime of star-gazing into the infinite realities of

beauty and the sacred—and then creating.

In the slow process of preparing the pigments and glue, which one must learn to do with the handmade paint that I use, I realized that I was practicing a devotional liturgy of sorts, . . . Through this act, I begin to feel deeply the compassion of God for my own existence, and by extension for the existence of others. It is hard work to live into this generative love, and

it is what we are made for: to paint light into darkness, to sing in co-creation, to take flight in abundance.

I consider my art to be a devotional act, a memorial in response to this woman's act [Mark 14]. I use precious materials such as azurite, malachite, and gold. I have done many paintings and installations based on this passage. What makes us truly beautiful? What makes us not just good, not just right, but beautiful? Can our churches be beautiful again, and not just promote goodness and truth? Remember, what the disciples deemed a waste, Jesus called the most necessary."

### **Receiving Images**

Artist and author Christine Valters Paintner explores how we might reconsider traditional approaches to photography. Instead of "taking" pictures, she asks us to "receive" images similar

to how we might welcome the presence of God in contemplation. Contemplative practice is a receptive practice. We make ourselves available for grace to break in; we open ourselves to listen and ponder.

We often use the word 'take' to describe our relationship with photography. Our culture emphasizes taking time, taking what's mine, and taking a break. What we are endeavoring to do in this process, however, is to receive (rather than take) the gifts around us, to be present enough so that, when the photographic moment arrives, we are able to receive it fully, with our whole hearts.

'Taking photos' is a common phrase, and changing that perception and process (especially if you use a smartphone, Lomo, or other disposable camera) may be hard to break, but I gently invite you to consider what reframing this process might be like for you and what it evokes in you. I invite you to bring a new awareness to how words and phrases can shape our experience and practices.

Rather than 'taking' photos or 'shooting' them or even 'making' photos, we will practice "receiving" images as gift. The traditional words for photography are possessive and aggressive. Yet the actual mechanism of photography is that light is reflected off of a subject and received by the camera through the lens opening. We can create conditions for a 'good' photo, but ultimately we must stand in a posture of receiving and see what actually shows up in the image.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke [1875–1926] writes in one of his poems of 'no forcing [and no] holding back'. When we are receptive we let go of our agendas and expectations. We allow ourselves to see beneath preconceived ideas. Rather than going after what we want in life, or 'forcing', we cultivate a contentment with what actually is. Similarly, instead of 'holding back' and merely observing life or falling asleep to it, we stay awake and alert, participating fully in its messiness and we keep our eyes open for the holy presence in its midst. Photographing in

this way can become an act of revelation. One of the gifts of art in general, and photography in particular, is that the artist can offer others this vision of the graced ordinary moment.

### **Art as Service**

Few of us feel called to be formal or fine artists, but all of us are called to be creators. Each of us is called to bring creativity, purpose, and passion to our vocation, no matter what it is. Artist and author Julia Cameron reminds us that we will know what is ours to do when we are open to the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit in service to others. She writes:

"The dedication of our work to a higher cause than our own self-promotion frees the work from preciousness. It becomes not about how good we are but about how good we can be in selfless service to something larger than

ourselves. Sometimes we can dedicate a book to a person whom we wish to reach. Rilke's classic letters to a young poet tapped his own inner reservoirs of wisdom and generosity.

Contemplating a piece of work, we do better to think Whom is this work for? Whom will it serve? rather than How will it serve me? Once we find a path for our work to be of service... then our work goes smoothly forward. It is not about "us" anymore... We disenfranchised ourselves from our birthright as creators and we lost the understanding that art was an act of the soul and not of the ego."

### **God Loves Things by Becoming Them**

When we choose to 'behold' things instead of begrudging them, we begin to see that everything is a revelation of the Divine—from rocks to rocket ships, from a Rembrandt to a Rothko. Our incapacity to see stems from our own lack of fascination, humility, curiosity, and awe. The only thing needed is a willingness to surrender to the naked now, which God always inhabits, where the Incarnation always takes place and is always mysterious, where God, in every moment, is perfectly hidden and, at the same time, perfectly revealed. Hold that paradox.

### **When we are receptive we let go of our agendas and expectations.**

# Biodiversity, Conservation, and Sustainability

A well-conserved biodiversity is the base of a balanced ecosystem and is of prime importance for sustainable development.

DR SHAKEELA V, ARCHANA BHATT, RAVEENDRAN T

Even if we have a cursory glance at just a fraction of the globe, we will be astonished at the diversity of all living beings around ranging from varied flora and fauna. This variety and variability among all living organism and their ecosystems is referred to as “biodiversity”. Ranging from the snow-capped mountains to deepest oceans to tropical forests, all life forms exist with vast differences. If we look at the global biological diversity, the estimated number of species comes around 50 million, out of which only 2 million are the described ones and the rest are still to be described. India alone is home to around 1,25,000 described living organisms and many are yet to be identified and described. India is also one of the nations among the twelve mega diversity centers of the world and inhabits a range of plant, animal, fungi and other species. These species form the base of our entire ecosystem and coexistence through interdependence on each other. A minute change in one species can trigger a massive change and effect on the other species sharing the interdependence. When it comes to the variability, diversity of the various organisms is a complex term and can be expressed and observed at various levels i.e. genetic, species and ecosystem with respect to the three fundamental hierarchal levels of biological organization.

- Diversity within the species is genetic diversity which enables a population to adapt to its environment
- Diversity between the species is species diversity or taxonomic diversity or

organismal diversity and defined in terms of species richness and species evenness

- Diversity at ecosystem or habitat level is called ecosystem diversity

In general, biodiversity includes variability of genus, varieties and species, population in different ecosystems and relative abundance of species. These species are an indispensable part of our ecosystem and their knowledge is essential for sustainable utilization of resources.

## Importance of Biodiversity

Biodiversity plays a key role in the sustainability of the entire ecosystem and supports life system in a number of ways in form of goods and services. Diverse form of flora and fauna provide us with direct benefits in form of food, medicine, animal products, bio control agents, industrial materials and recreational use. Apart from the ecological benefits, biodiversity serves as an important socio-economic asset to any country on account of the many benefits it provides. This value of biodiversity can be expressed at many levels from productive, consumptive, social, aesthetic, ethical, option to ecosystem value. The productive uses of biodiversity include the products that can be commercially harvested for exchange in the market and aid towards national income. It can also include wild genetic resources that can be traded for research purpose by scientists. Some of the examples include products from silk industry, pulp & paper industry, timber and

plywood industry, textile industry and pearl industry to name a few. Consumptive use include products that can be harvested and consumed directly and not coming under normal trade circulation such as food through wild plants and animals, non timber forest produce, forest honey, fuel wood, etc. Apart from the above material aspects, biodiversity also has social value that is linked with the society, religion, customs and spiritual aspects of the community such as sacred plants, use of flowers in worship, folk tales associated with wild animals and plants. Aesthetic value of biodiversity is also of prime importance as it attracts the community for enjoyment and recreation and helps generate income through ecotourism. Above all, the ethical value or existence value of biodiversity is the crucial one as it aims to conserve and protect the diversity and gives importance to value of each and every species. Besides, indirect value of biodiversity in form of ecosystem services also needs to be recognised as it is crucial for ecological balance, soil health, environment and mitigating climate change.

## Biodiversity and Sustainable Development

When we talk about the development of ecosystem, it is only possible with the development of the inhabitants of that ecosystem i.e. all the components of that biodiversity. Biodiversity is surely a key environmental component of sustainable development. Without biodiversity, life won't sustain on earth including our own as this diversity in various forms is source of ev-

everything we need on a daily basis ranging from food, water, clothing and shelter. Moreover, conservation of biodiversity is one of the key factors in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as declared by the United Nations. It is important to note that especially SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land) that are directly linked to biodiversity can contribute significantly towards achieving the other SDGs. Biodiversity has a prominent role in achieving food and nutritional security which directly contributes to achieving of SDG 2 i.e. zero hunger and also very relevant to SDG 1 i.e. poverty eradication. The vast diversity in agricultural crops coupled with livestock can help develop sustainable and resilient agricultural systems in this changing environment. This in turn can also play a crucial role in the development of small scale farmers, indigenous community, fisher folks and forest dwellers who are directly associated with biodiversity. Be it poverty alleviation or food & nutrition security, climate change or overall well being; conservation of biodiversity directly or indirectly affects the sustainable development of a nation through multiple benefits. Ecosystems supporting biodiversity provides us with numerous services and resources that undoubtedly support the pillars of sustainable development across societal and economic sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry, textile, tourism and many more. Inter linkages and wide spread benefits of biodiversity play an indispensable part in the sustainable development of any nation.





### Threats to Biodiversity

Species all around the globe are disappearing at an alarming rate since past few decades and the pace is increasing even as we speak. Despite its importance, biodiversity has decreased significantly over the years especially between 1970 to 2016, the population of vertebrates alone fell by 68% on an average. As per the WWF Living Planet Report 2020, average decline in biodiversity from 1970 to 2016 came out to be 94% in Latin America and Caribbean, 65% in Africa, 45% in Asia Pacific, 33% in North America and 24% in Europe and Central Asia. This data alone is enough to show the increasing threats to biodiversity around the globe. If we summarize the major threats to biodiversity, the report has identified five major ones and their proportions; changes in land and sea use (50%), Species over-exploitation (24%), invasive species and disease (13%), pollution (7%) and climate change (6%).

1. *Land and sea use change:* Due to habitat loss and degradation caused through various natural and manmade activities, there is a huge loss of biodiversity around the globe. Land use for agricultural activities alone accounts for 80% of the average global deforestation. Other factors like urbanization, increased human population, disease outbreak, natural disasters like earthquake, floods, also contribute to loss of biodiversity.

2. *Species overexploitation:* Overutilization and overexploitation of resources contributes significantly towards species loss and extinction. Many activities that lead to this situation include over fishing, illegal hunting, mining, marketing of endangered species, etc.

3. *Invasive species and disease:* Introduction of invasive or exotic species in an alien environment is one of the major factors responsible for loss of native species. The interactions among the native species get dysfunctional due to these exotic species and leads to extinction of the native ones. Many times, these invasive species compete for food, water, space and other resources and can even spread diseases that the native species have no immunity.

4. *Pollution:* Pollution in various forms affects the survival of any species and results in biodiversity loss. Application of harmful chemicals in the soil, industrial waste, air pollution and other

types of pollution can cause serious threats to the diversity like decreased population of pollinators, marine biodiversity loss, degradation of soil health and many more.

5. *Climate change:* Change in climate affects the survival of species as it has to adapt with the uneven and sudden weather events which affects their existence in a negative way. On top of that, events triggered by climate change such as forest fires, floods, landslides and other natural calamities can lead to unprecedented loss of biodiversity.

### Conservation Strategies

With the increasing threats to biodiversity, it is an immediate concern that conservation efforts towards biodiversity must be up scaled. Conservation of biodiversity involves preservation, maintenance, sustainable use and recovery of the biodiversity and must aim towards protection of biodiversity. There are two basic strategies of biodiversity conservation i.e. ex situ and in situ conservation

Ex situ: Conservation of the species outside its natural habitat through botanical gardens, zoo, conservation stands, tissue culture and gen banks. These species can also be utilized in future to restore degraded land or reintroduction of species in wild.

In situ: Conservation of species in its natural habitat through various protected ecosystems such as biosphere reserves, sacred forests, protected areas like wildlife sanctuary or national park. India is home to many such protected areas like Corbett National park, Bandipur National park, Nilgiri biosphere reserve and many more.

Besides the structured frameworks for conservation, we also need to focus and work in a collaborative manner with the indigenous communities as they are the custodians of the traditional wisdom. Apart from these, equal efforts are needed to bring awareness to the citizens especially to the youths about the importance of biodiversity and the need for conservation. A well-conserved biodiversity is the base of a balanced ecosystem and is of prime importance for sustainable development.

**Dr. Shakeela V.** is the Director of Community Agrobiodiversity Centre, MS Swaminathan Foundation, Wayanad.

### COVER STORY

## Education Markets and the NEP

The neoliberal agenda in the National Educational Policy especially in the area of tertiary education in India needs more scrutiny.

KAPIL ARAMBAM

In August last, Karnataka became the first state to implement the new National Education Policy (NEP), a vision and philosophy for education which also aims to revolutionise the education system in India. Any plan to revamp the system is laudable. Changing times often require upgrades and overhaul. However, when it is guided by ulterior motives, other than providing and facilitating quality education, the NEP has raised more questions that it has answers for its implementation.

Normally it takes time, in terms of years, if not decades, to bring in such drastic changes as indicated in the NEP, but in the UG college where I teach media studies and visual communication, the new academic session was scheduled to begin in the second week of August 2021 and the Karnataka government announced about the implementation merely a week before about the scheduled opening of the new academic session, and thereby delaying the commencement of first-semester students who are going to be the first batch under the new regulation.

For obvious reasons, the present regime desperately wants to either rebuild or redo every available system that was created by the

previous government known for its so-called dynasty politics. Much more than this political and cultural rivalry, the present government is also a diehard fan of neoliberalism and it wants to incorporate the idea of free-market capitalism in every major decision-making apparatus of the State. This is where the NEP, despite its other strong or weak points, still covers a substantial area that we need to uncover.

Before we talk about the agenda of free-market fans in the education system, the history of this relatively new policy goes back to 2016 when former cabinet secretary TSR Sumbramanian was appointed to chair a committee to formulate a new educational framework. In those days the process was opaque because hardly anyone has seen the reports of the committee albeit there are records showing that the committee had revised the reports nearly six times and created as many drafts. Instead a new document titled as the Draft Input for Education Policy was released in July of that year. Among other things, a prominent feature of the document was its alignment to the agenda of the World Trade Organisation.

Two years later, the former Ministry of Human Resource Development that has now

become the Ministry of Education announced for the first time that there will be a national education policy. Yet it took shape only when Narendra Modi came back for his second term in 2019 and re-announced the introduction of the new policy. Back then, another committee headed by Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan, former chief of the Indian Space Research Organisation, prepared and released a 484-page document reportedly seeking suggestions from the public and stakeholders.

A few months later, another summarised version of the document running up to 55 pages was released in October 2019. Referring to the timeline, amidst the countrywide protests against the then Citizenship Amendment Bill that eventually became an act, another 60-page document was released in December 2019. It went on like this but public records show that there was neither consultation with the stakeholders nor it was properly discussed in the Parliament before the policy was given the green signal for implementation. This is another grim reminder that India is currently under a government that makes no distinction between democratic and iron-fist rules.

Finally, earlier this year on 29 July, the Union Cabinet announced the adoption of the National Education Policy and the Ministry of Education hurriedly released a 66-page document with slight changes in the content, which more or less was based on the Kasturirangan report. Now in its concrete form, it is hard to miss the emphasis that the policy has on privatisation and commercialisation, and not to exclude the apparent saffronisation and centralisation of the education system.

### **The Force From Within and Without**

In 'The regulation of education through the WTO/GATS', Angela C de Siqueira – from the Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil in which she analyses the documents from the World Trade Organisation and its General Agreement on Trade in Services, and proposals presented by various countries, demonstrating their interests in eliminating 'barriers' to 'free trade' in education – mentions:

'The richest countries, having the majority of their population already schooled, with a decreasing birth rate and ample educational systems in operation, are becoming a restricted market for the operation of companies in the educational sector. On the other hand, developing countries – whose majority of inhabitants are at the school age, and therefore, represent a great demand in potential for the educational offerings at several levels – are the preferred targets of the business groups' search for new markets.'

For that matter, it is an open secret that the WTO and its treaty GATS have been created solely for the interest of corporate houses and their owners, thanks to the US, the EU, Japan and their ilk. Their belief is that free trade will solve all the problems of humanity and their agenda is to deregulate international markets, an idea which has appealed to the present government in India the most.

This observation is also quite relevant to the NEP, according to which we will see various foreign universities opening their campuses in the country. Unfortunately this can also put the final nail in the coffin of the public education system and further the mass exclusion of marginalised people from the system.

In the words of Dr Prem Singh from the University of Delhi: 'The nature of knowledge/epistemology has also been changed along with the way of imparting knowledge in [the] NEP. Knowledge is not predetermined in the context of the individual and society or the world[; but] it is a predetermined text designed to serve the existing corporate-capitalism.'

The credit should not go only to the present regime. Two decades ago, during the first NDA rule, Mukesh Ambani and Kumarmangalam Birla had drafted a Policy Framework for Reforms in Education (PFRE) that endorses, among other things, the establishment of private universities, depoliticisation of campuses, fee hike in universities, raising funds from internal accruals, and foreign direct investment in the higher education sector. Though it was criticised then, several ideas envisaged in the PFRE are reflected clearly in the NEP.

### **Radical Change Does not Always Mean Revolution**

If we go by the ideals in the NEP, it is aimed to bring about a revolution in the education sphere with a completely different structure of 5+3+3+4 (against the old 10+2), the introduction of a four-year college education with multiple exit options, an aim to get rid of board exams, a move to make colleges and universities multidisciplinary, a focus on experiential learning and critical thinking, while setting 2040 as the deadline for full implementation of the policy, and so on.

We will be missing the woods for the trees if we focus our attention only on what is in the policy than what is not. Ideals are called ideals because those are an ideal but it is equally important to implement it. In simple words, regardless of how ideal a policy is, the aspiration should meet the implementation.

In the case of the NEP, it is not only implementation but also the very moral and philosophical foundation which is a problematic area. When education is made a tradable service that exists for the sake of earning profit, there is an epistemological fallacy in knowledge production. This is even truer with reference to keeping the focus of tertiary education on vocational ends.

During the UPA regime, India was forced not to sign the GATS Agreement for the same reason that education was listed as a 'trade'. Yet the hegemony of the latter did put pressure, and not the Ministry of HRD but that of Commerce released a report, back in 2005, titled 'Higher Education in India and GATS: An Opportunity' seeking a balance between domestic regulation and free trade. Now, the NEP has removed all the barriers though it does not even overtly mention these issues.

What's even worse is the centralisation of the whole system. The NEP has proposed a Higher Education Commission in India (HECI) plus four verticals: the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC), the National Accreditation Council (NAC), the Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) and the General Education Council (GEC). The establishment of a council like that of GEC implies the loss of

autonomy for colleges and universities in the long run. One cause of concern for the higher education institutes must be the Institutional Development Plans that will be prescribed by the NAC and will be a criterion for funding by HEGC.

On top of this, there is also a chance that a transnational and international organisation such as the WTO will interfere with the sovereignty of a nation.

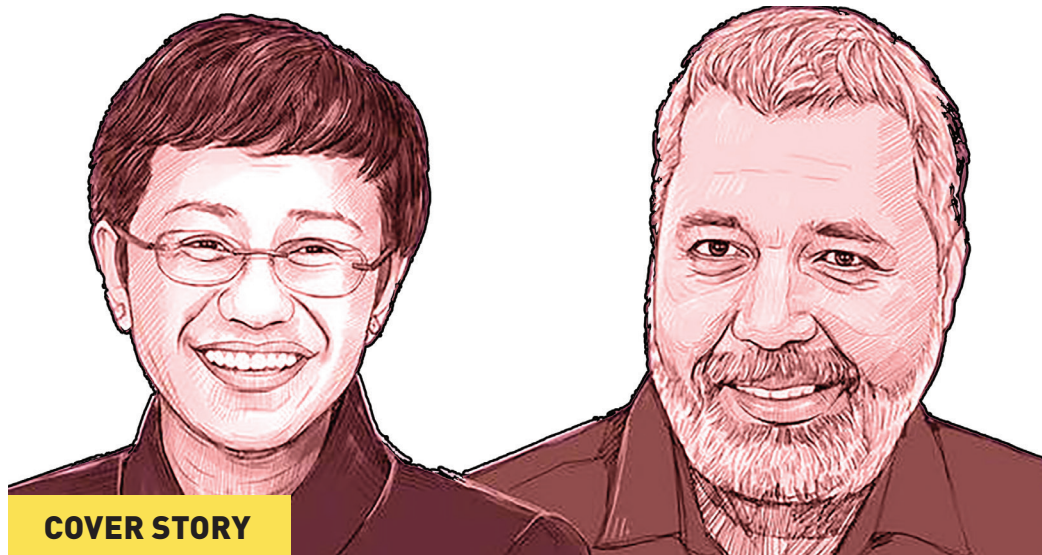
When there is no distinction between private and government establishments, as advocated in the NEP, there will be structural changes; some of which again are welcome and others are open to question. For instance, this lack of classification will also mean there will be no distinction between foreign and domestic players, which is exactly what the WTO wants.

Dr. Vijender Sharma, former president of the Delhi University Teachers' Association: 'Commercialisation of higher education can have adverse implications, both in terms of access and equity. Commodification of education, research and knowledge will not serve the long range interests of the nation. It could lead to truncated growth and lopsided development of higher education.'

The education sector is going to be the next crashing place for capitalists and corporate houses in which students are going to be consumers. In India, the present regime that is openly nationalist and supports Hindu hegemony considers neoliberalism as the way out for the country to become a force to reckon with. In the process, they are overlooking the future consequences of making everything a business in which only loss or profit counts.

Organisations like the World Bank and WTO must be held accountable for destroying the functions of higher education, which include, among others, to provide an open space for debates and deliberations, the constant creation of knowledge and accentuating the awareness of issues that are of sociopolitical and economical relevance. The first resistance can come from the campuses that these organisations are planning to take over, else we will be reduced to another commodity that can be sold, bought and discarded.





# The Nobel Goes to Fearless, Tireless Journalism

The Nobel Peace Prize 2021 goes to two fearless, tireless fighters. They kept fighting so that the mass manipulation and tyranny of the powerful and rich are exposed; and the masses are left with some chances of living in truth and peace.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

As a teaching faculty in the department of Mass Media I have the privilege of attending talks, webinars, and interactions by eminent and not so eminent journalists and media practitioners. Yesterday, for example, we had a webinar on 'Women in Media' by Sandhya Menon, who passionately and with great detail spoke about her call as a journalist, and her beginnings as a news reporter. She completed her talk and it was time for interaction and questions. And this time too, with no exception to other times, the same question was asked in apprehension and fear by the journalism students, 'what are the major challenges we encounter as journalists today? And how do we face them? Answer to the first question is easy because there are depressingly plenty of challenges: from personal risks to fighting fake news to abuse of power and mass manipulation. Most serious and genuine journalists pause before answering the second question, because there are no easy answers. The sentences go shorter.

The often-heard answer is fight, do not compromise, you often know that you will not succeed, yet go down fighting.

Journalists today, on the one hand, are in the best of times because of the technological advancements and the ease of conducting business; but on the other hand, these are terrifyingly difficult times for journalists because of the obstacles and hurdles involved in reporting facts and speaking truth to power. Around the world, a new generation of authoritarian and populist leaders is leading a concerted and intentional assault on truth, with serious consequences for journalists.

It is at these confusing and bewildered times the Norwegian Nobel Committee has decided to award the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize to Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace. Maria Ressa has faced multiple criminal charges for the way her news website Rappler

has challenged the rule of President Rodrigo Duterte. Dmitri Muratov, though his newspaper, Novaya Gazeta, has been a persistent critic of President Vladimir V. Putin. Both have worked under governments that use a range of methods — from repressive legislation to arrests, torture and even killing. 2020 saw the highest number of journalists being imprisoned since 1992. Journalists like Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov were committed to exposing corruption, documenting abuse and combatting misinformation. With this not so common Nobel Peace Prize to Journalists the famous lines of Ressa will be echoed again "We are journalists, and we will not be intimidated. We will shine the light. We will hold the line."

## Maria Ressa's Battle for Truth in the Digital Age

One of the early realisations of Maria Ressa about Philippines, her country and about other manipulative regimes is that "If you can make people believe lies are the facts then you can control them." Most authoritarian rulers and regimes do it comfortably these days with the help of mass media, especially social media. They go after facts, destroy facts and rip democracies apart. Ressa acknowledges the three typical steps involved in this tragedy:

1. You lie. Not once but repeatedly. When we say a lie a million times, it replaces truth. The manipulative regimes flood the society with lies, false news, and disinformation.

2. Keep accusing. Keep saying that it is your opponents and the journalists who are lying; and create an 'us against them' narrative. Ressa talks about 'Patriotic trolling': it is a state-sponsored online hate and harassment campaign to silence and intimidate.

3. At some point everyone looks around and says, "what is truth? There is no truth. This is the point where the manipulative regimes begin their victory parade.

With this resistance becomes impossible and the game is over. With this the role of serious honest journalists become harder and unkind. How do we fight back, when the government and other powerful people succeed in spreading lies? Ressa categorically says, fight

back with data; fight back by discovering and knowing what reality is, and tirelessly and fearlessly making them known to others.

## Fighting Back with Data

Without facts/data we cannot have truth; without truth we cannot have trust. Without these three valuable components, democracies as we know are dead. What do we do as journalists? Start with your area of influence, says Ressa, first tell your family and friends; begin by taking care of what is in front of us. In whatever capacity possible, demand accountability from power; stand up against bullies; and report lies. Lies travel faster; facts are kind of boring. Have patience. Slowly but surely, we will find others gathering courage around us, because courage is contagious.

In the Philippines, the Internet largely exists on Facebook, because the platform offers free data through its mobile application. Ressa's reporters exposed dozens of fake and spam-heavy accounts of the president Rodrigo Duterte's supporters. They had systematically manipulated the online discourses to fit their narrative; and the sad fact is that the common people slowly had mistakenly taken it for reality. For all the works done by Ressa and her team, she and those worked with her were subjected to an online hate campaign and multiple arrests. Maria Ressa, in spite of multiple arrests and retentions says with charisma, "We know it's a tough time to be a journalist. But I think what strengthens all of us is that there is probably no better time to be a journalist, because this is when we live our values and we live our mission."

Governments, establishments and people, both left and right, have issues with the growing power of Media, especially the digital social media. The conservative right wing governments fear that these platforms provide systemic support and encourage free speech and freedom of expression. The more liberal, left wing governments fear that these digital social media platforms give room for fragile data privacy and fake news propagation. Journalism in the age of digital social media and growing authoritarian populism is a constant challenge to promote truth; and hold on to it.

# “Democracies Do Not Elect Tyrants”

Democracy is not an exercise of free speech bereft of truth, respect towards human people and plain ethics.

GERRY LOBO, OFM

The Honourable Chief Justice of India, N. V. Ramana, in his Justice P. D. Desai Memorial Lecture on June 30, 2021, placed a simple cautionary axiom: “Democracies do not elect tyrants.” The axiom speaks volumes in relation to the manner in which leaders of a democracy, such as ours, function. Obviously the Chief Justice of the Apex Court is aghast at the elected representatives of a democracy - the way they govern and arrive at decisions. Democracies, consciously and sincerely desiring a harmonious existence and a fearless speech, elect co-citizens who bear the mark of honesty, justice, tolerance and compassion as their voice in the governance of a country. However, the irony written on the pages of human history is that democracies do generously and selflessly elect democrats, but very soon, disgustingly and sadly enough, they turn into tyrants. Our contempo-

rary ruling dispensation of a democratic nation witnesses the horse-minded reality beyond any explanation. Such a conversion from democracy to tyranny is experienced today by commoners who dare not voice themselves in public lest they be policed, emarginated and placed under house arrest. The incumbent Chief Justice, himself being a citizen of our democratic nation and as one who shares in some measure the anguish of his fellow men and women, is not far from the truth of his axiom: “Democracies do not elect tyrants.”

“Rule of Law,” clearly demarcated from the “Rule by the Law” by the Chief Justice, seems to be an alien distinction for those who govern our society at different levels: the police in the Law and Order Department, the bureaucrats in high offices, heads of institutions and those on the legislative boards. Ruling by the law has overtaken governance by the Rule of law in these times. The “majority” in our legislative institutions has denigrated the Rule of Law governance by usurping political power being exercised over the citizens. The Rule by Law thus silences the common man and woman keeping them satiated by the favourable monetary dole-outs and other benefices which in no way enhance human development, instead only perpetuate dependency, with an ulterior motive of garnering votes in the subsequent elections. The vicious circle has impoverished the human spirit, creating a kind of apathy in the electorate. The very fact that a democracy such as Singapore, because it provides affluent comfort and decent living, may not speak the truth of the axiom: “Democracies do not elect tyrants.” Often such democracies carry

a decorated cover of perfect democracy for a mere tyrannical rule by law where everything works mechanically.

Democracy, on the other hand, is not an exercise of free speech bereft of truth, respect towards human people and plain ethics. It does not mean, either, silence at unjust and preposterous practices; instead, it means a prophetic opposition to anything that oppresses the human spirit and divests the human rights and dignity. Rule of Law in democracy renders people their rightful place and proposes justifying responsibility towards the societal well-being. Democracy, therefore, does not exclude the Rule of Law to let people do what they will, thus creating anarchy. Democracy, in no way, suggests irresponsible acts leading to violence. However, in a democracy tyrants can disturb the peace. Well-mannered leaders, at all levels of the society, respect democracy as a greater responsibility placed on them towards their citizens. Therefore, democracies do not elect tyrants!

The strong tendency of the democratically elected leaders turning tyrants is observable particularly when the voice of the numerically weak opposition is drowned by the large governing body of the elected from a majoritarian legislature. In such an instance the human as well as economic resources are pipe-lined to favour the aristocratic favourites as it is done in the selling of the Public Service Units such as national airports and major companies today. Bills are passed without honest and critical discussions, in haste. Governance is transformed into Rule by Law, thus subjecting the common citizen to sit beneath the rich man's table with dainty foods, only to collect the crumbs that fall from it, meant for dogs! When democracies elect democrats of sensible and sensitive calibre, and they make themselves tyrants because of the unbridled desire for power positions, a nation of human hearts dies. It is not that those elected by the grace of people are ignorant about democracy. Rather, they ignore the noble values of equality, fraternity and liberty for falsehood and tyranny. Kind regard toward human beings vanishes from their demeanour and cruelty is meted out to the innocent exhibiting one's power.

The active participation of people of a nation in the creation of a human world with just order and harmonious existence is what democracy consists of. It is more than a mere freedom of speech or a free movement of people. Sensitive living and compassionate approach in human predicaments, critical awareness of and un-delayed response to living issues speak for a genuine democracy. Tyrants, on the other hand, have no heart even to ponder over for a while and realize that the sheer mercy and goodness of the electorate has, in reality, elevated them to where they are. It is obvious that democracy is robbed of its valuable wealth and tyrants have made their den in it. Oh, how the hunger for power encroaches the home of democratic values! Even in spite of the devastating tragedy of Covid pandemic razing millions on our planet, democracies that elected democrats prefer to forget the loss and pain of our Mother Earth and with iron fists dare to direct the destiny of nations homed by human “others” of flesh and blood. It does no good to anyone to put in the open any number of instances of pain and penury, rejection and death the world has witnessed in the recent past. All are aware of the fact that democracies do not elect tyrants, but tyrants they become once elected. They are spread all over – in government offices, in public institutions of service, in religious and sacred spaces, in parliaments and in market squares.

“Democracies do not elect tyrants.” It is true. And yet, “Governments are associated with constant reliance on falsehood in order to establish dominance,” stated Justice Chandrachud of our Supreme Court. The elected ones who govern the society or a nation go without an ethical soul; the victims go unnoticed and un-mourned, as it happened during Covid months. Tyrants dodge moral responsibility from the proximity of the “other”, obliterate and annihilate the face of the “other” or see the “other” from a mere utilitarian, market point of view. There is, today, a growing sense of un-ease and frustration, unhappiness and burden on the citizens of our nation because democracy is sold to tyrants and tyrants rule over the helpless millions. A change is possible if all believe and embrace the critical axiom: “Democracies do not elect tyrants.”





# Leadership Learnings in VUCA Times

Experienced leaders need to think young and teach to question, not just to throw answers; simply because the same questions may stay relevant, but the answers to them are definitely shifting.

KENNETH LEAN

The world seems to be a rollercoaster ride like never before. The most powerful nations are getting challenged with a dynamism that is forcing long term plans to shrink into very short strategies. Strategists are grappling in the embrace of uncertainty as innovation through technology keeps propping up from unexpected quarters. The opportunities through technology is making entrepreneurship verily possible even in small little sleepy towns.

Every corporate giant is finding a competitor sprouting out from unexpected places. This makes leadership more exciting, challenging and painstaking; which has led to thudding falls of organisations and individuals. The character of leaders in this transformational journey is being tested on a day-to-day basis – even more a reason that leaders learn to let go and rise in their fall. The question that many businesses are struggling to find answers to is, “Is there a way out without falling prey to these disruptions.” Can organisations build leadership capabilities to lead industry disruptions, than fall victim to it? The only alternative is to be agile and learn from VUCA times, on the feet and on the run!

The learning cycles for leaders are shrinking, and probably many proven management principles are being challenged, and many re-written. Recently during a coffee conversation, a leader was sharing that his organisation of over 100,000 people has lost about 20 leaders

in the last half year. Many of those exiting were shifting career lines, causing panic in the conservative leadership that existed. The current leadership, he believed, was struggling to hold together an organisation that was till recently expected to grow rapidly in the next five years. What could be the reason? The current leadership had not been able to anticipate the challenges from agile and young start-ups. These leaders in their swollen pride have not been able get whiteboards and their grey cells to work for them. Their dependency on their successful past is not allowing them to learn in these falling times.

The number of years spent in doing the same thing is not real experience. On the contrary, just simply learning different ways of rising during the little falls in the pit holes of an otherwise smooth road – is what actually turns experience into value. Never has the Law of Constraints been more relevant. Leaders of these large corporations are well used to being challenged with the constraints of resources like machinery, people and money, but NOW the constraints are of ‘ideas’. The tired and old brains camping in soundproof cabins refused to listen to the changing world outside. The young innovative brains have already shifted the game away from these large corporations, to small garages of ticking minds. There isn’t time for blame games here; it is indeed time for learning and listening, and not lecturing. Many leaders

keeping talking about their past successes, it is however about time to talk about what one can do of the future.

Most of the jobs and roles may disappear before you can push back the ergonomic chairs and stand up to face the world. The role of chairs has shifted to some garage filled with innovative ideas. Leaders need to take solace of their experience and adapt to these fast-paced changes happening around. That said, all is not well with the new world too, but then these are learners. The solution is in trying to find out where the wise people of the past can add in and rise along with the young generation. Mentorship is important for these young entrepreneurs in areas like mentorship for organisation building, scaling of markets and value creation.

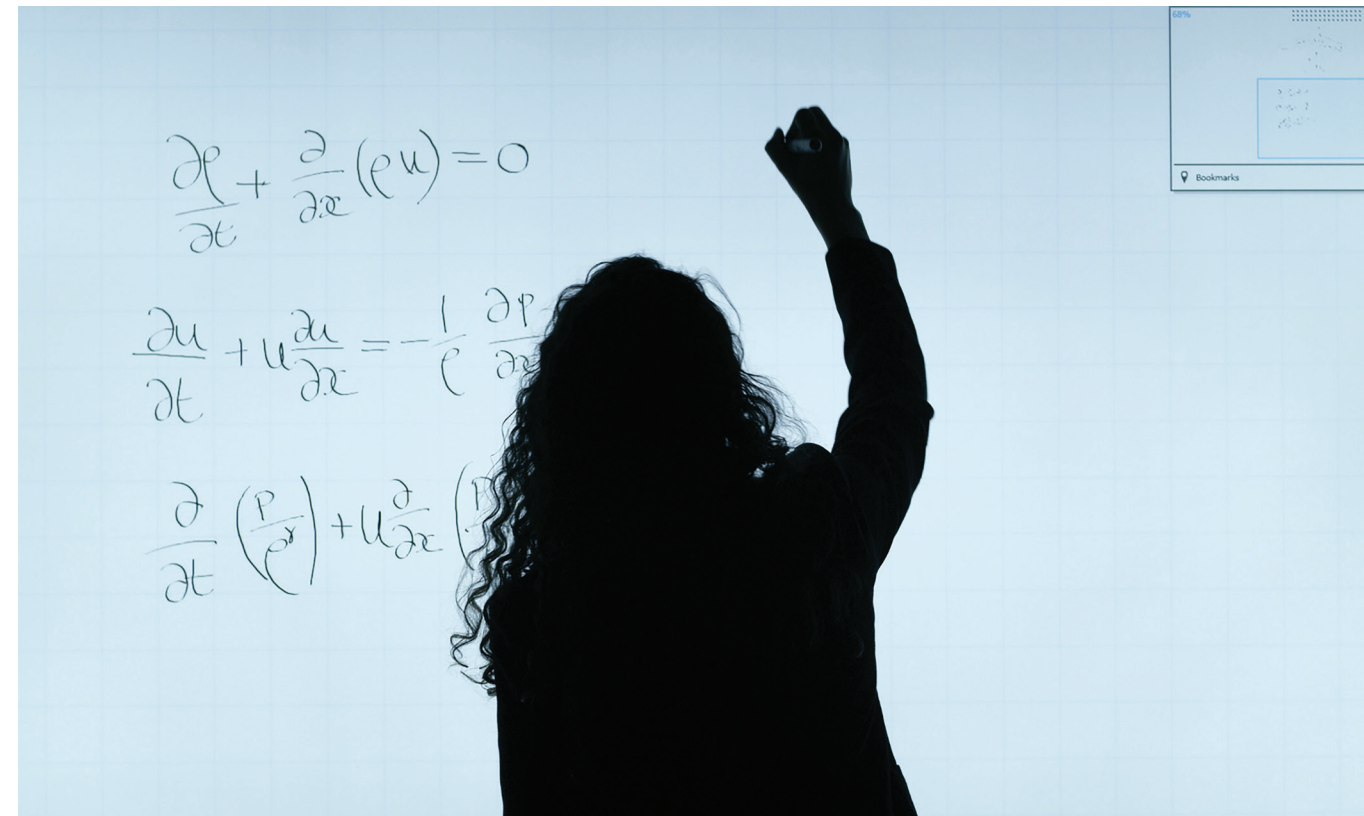
However, adapting to their style of learning is something the experienced leaders need to understand. Classrooms are no longer learning labs, so where does one teach or learn? Or rather, how does one approach learning? Experienced leaders need to think young and teach to question, not just to throw answers; simply because the same questions may stay relevant, but the answers to them are definitely

shifting. Leaders with experience need to learn to re-shape their personality. Some of the things they need to leave behind are their ego, prestige, impulsiveness and authoritative behaviour.

It sure is time to depend on the most tested traits of EQ and be a learner while coaching. Times might look tough but for the learner it is always exciting to explore new paths, re-discover oneself and see every fall as an upward movement. Empathy, adaptability, influence, transparency and continuous learning are traits leaders need to build on to manage these changing times. Oliver Holmes probably stays relevant today when he says, “Man’s mind once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.”

If your backpack is equipped with a great attitude and an open mind, the journey will be an educating one. In every fall, there will be a new way to rise up again.

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## IN PICTURES

# My Grandma, Her Nose Plugs, Tattoos, and Me

NANI AMUNG

**A**s a child, I was always scared of this tattooed woman who always wanted to hold me in her arms. She would talk in a language I didn't quite understand yet. With a pair of big nose plugs and tattooed lines along her nose and chin, she looked so alien and unlike the women in my school books. I would cry and run away every time she reached for me and she would just sit there with her arms reaching out, longing for her granddaughter.

It took me years to connect with my grandma because of the lack of contact; and so little time we spent with our grandparents. We only met on vacations from my boarding school but even then the language barrier was too vast for us to have a proper talk; and by the time we finally understood each other, too many years had already passed, and there were only some women still left with these tattooed faces.



Nani with her granny





One day she sat me down and said, “I used to be so upset when as a child you always ran away from me. At that time I wished I didn’t have these tattoos on my face so that my Nanu would come sit on my lap but I couldn’t do anything about them, these nose plugs and tattoos were my identity and you always ran away from me”. This conversation really upset me and made me realise how I failed to understand her affection because of the generation gap which made us so different from each other. “These were tattooed on me and all the other girls in the village at an age I can’t even remember but during winter. I remember it was cold that day. Some of us would cry and try to run away but our mother and aunts would hold us down and tattoo our faces” she said, imitating how she tried to wrestle their hands off her wrist; and she laughed.

Although it was forced on some girls, it had a very significant value in our Apatani tribe over time and was a part of our identity; settled in a small valley called Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh. My grandmother told me of how long time ago people of other tribes would come and forcefully take away the women from the villages. The legend has it that Apatani women were considered to be very beautiful and the villages were frequently ransacked. So to protect themselves, they started tattooing their faces and with time, it became their identity and changed from uglification to a symbol of beauty until 1974, when the government banned this practice and in the process rubbed off a huge part of the identity of Apatani women. Some of the women who had tattoos started getting surgeries to conceal it after the ban; and the number of women with facial tattoos, which were once considered as their identity started going down. These days you only see the oldest people in the village flaunting their tattoos and in coming years it will only be recalled in our legends.

## Does Google Know Me Too Well?

SANJANA SUPRATHI

Yes, they sure do. They know when I want to eat, what I want to eat and where I want to go; all too well. How? Why does google know me better than I do myself? Here is where I will slide in our subject for the day... SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM.

To simply put it, surveillance capitalism is a system, an economic system to be precise, that thrives on commodification of my personal data (Yours too!) for their profit/business success. Sure I’d like google to tell me what to eat for lunch, that would be less work for me. While on the surface it is okay for us to think this way, Shoshana Zuboff, the author of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, says that it is a misconception. She says, we believe what these companies take from us is nothing more than what we provide and that we still feel we have power over how much we want to reveal about ourselves. I am truly sorry to break it to you this way but they know more about you than you would want them to know. (yes even your guilty pleasure obsession over KUWTK!)

Companies like Google and Facebook collect our residual data, i.e. data we have left behind. They hold onto this to predict, influence and modify our behaviour through mathematical calculations and algorithms to build predictive MODELS of human behaviour. For example, where you’ve been, the spelling error you erased that would’ve made you look a teeny weeny dumb, how fast you type, how fast you walk, where you walk to and awful-lot-more!

You may think, trust me I do too, that “this doesn’t really affect me”; but it does. The reason we are not as aware is simply because the problem is happening on a level that is not accessible to us. This becomes an issue of “assault of

human autonomy” as Zuboff puts it. My face is data, my location is data, my house, my family and my lunch is data. Do I want it to be? No! But do I have a say? You guessed it right, no again!

What really is ours is our personal experiences and the day I realized that even that is not mine, ngl, it did kind of make me feel like a ghost floating around in the office of Google and Facebook. What do they do with this and why do they want to know whether I use Nandini milk or Soffit? What started off as advertising has now come to stand as what it is today. A concern of privacy and autonomy.

The surveillance capitalists sell certainty to business partners. Let’s say I am on Google looking for online stores to buy myself a Taco sleeping bag. Now, let’s stay, Amazon has partnered with Google and if I am looking for something, I probably want to buy it. Google will simply tell amazon, “hey look, a potential buyer (certainty)” and boom, targeted advertisements.

A few things you can do to hide on the internet are:

- Ensure websites you visit have HTTPS! It ensures encryption.
- Use tracker blockers. It blocks those follow you and record what you do on the web.
- Use multiple browsers for different online activities to make it harder to join the dots of online activity

While it’s all fun and games (not), there is a need for us to understand better what is being done with our data that we do not want to share with us. It is important that we know how much of us is being commodified and learning about that is digital self-defence. Your privacy is your fundamental right.

# Discrimination Is Alive and Thriving

**Education defeats its purpose if it does not broaden mental horizons, if it does not enlighten those being educated.**

MONICA FERNANDES

**12** *Years a Slave* is the brilliant and enthralling story of how one man survived being wrongfully enslaved in 1841. The author, Solomon Northup, narrates the heart-rending condition of exploited slaves. He vividly describes the unimaginable cruelty towards the 'blacks' meted out by the white, churchgoing landowners of the Southern belt of USA. Lashings were common and the slaves were miserable. The whites convinced themselves that they were a superior race and that the blacks were mere chattel.

Nearer home, the intense and hard-hitting movie *Article 15* exposes the underbelly of entrenched casteism in rural India. It questions the validity of a system that is unjust, exploitative and labels an individual's capabilities on the basis of his caste.

God created all human beings equal but it is these wonderful thinking creatures he created who have invented and perpetuated artificial barriers based on gender, caste, creed, colour, looks, height, perceived intelligence and so forth. The caste system is continuing because it enables the strong to subjugate the weak for their own material benefit.

Education defeats its purpose if it does not broaden mental horizons, if it does not enlighten those being 'educated'. Education's purpose is not merely to enable us to get better jobs. It is of no use if it does not challenge entrenched and discriminatory beliefs and practices passed on from generation to generation like family heirlooms.

The failure of the education system is evident in the suicide of Dr. Payal Tadvi in Mumbai reported in the newspapers. One cannot but

feel sorry for Dr. Tadvi who was allegedly driven to suicide by the remorseless cruelty of her women seniors Hema Ahuja, Bhakti Mehare and Ankita Khandelwal. This trio of doctors did not think their actions were wrong as perhaps they believed in their own superiority as upper caste women as compared to Dr. Tadvi. They hurled insults on their victim such as "Don't try to be our equal", "over-smart", "manda" (dim). And "Being from a lower caste, you are trying to be our equal?" Their attitude was totally unjustified as a witness describes Dr. Tadvi as being "competent and accomplished in her work." The workplace is an area where one is paid to be productive and not a place to spend one's time in discriminatory practices.

The newspapers published the case of Aniket who was an engineer and an MBA. He also took his own life due to the relentless barbs and taunts he faced in the workplace because he was gay. Aniket's sexual orientation is not the business of his colleagues who have been employed to work. His only crime was that he was different from the majority.

I recall with amusement the discrimination meted out to me by my own family. My father was an engineer in the railways and had a posting in Ajmer in those days. It was my older cousin's wedding in what was called 'Bombay' in those days. It was to be a big wedding and I was one of the four flower girls. So my mother and I came to stay with my aunt for this momentous occasion. I was as pleased as punch to try on my multilayered dress and shoes to match. And then the great day arrived and so did my woes! My mother and her two sisters set upon me with a vengeance by first pulling

my hair and winding it around several curlers. Ouch! Straight hair, so unacceptable! But worse was to come. In a serious attempt to beautify me, the three ladies liberally applied powder all over my face in order to cover my brown skin. In the hurry of getting ready, the three amateur beauticians forgot to powder my neck. And so I sallied forth with my face like 'a Greek statue' to quote the British playwright R.B. Sheridan and the rest of me belonging to a nine year old Indian girl. The other three kids were spared the beauty treatment as they were fair with curly hair and thus conformed to the perception of beauty.

It hurts when one doesn't belong. Veena was a poor girl who could not afford to follow trendy fashions and was ignored by her classmates in college. So she decided to stand out by buying a set of different colour contact lenses. Unfortunately these were of inferior quality and the poor girl lost one eye due to an infection.

Discrimination involves three types of people for its perpetuation. One individual could be a victim, another could be the bullying oppressor and the third could be an instrument of change. If you are a victim, bear in mind that you are hand crafted by a loving God to be

unique. Victimisation may continue but this does not alter the fact that you are unique. Seek help. If you are in college, confide in your close friends or complain to the principal. Don't take it lying down. If you are being harassed in the workplace, try to change your job. Write down the positive aspects of your life. For instance, list out your talents. Count your blessings – your good health, the opportunities open to you which unfortunately many of our countrymen do not have. Think of the fun times you had with family and friends. Above all, one's self talk should be positive, affirming all one's positive qualities and uniqueness.

When we hold on for dear life to our prejudices, when they colour our actions, then our prejudices are in fact controlling our minds. Be the third type of person mentioned above. Break the shackles of wrong beliefs in discriminatory practices that keep your minds shackled. Be the agents of change in your homes, your schools, your colleges and your workplaces. Reach out with compassion to those who are different. Freedom is not confined to an individual but it encompasses society as well. Let it be our earnest endeavour to foster peace, social harmony, brotherhood and equal opportunity.







# The Art of Letting Go in Death

**There is in all of us a certain degree of unwillingness to accept our mortality. For many people, the time of death is the one moment when we desperately cling to life.**

JOY PRAKASH OFM

**T**oday, circuses are rare! To see a circus performance today we may have to resort to YouTube performances. And it is important to watch it; it gives important lessons for life.

In a Trapeze circus performance, there is a “thrower” and a “catcher”. Both are suspended in the air. The thrower picks up a person and throws him/her through the air. The person travels through mid-air and flies to the outstretched hands of the catcher. The performer will have to just stretch out his/her hands to the catcher who will pull up the person with both hands and securely land him or her in safety.

The whole thing is breath-taking and full of suspense. There is also appropriate music to synchronize.

The trapeze artists know full well that only the release of the secure bar allows them to fly into the hands of the catcher. Before they can be caught they must *let go*. They must trust the space of movement. Whether it concerns a person, his possession or personal reputation, in so many areas, we hold on to them as securities. The most difficult thing is *letting go*. A story is told of an elderly woman brought to a psychiatric hospital who was wild, frightening everyone with her clenched fists. The hospital authorities,

nurses and ward boys tried to pry open her fists and she would not open her fists for the life of her. It was as though she would lose her very self along with the coin that she had held tightly in her hand. The woman was frightened to the core of what would happen to her if she allowed her fists to unclench!

The rich young man could not *let go* of his “great possessions” (Mk 10:21). He was afraid of releasing them and following the ‘good Master’. The Gospel account says, the rich young man went away sad!

Says the great spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen, “In trapeze circus everyone applauds the ‘thrower’ but he is not the hero. But the ‘catcher’. The only thing I have to do is stretch out my hands and trust that he will be there to pull me back up.”

We can say no less about the God who encircles our little lives and waits to catch us and hold us – in the hard junctures and the good, in the precarious moments and the times we soar. Someone within us and yet beyond us always makes that possible. Because of that, our tight grip on life – its joys and even its sorrows – can loosen. We too can learn again to fly – to *let go* – with trust.

The great paradox is that in *letting go*, we receive the hands of the Great Catcher, that safety in the unexpected places we all dread. The little brief moment in the air is when we only need to move to the catcher with courage. C.S. Lewis says in his “The Four Loves”: “to love at all is to be vulnerable...If you want to make sure of of keeping (your heart) intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it around carefully with hobbies and little luxuries, avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken – it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable...The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from the danger of love is Hell.”

Fear becomes a great obstacle in reaching out to the hands of the Catcher. We must trust the Catcher. We fear if we will be caught or not, whether we will go down into the chasm beneath us. Yet, in a life of faith, we see such

fearless people as the widow who put in the two little coins into the temple treasury and *let go* the security the two coins would have brought to her life. We are told in the Gospel it was “...all she had to live on” (Mk 12: 44). So also the woman with the flow of blood trusting in her inner voice “I will be made well” (Mat 9:21), reached out and touched the fringe of the garment. Jesus exclaimed, “Someone has touched me.” The result was healing!

Hence when we dare to *let go* in faith and trust, we do receive life in abundance! Don’t we? Often I have found much consolation in the words of a Greek writer and philosopher, Nikos Kazantzakis, whose eloquent words impel me ‘to let go’. “O God, thou only art immovable. If thou didst not exist, to what should a man cling when everything is dissolving and lapping away? The woman who loves? The father who begot him? Men? Everything withers, crumbles, slides, Thou alone, O God, remainest there stable; let me lean upon Thee! Hold me tight, O God, my reason is tottering” (Report to Greco).

For many people, the time of death is the one moment when we desperately cling to life. There is in all of us a certain degree of unwillingness to accept our mortality; for ‘life’ to cease. During the early days of Covid-19 deaths in Italy, there were reports about priests who were on ventilators and who gave up their chance to live longer by voluntarily asking the nurses to connect their ventilator machines to the younger people in the ward. They *let go* of their chance to live so that another may live.

Henri Nouwen opens our eyes to the way Saint Francis of Assisi embraced death, calling her, “Welcome, Sister Death”. Nouwen says, he, Saint Francis, gives the feeling that “He died, but never died”. Saint Francis died in 1226, but he is still very much alive! His death was a true gift, and today after more than eight hundred years, he continues to fill his brothers and sisters, within and without the Franciscan orders, with great energy and life. His life goes on bearing new fruit around the world. His spirit keeps descending upon us. More than ever I am convinced, says Nouwen, that death can, indeed, be chosen as our final gift of life (Life of the Beloved).



# Positive Virtual Pedagogical Models for Pandemic Times

**Virtual proximity needs to emerge between educators, teenagers, management, peers, parents, thereby moulding the virtual world into a holistic learning environment.**

ROSELINE FLORENCE GOMES

The pandemic of 2020-21 has created a transitional havoc among the population worldwide. Amidst all the developmental age groups the silent sufferers are the teenagers belonging to the early adolescent phase. These belong to the age group of 13 years who are in the formative years of psychosocial development. The prolonged exposure of the pandemic has led to an increase in social isolation, escapist behavioural tendencies, uncertainties about the future, and most importantly restriction in both personal and social skills. Educational institutions have worked on stabilizing the e-learning portals in guiding teenagers to socially adapt to the changing pedagogy. This has drastically made the facilitation process expensive and unavailable due to the varied types of learners meeting with scarcity on economic and virtual resources. There has been a phenomenon of progressive brooding observed among educators, parents, academic institutions about the digitalisation of the learning and understanding process. With all these complexities, societal institutions including schools, families, and other supportive networks are unable to identify the gender-based psychosocial trajectories of our teenagers. It's needed that these institutions function as one inclusive unit in catering to the gender-specific needs of the adolescents. Earlier teenagers were battling with self-expression and interpersonal interactions which further have strength-

ened in the phase of virtual communication. It's integral that academic authorities with the assistance of parental networks promote autonomy and leadership qualities among the younger generation. Collectivistic integration of perspectives may uphold the innate tendencies of teenagers to grow internally and emit the individualised attributes within the social fabric. Early identification of psychological turmoil faced by male and female teenagers will lead to solution-focused tendencies of uplifting the personal growth of these teenagers.

These evidence-based virtual strategies need to be created by using available resources that are inexpensive and accessible. Educators, researchers, parents, community professionals need to develop a sense of social responsibility and ownership within themselves. Simulation models equipped with visual, auditory, and kin-aesthetic approaches need to be blended by stabilising feelings of connectedness among teenagers. The pandemic has given rise to digital addictions among the young which elucidates the noble duty of authority figures in transforming the negative usage of social media into a positive pedagogical model. It would enhance a participatory approach by collectively involving teenagers in capacity-building and formulating youth-driven initiatives. Hence, virtual proximity needs to emerge between educators, teenagers, management, peers, parents, thereby moulding the virtual world into a holistic

learning environment. This will renew the teenager's leadership skills and decision-making processes. Virtual pedagogical models should be designed to reflect gender equality in making a fascinating transition to virtual pedagogy. This would mould virtual learning from a business model to a self-transformative model. Instructional methods need to be collaborated with the young in guiding them to apply digital practices mindfully by understanding the personal, social, and affective qualities of the virtual world.

Learning beyond the formal curriculum is like the creation of self and social awareness. It's the reinforcement of social change and the development of virtual extra-curricular activities for personal autonomy and leadership. Virtual models need to be explored, experimented and evaluated by teachers, caregivers, or any other institutional members to define skill-sets in redefining self-growth. Teenagers need to be involved in the academic process through the application of positive virtual transformational models. Some of the strategies that can be implemented in harnessing the psychosocial capacities of teenagers are as follows:

Graphic Interchange Format can be applied through multiple images, animations, soundless video-auditory cues depicting affective states, educational concepts, or any relevant pedagogical resource.

Virtual memes in the form of cultural visual stimulus can add humour to the process of virtual digital facilitation. It can symbolize an idea, action, culture, or personal style. This would strengthen the pathways of intercultural learning.

Positive self-affirmation cards can be created by educators in promoting a favourable understanding of the concept by relating to self. This would facilitate experiential learning and develop self-competence skills.

Virtual simulation worksheets for self-development needs to be explored by teachers and parents in promoting teenagers' critical reasoning, experiential skills, and self-sufficiency abilities.

Story-driven real-life experiential posters blended with the educational resource would integrate social understanding, intrinsic motivational skills, problem-solving approaches, and self-paced learning strategies.

Virtual positive rewards can be initiated in demonstrating acceptance and appreciation of gender equalities, individuality, and age-related or personality-driven talents.

Virtual postcards can be designed and mobilized for both male and female teenagers in instilling journaling skills using values like gratitude, self-care, sustainability, collectivism, etc.

Thus, the pivotal role of family, schools, and other societal organizations in understanding and valuing teenagers in the formative years, without any discrimination of gender, would be carried out. In the current pandemic, the present generation should be initiated into virtual facilities in order to function productively. Teenage capacity development is like the art of leadership that looks like an individual practice but it's more like teamwork. The support system includes these community institutions where some appreciate, some criticize, and some back these adolescents up. It looks like an individual effort but it's a collective journey of a cohesive chain. This chain is our community that scaffolds the teenagers to be autonomous in accepting their talents, skills, personal traits and handhold themselves and others to be self-sufficient. Therefore, it is an inclusive web collating all the personal strengths and weaknesses.

In this era of the novel pandemic when teenagers transition into their developmental phases, let's guide them as transformative role models who are their caregivers, educators, and peers. We can always brood with the changing digital world, diminished human face-to-face interactions, economic and health crises, and so on. But it's time to rejuvenate our solution-focused methods in recreating newer pedagogies in improving the teenager's upskilling techniques by nourishing the psychosocial attributes for a smooth transition of personal growth and life-long learning.



# The Stained Subject

**Sex education is lessons on how to tackle relationships with ourselves and others, family values, gender roles and identity, consent and awareness about sexual abuse, contraception and the list goes on.**

SNEHA BALAKRISHNAN

“A little learning is a dangerous thing”. This proverb clearly states the current scenario of today’s generation. India has a paradoxical attitude towards enforcing ‘Sex Education’ into school curriculum. To be honest, India is still in its cocoon in this matter. India ranks 33 in the world for being the best countries for Education. But sex education is contemplated to be an unsatisfactory reputé to the rich Indian culture where ironically sexuality was exhibited through ancient sculptures, Kama Sutra, etc.; all which uplift the heritage of India. The critics suggests that “Sex education may be indispensable in western countries, but not in India which has rich traditions and ethos.” The real problem arise when we ignore the reality and still follow such presumptions. Right now it is sort of a miserable condition, as not only the topic is given any importance but also dismissed as sensitive and controversial subject that stain the young minds.

Sex education was and is still regarded as a hush or skip topic at home and schools. Sex education is defined as a broad program that aims to build a strong foundation for lifelong sexual health by acquiring information and attitudes, beliefs and values about one’s identity, relationships, and intimacy. Sexuality education encompasses a range of topics that are tailored to the age and developmental level of the child. Yet there is still a majority who halt at the impression sex education is merely focused on abstinence only. Adolescence is the time of rapid mental and physiological changes. In short their mind and body is like a highly reactive metal. If not stored and nurtured properly, it can easily turn into an explosive. Apart from the curiosity, it’s also the time of confusion and bag

full of doubts concerning their bodily changes. At the moment, the new media have a lot of uncensored guidance to offer to these thirsty minds. Information is everywhere. The growing minds won’t be able to differentiate the authentic material as it is a holistic type of education. That’s where when one realise the urgency of sex education. Teenagers endure pressure from peer groups as well as stereotypical norms that society build up for ‘man’ and ‘women’ to act out accordingly. In terms of Psychology, Freudian theory of psycho-sexual development states that, “It is a natural instinctual tendency of human beings to explore about sexuality from an early age.” It is not surprising that we all know ‘Mitochondria is the power house of the cell’ but can’t answer some of the basic questions about our own anatomy. Also it’s time to state that sex education also contains lessons on how to tackle relationships with ourselves and others, family values, gender roles and identity, consent and awareness about sexual abuse, contraception and the list goes on. This education helps to systematically cope up with developments in our body also benefits us in understanding the changes that occur in others too. In all these chaos, the teenagers are becoming victims without their knowledge to the traditional minds resisting to come out of their comfort zone. Additionally, sex education helps in pulling up India from the fight against AIDS.

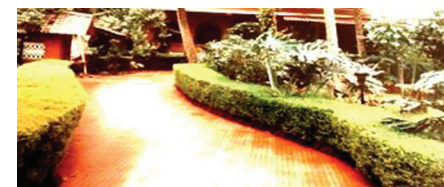
Proceeding on, let’s take a peep on Government’s responses, In 2007 a number of state governments passed orders banning an adolescent education programme designed for 15-17 years in all state-run schools, NCERT introduced in 2006 a curriculum for sex education under ‘Adolescent Education Programme’ which

was produced in collaboration with the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) and UNICEF. This programme was withdrawn after several states protested against including sex education in the school curriculum, The NEP 2020 doesn’t include Comprehensive Sexuality Education. The approach towards implementing sexuality education in school curriculum should be truthful, comprehensive, accurate and developmentally appropriate sexuality education. Currently the sexuality education students get don’t even cover the surface level. To do it well, it needs a well educated and trained teacher specially assigned to this.

At first, the attitude towards it should be changed as it is perceived as the title itself attracts bad scent. We have been flavoring and blinding it with filtered colours blurring the truth. The first and foremost best place to bring a change in this would be at their very own house. Opening up on such controversial matters at home is really a stepping stone to unshackle the barriers and encouraging them to speak openly rather than hiding it as an embarrassment topic. Then comes ‘Mass Media’, which have a mixed impact. Informants of the media should be steered by experts and doctors which bear trustworthy informations. In a hindsight, the rape culture predominantly seen amongst youth can be avoided to an extent by having them go through the right sex education. Lawfully speaking, Sexuality education is per-

ceived as a basic human right that falls under the broader title “reproductive rights” as emphasized by reputable NGO’s such as the Family Planning Association of India. According to the United Nations Human Rights Council Report, by not providing sex education, there is a violation of the human rights of Indian adolescents and young people as recognized under international law.

The conclusion of this article is inescapable viewed in the light of the foregoing issues, Triggered the need for sex education in India, still the critics feel that “Sex education may be necessary in western countries, but not in India, which has a rich culture. It will have adverse effects on young minds.” For centuries people followed this notion like a flock of sheep. Social norms and gender inequality influence the expression of sexuality and sexual behaviour. The detoured young minds should be immunized with unbiased sexual health for the better tomorrow. Less communication leads to more chaos in how people deal with such matters. Implementing debatable subject into the school curriculum is definitely a strenuous task taking account of the emaciated beliefs and taboos relating to sexuality education; but if we do not do it we would be jeopardizing the lives and future of adolescences. Doing it right may avoid promiscuity, experimentation, and irresponsible sexual behavior. “It isn’t ‘No’ sex before marriage, it is ‘Know’ sex before marriage.”



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## 14 November

Children's Day (India)

Children's Day is celebrated to increase awareness on the rights and education of children every year. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru was born on this day in 1889.

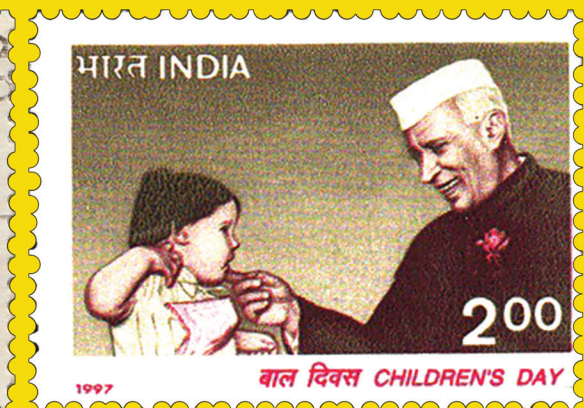
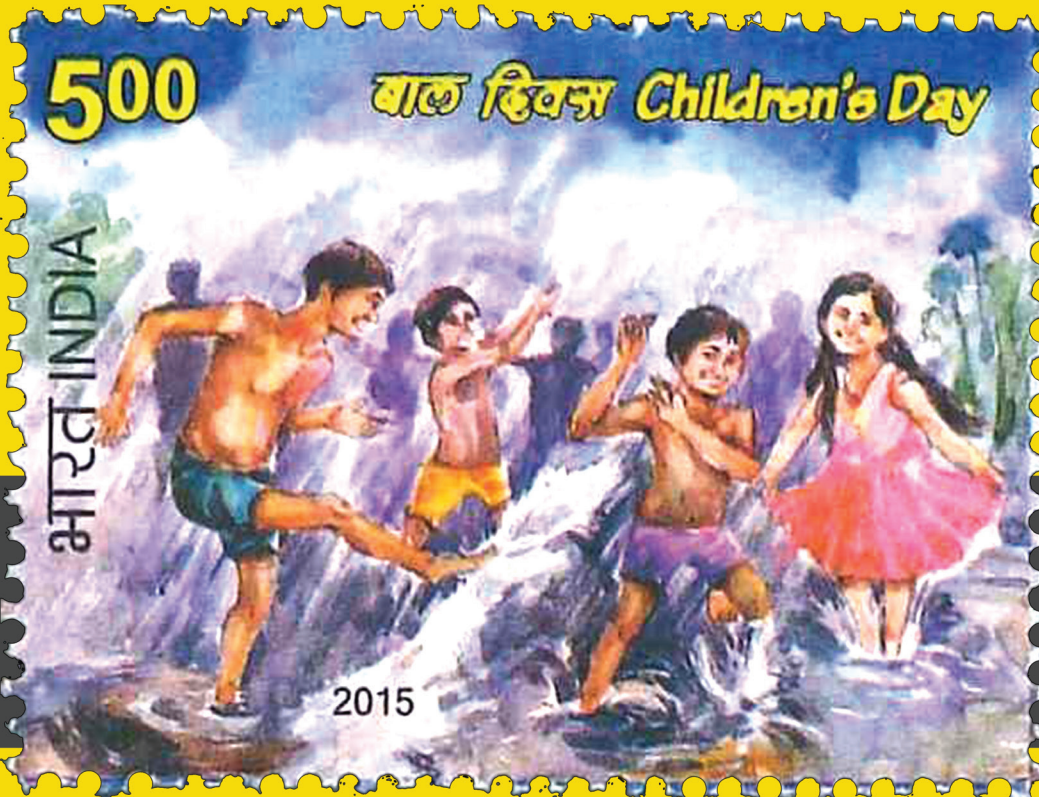
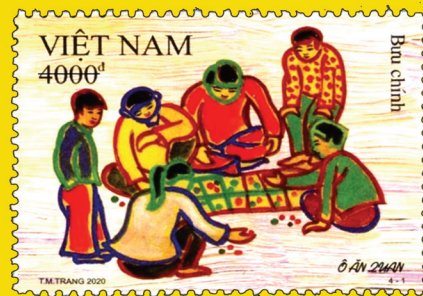
## 20 November

World Children's Day

The World Children's Day was first established in 1954 as Universal Children's Day and is celebrated on 20 November each year to promote international togetherness, awareness among children worldwide, and improving children's welfare.

November 20th is an important date as it is the date in 1959 when the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. It is also the date in 1989 when the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Tom John OFM



This year, the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a child rights crisis. The costs of the pandemic for children are immediate and, if unaddressed, may last a lifetime.

United Nations



# The Birth

A FRANCIS

“It is not like the rocket science; it is just parenting! We did it; and you too, will, just like all of us!” Mrs Menon admonished her daughter, Tasha, with a stern but dismissing tone.

Tasha, however, was not convinced of her mother’s admonition. Her mother’s reality in India was nowhere close to the struggles she faces daily as a recent immigrant in Canada. “It is true that parenting is not like the rocket science; but parenting is awfully hard”, she retorted to her mother, at the risk of being disobedient.

Tasha gave birth to her firstborn hardly two months ago. Since the birth of the baby, her life took a big nosedive.

All of a sudden, she received a new identity. ‘Mama’ is the new term her family and friends, including her husband, use to address her. It started with the birth of her baby. Doctors, nurses, even the cleaning lady in the maternity unit, had repeated the same question to her, “How is the baby doing, mama?”

She can’t even decide when to go to bed, a very basic human need according to Abraham Maslow, the great humanist turned transperonalist! Her outings are unidirectionally reduced to taking the baby to the ‘Sick Kids’ hospital or to any pediatric clinics, because the baby is ill. And, of course,

constantly to the ‘Shopper’s Drug Mart’ because the baby needs diapers.

Until she became pregnant, “For ever Twenty-One”, the famous American fashion retailer was her favourite weekend hang-out corner. That, surely, is one of a by-gone stories of her life, now. A thing of the past!

The concerns that occupy her life today are candidly different.

To start with, she didn’t have enough breastmilk to feed the baby. Well, when that was partially resolved with children’s formula, the issue was about the baby having constipation. When that too was addressed somewhat successfully, it was about the baby having green poop. Tasha’s cousin, who has a bit of medical background, may be the only apothecary in the family, insisted that a newborn having green poop was unusual and required immediate medical attention. So, the baby was rushed to the Emerge at St. Joseph’s Hospital. The duty physician however, didn’t seem to be too excited about it. According to him green poop is better than red.

The latest issue, however, is not about the colour of the ‘poop’ or constipation but it is about the baby having loose poop!

No wonder, why Tasha feels that her mother’s words didn’t connect with her reality. Eerily disconnecting her cellphone, and feeling still

more disconnected with her mother, she started to pace back to her bedroom where her baby was sleeping peacefully after waging a world war with his unrelenting cries and never-ending tears. “Advice feels like a wonderful thing for anyone as long they are not the ones receiving it”, she said to herself with a sarcastic smile.

Her smile however, did not last long. All of a sudden, she became aware of the sole daunting reality of her life, the Baby! It was almost time for her to start the next round of feeding her baby. Unknowingly she began to walk fast. With the accelerated pace, her inner thoughts too began to flow faster, and perhaps a little wilder, “Would these nightmares of parenting be over, any time soon? Mum in India, could boast of her parenting expertise. But she had the whole village to take care of her babies. She could easily blurt out, “parenting is not hard as the rocket science.” I think I might be better off with rocket science than this business of going after the colour of baby poop and changing one diaper after another! Who knows, I would have become a better scientist, if I had applied to NASA instead of getting into baby making! After all, I have a masters in physics with honours!”

As Tasha was approaching her bedroom, she raised her head mechanically, letting her eyes to have a far-reaching vision of her baby sleeping

peacefully when she went to attend mom’s call. To her surprise, she momentarily realized with an electrifying emotion in her body that her baby was lying wide awake. His tiny head was turned towards the door, as if he got engaged in a serious but patient search for his mother who went missing while he was sleeping. Her eyes caught the long but loving gaze from his tiny eyes, and her heart began to pound rapidly. Driven by an overflow of maternal affection and love, she ran towards him. She grabbed him instinctively to her chest, as close and tight as possible!

In the healing love of that deep symbiotic moment, she realized that her self-talk and the conflicting inner thoughts, vanished instantaneously.

Like a forgotten dream that fails to assail the person in his wakefulness, the resentment that Tasha held towards her mother too receded into the thin air of a forgotten memory.

Holding the baby to herself, in the magical solitude of that moonlit night which made its gentle appearance to the room through the half open window, Tasha stood blissfully, and feeling endlessly calm and content. She looked as if she was beginning to cherish her new experience of being born as a mother, while her husband was snoring loud from his side of the bed!





# The Frail and the Fragile

FR. K M GEORGE

one who sits and waits for the rain to pass will also get wet.'

It seems to have a strange philosophical tinge to it. Does it mean, whatever way you choose to steer through life you will end up with the same destiny? A bit sad and fatalistic, isn't it?

Walking along the river bank with these thoughts in mind, and expecting the rain anytime I happened to spot a beautiful dragonfly perch on a blade of grass (see the picture from my mobile camera). The rather ageing leaf of grass is tenderly hosting a frail fly with transparent wings and a delicate blue body.

Are they whispering some secrets to each other? May be. One thing they might certainly share is their frailty. Stooping over the flowing water, and carrying a few shimmering water drops on its back from the night's shower, the grass leaf is one of the weakest of things on earth. The beautiful and tender fly that found rest and refuge on the flimsy leaf is also extremely frail.

They are hanging in mid-air between the overcast sky above and the muddy river below. The impending rain can do away with the frail and the fragile in a matter of seconds. Yet the sweet moment of their embrace, with the bright eyed droplets as witnesses, made my day. I stood still with closed eyes for how long I don't know until a cold shower woke me up.

At the break of dawn the day looked fine, especially for morning walkers. But it is the Monsoon season. One never knows. The South-West Monsoon (*Kaalavarsham*) that normally reaches Kerala coast on June 1 can be precarious. One moment the weather may look fine. In the next few moments it might rain cats and dogs.

The other monsoon brought in by North-East winds (*Thulaavarsham*) in October-November is very different. It usually gathers clouds with resounding thunder and lightning for two to three hours before it actually rains towards the evening. Out of the two different experiences of the monsoon there is a wise saying in Kerala somewhat like this: 'One who runs to escape from the rain will get wet, and

CINEMA

# Nayattu and Dalits

MEERA INDHU PRADEEP

The Oscar nomination of *Nayattu* becomes another proud feather on the crown of Malayalam cinema after the much celebrated Oscar entry of *Jalikettu* last year. *Nayattu* or the hunt is the literal idea and the force throughout the movie. Based on true stories, it is written by Shahi Kabir, and directed by Martin Prakkat. The movie is a blend of a suspense thriller along with socio-political commentary. The visuals of the movie have been wonderfully captured through the eyes of Shyju Khalid.

The major casts, Kunjacko Boban as Praveen Micheal, Nimisha Sajayan as Sunitha, and Joju George as ASI Maniyan, has given a stellar performance which is worth special mention. The consistency they have maintained throughout the movie have added additional essence to the movie. The performances by Yama Gilgamesh and Biju needs a special praise.

It is surprising to know that the movie has not yet received any regional awards. The movie had been subjected to much backlash and was among new trending topic on social media then. While a particular section of people criticized the movie from a political point of view for promoting anti-dalit ideas, another pointed out the realistic portrayal of exploiting Dalits for politically manipulated motives.

The movie starts with a scuffle between a politically motivated narcissistic youth and three police officers who get caught up in an endless web of chaos. The incident jeopardizes the life of the three police officers whose life turned upside down after being the prime



suspects of a murder case. The movie which starts with an uproar ends in dull, somber tone.

Does the movie have a hostile attitude towards Dalits? The portraits of Ayyankali and Dr. B R Ambedkar can be seen in the living rooms of two of the major characters. They are not merely shown as the ideal figures the characters are inspired by, but these provide the viewer about how the ideologies of these characters are shaped. While in another scene in the CM's office, a portrait can be seen behind him, which is not clearly focused. The portrait is of the CM himself indirectly points out the callousness of the egoistical and self-centered governance the victims are in.

Truth seems to have little or no value in this corrupted system where the innocent is being hunted. The individuals are being mere puppets on the hands of the system. We see the major characters losing the battle but they fight till the very end.

*Nayattu* is an excellent example after *Jellikettu*, of a movie with more dimensions than just fantasy; instilling a new sense of purpose and hope for the movie industry.



# Dying Birds

JAMESMON PC OFM

They disappear from our lives, from our preoccupations and scheme of things. We do not notice their disappearance, and naturally seem least affected or perturbed by their absence. This painting was done in 2017, and has its roots in my own mother's final days. Thankfully, she was deeply cared for by her elder son and daughter-in-law. The posture that you find in the painting is one that my mother most liked when she rested. The figure of the man has wings which are very colorful and young and yet, he is dying. He is not dying young, but his life has come full circle. He has a beak like a bird. His body bears a shade of greyish blue. Everything about him reminds one of a dying bird, except his wings.

The guitar placed on the table over a red cloth is a reference to Picasso's *The Old Guitarist*, a 1903 oil painting done during his "blue period" when he was deeply affected by the suicide of a dear friend of his. Picasso himself was very poor at the time, and he saw his own misery reflected in the downtrodden and castaways like beggars and prostitutes. The guitarist in the painting is actually blind and we see him bending over his guitar, his only means of survival. He represents the treatment that was meted out to artists in general (including Picasso) by society that considers such people useless and a burden. I have taken inspiration from the color scheme that Picasso used in order to create this melancholic figure.

Old people are often considered a burden to families and the world at large. Therefore, they find themselves alone on the streets or in some old age home. Many die unnoticed in these places, practically abandoned by their own children. Maybe a few are lucky to die in the presence of their loved ones. The question that Arundhati Roy asked is poignant and painful at the same time: "Where do old birds go to die?" The original intention of the author in asking this question, in my understanding, in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, is a reflection on the disappearance of the vultures in hundreds, birds that kindly, silently, and efficiently work on carcasses, keeping the equilibrium of our ecosystem. I feel her question is multi-layered. It is also addressed to the rat-racing, mad-rushing, cutthroat world we have created. Many are waylaid and they slip away from our vicinity, unnoticed. To be forgotten and abandoned is a tragedy of our times. Human life has become very cheap and can be easily disposed of.

I have also tried to work some surreal elements into the painting. For example, the window and all the furniture are among the clouds, pointing to the times of freedom and the bright days he enjoyed, just like a bird. The guitar is an instrument I love very much. Basically, the picture speaks about the anxiety and tension I myself went through, as my mother approached her final moments. As she struggled, all of us struggled with the reality of death. With her passing, a part of me passed too.

## ART

### Where do old birds go to die?

by Jamesmon PC OFM

#### From the reviews:

Love the iridescent wings. They contrast his dull and decaying body. They reflect the colours of the sky, while his body clings to the colours of the earth. It's like the wings are a part of him he never knew he had, a part that freshly emerged just to carry him to a better place. One of his hands is unclasping while the other is open. His hold on the world is loosening. The guitar is a modern substitute for the angel song of the harp. Maybe heaven is just a kind and safe room in the sky where tired and fulfilled souls retire.

– SUSANNA CORREYA.







# Redeeming Memories

BOBBY JOSE KATTIKAD OFM CAP

**M**uhammad Ali was considered generally rude. But that is not how his relatives would love to remember him. When he heard about a little boy who was desperate to see Ali, the first thing Ali did was to go and visit him. He was heartbroken when he heard that the child was suffering from cancer. With great compassion he embraced the little boy and said: "Just like how I defeat and ground George Foreman, you are going to fight and defeat cancer."

The child did not respond positively. Instead the child replied, "No, I'll see God soon. I will tell God that I know you." His reply surprised Ali.

On the way back, Ali was silent.

Within a week, the boy passed away. Upon hearing the sad news, Ali sent his friend in his stead to attend the funeral, as he was so heart-broken and could not bring himself to witness the last journey. A picture with Ali too was kept on the child's bier by his relatives in fulfilling the boy's final wish. Maybe the boy wanted to point to Ali and tell God about his friend.

Any successful person should find a place in the memories of his loved ones because of the fragrance of goodness and moments of compassion she or he showed.

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



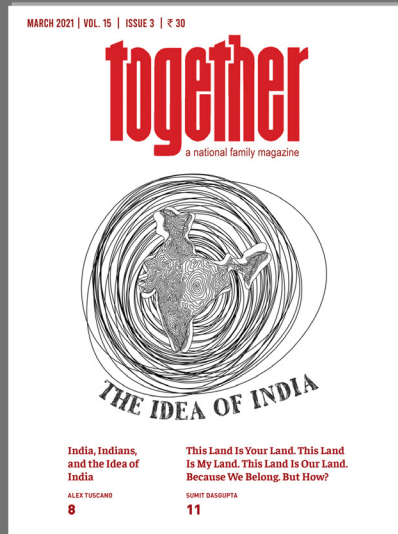
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