

together



a national family magazine

**TOMORROW
IS CALLING**



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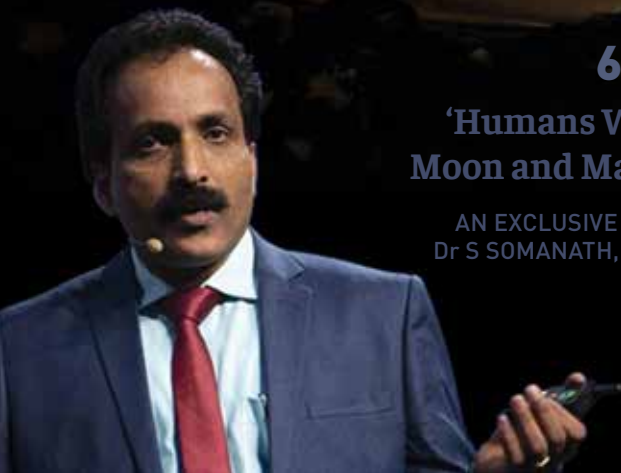
**'Humans Will Travel to
Moon and Mars Regularly'**

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Dr S SOMANATH, CHAIRMAN, ISRO

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**From Pathology to
Mental Health**

A FRANCIS OFM



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

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

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

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

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Questions May Be the Same, but the Answers Have Changed

Every horizon is an answer; and it holds good until we reach its peak. Every answer elevates us enough to see new answers.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

The one who had a past will own a future. The dead ceases to have a present distinct from the past. Having an ex ('ex' as in ex girl/boyfriend) means that we have a changed present. Shouldn't there be an ex for our perspectives, thinking, doing, and life. Spirituality calls it the former self. In short, being open to change will save us from perishing in the past.

Let me begin with a life lesson from Albert Einstein. It was the final exam of the course Einstein was teaching in the University. His assistant finished distributing the question papers to the students, only then did he realise that these were the same questions Einstein

had asked the same class the year before. As soon as he noticed the mistake he rushed to the professor's chamber and made it known to him. Einstein looking closer at the already distributed question papers and told the assistant: 'You're right, these are the same questions as last year -but, the answers have changed.' The questions may be the same, but our answers must change; that is a survival tool.

Yuval Noah Harari, the author of *Sapiens* in his Talks at Google categorically says that nobody knows what the world would look like in 2050; but what we do know is that it would be very different from what it is today. He continues to say that humans will need

to reinvent themselves repeatedly to survive. Future is all about change. Harari brings to our attention that if traditionally people built stone houses with very deep foundations now it makes more sense to build tents that you can fold and move elsewhere. We don't know where we have to move, but we have to move. In the case of literal houses it is easily understood; but it is true even of our own ideologies, beliefs, and identities. Nothing is permanent. Things are in constant change. What we need to build up is psychological capabilities. Therefore what Harari suggests for our future is to equip us with emotional intelligence and mental stability, primarily to face changes.

The Unknown Is Bigger than the Known

What we know about our universe and ourselves is only a speck. Modern space exploration, scientific research, and psychological investigations are finding new truths. It is interesting to note that a US House committee is set to hold open congressional hearing about unidentified flying objects (UFOs) for the first time in modern history. The journey seems to have just begun.

Seeing the young Nikita looking out through the window the teacher stopped the class and asked her, 'Nikita, what are you looking at?' Nikita was caught unaware. Nikita thinking out a quick answer blurted out, 'Teacher, I am looking at the horizon.' The teacher again asked her, 'Looking at the horizon? What do you see on the horizon?' 'When I look at the horizon' taking a little time to think answered Nikita, 'I see the horizon.' Seeing the mischief in her answer, all in the class had a hearty laugh.

The experienced teacher did not give up. She asked Nikita again, 'Do you know that one day you can reach that horizon?' Students stopped laughing, the class fell silent. Nikita, and her colleagues in class, never thought of that possibility, she became interested and grew curious. She asked the teacher, 'When I reach the horizon what would I see?' 'When you reach the horizon', said the teacher with a pause, 'you will see other horizons.' Nikita's face brightened up in disbelief and curiosity. The class, being

seated in that tiny classroom, now knew that the unknown is bigger than the known. In line with the thoughts of Caroline Kettlewell, the author of *Skin Game*, some would cling pitifully to the shelter of the known because the unknown expands infinitely and unsettlingly outward. But people like Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani activist for female education, who stood valiantly and heroically against the Taliban has educated us that 'one child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world.' Every horizon is an answer; and it holds good for a while. It pulls us up; it motivates us until we reach its peak. Every answer elevates us enough to see new answers.

Cooperate with the Unknown, the Unfamiliar

What misleads us the most is the obvious, the certain. Humanity had once believed that the earth is flat, that it is the centre of the universe as obvious truths. Today we know that we live in an ever-growing universe, simply expanding at all points; our universe has no centre.

Seventy thousand years ago, our ancestors were insignificant and unimportant animals. Their impact on the world was not much greater than that of jellyfish, fireflies or woodpeckers, says Yuval Noah Harari. How did we come from there to here to the position of being the major player in controlling the affairs of the planet, and the other animals did not? Harari places the credit on human capacity to cooperate flexibly and in very large numbers. The bees and others who cooperate in big numbers are not flexible, they can't handle a new crisis; they can only repeat what they were always doing. Wolves, chimpanzees, etc. who are flexible to an extent can't cooperate in big numbers. Their cooperation is based on intimate knowledge of the other; if they are not familiar they tear them apart. Harari goes on to add another important human factor for cooperation –human capacity for creating and believing in fictional stories.

We came so far, conquering all sorts of forces, because of our capacity for cooperation; and our future will depend on our willingness to trust, believe and cooperate with people who are unknown and unfamiliar; and in a flexible way.



'Humans Will Travel to Moon and Mars Regularly'

AARDRA PADMAKUMAR and NIKHIL BANERJEE

Dr Sreedhara Panicker Somanath is an Indian space scientist and is known for his contributions in launch vehicle design. In January 2022, he took over as the chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation. Dr Somanath speaks to the *Together* regarding his new assignment, new trends in space research, his dream for India, and much more.

***Together:* Congratulations, Sir. You took up as the chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation early this year. Tell us about 'you as a space researcher', and what personal interests and passion led you to be a space researcher?**

Dr Sreedhara Panicker Somanath: I was very fascinated during my college days with my limited knowledge gathered on universe, solar systems, general physics topics such as matter and astronomy. This interest was triggered by the books I read in my school days.

During my engineering course in Mechanical Engineering, I was interested in thermal, flow and propulsion studies. But I had no information or awareness on the space technology and its possibilities, as accessible to youngsters today.

I was not a researcher in space science area, but into engineering of space systems such as launch vehicles. That is how I started working in PSLV project and later in LVM3 rocket design. I was really passionate in design and creative in conceiving engineering systems, realize, test and integrate them.

India formally began its space programme in 1960s with Vikram Sarabhai, founder of INCOSPAR, which later led to the creation of ISRO. After 60 years how do you evaluate India's space research and technology?

There was a big gap in technological capability between India and other space faring nations during the 60s. While USA and Russia were in space race and were working on moon mission, we were launching borrowed sounding rockets and conducting basic science experi-

ments. But in the last 60 years we could bridge this technological gap to a great extent. We are now capable of conceiving any type of missions, build instruments, spacecrafts, launch using our own launch vehicles from our land, and also provide operational services in communication, remote sensing, navigation and science.

Take the example of Mars Orbit Mission (MOM) and Chandrayaan. Success of these missions are examples of the technical prowess of our nation, when we understand the unique approaches taken by ISRO to accomplish this mission and also science outcome produced.

We have achieved *atmanirbharta* in the domain of space technology except for some special items such as electronic parts that goes into our rockets and spacecrafts. The scale of operations of ISRO are lesser compared to others and announced plans are smaller in magnitude and less ambitious due to lower budget allocations. But we have the needed technological capability, cost effectiveness and application centric approach which are worth celebrating.

As you begin as the chairman of ISRO, what are your initial challenges?

I had to work towards converting the announcement of reforms in space sector by the government into a reality. This included preparing and announcing the revised space policy, bring out the draft space activity bill, commence the operation of INSPACE.

We had to prepare the plan for the missions in this year and next, prepare the overall plan for realisation including that of Gaganyaan and other development programmes.



After you took up as the Chairman of ISRO, it successfully launched India's earth observation satellite EOS-04 in February. Can you briefly tell us what it takes to launch a satellite?

The launches of PSLV are a regular business for ISRO now. It happens in a clockwork precision by the teams, though it has its own challenges. The work across all the ISRO centres is to be coordinated, quality of each system to be ensured and launch campaign must be efficiently conducted. Each spacecraft is unique, including EOS-04. The user participation and ensuring the utilisation of satellite data after the launch is to be ensured by establishing data reception and processing infrastructure. The launch of each satellite is a big team work involving thousands of people having specialisation in many domains.

India is one among the leaders of space research in the world along with the United States, China, Russia, European Union, etc. Is India doing enough in the area of space research to keep its place as a space research leader?

What we do is what is needed for this country. We carry out the demand aggregation in remote sensing or earth observation area,

satellite communication and other services from all governmental agencies, departments, ministries and private users. We also interact with the science community of this country form all laboratories and identify unique space science missions and engineer them.

The space mission we conduct are for the users of this country. We also do innovative developments in all these areas and showcase to the users to create applications such as climate and weather, disaster management etc. We support the strategic users for meeting their requirements as well.

In this process we do not compete with any other nations and do not compare on the volume of work with others.

There is no 'Enough', when we address the tasks left out. More can be done in all domains to develop new capabilities such as building space stations, more planetary explorations, building bigger and powerful rockets etc. All these are within our technological reach. But we have to understand that this is a government funded program and there is a limit we can earmark for space sector. More share will be allocated for applications and programmes that benefit the governance of the country and for specific needs. We have to keep allocating only a smaller pie for all those advanced science



My dream about India is much bigger than that I have on space research. This one nation will stand apart as the future of humanity.

missions and technologies, though it has its significance when we chalk out a long-term plan for a stronger, powerful and prosperous nation.

We in ISRO continue to work on all frontiers of advanced technologies in space sector, with a minimal investment and resource allocation. We can always scale up and achieve global levels when needed for the nation.

What are the new developments in the area of space research? How will it impact the life of the world?

If we are discussing the global space arena, then there are many areas. In the domain of communication, space will continue to be the backbone of the network with direct to device communication having high data rate connectivity. The availability of space-based timing and location services coupled with data services will thrive in the near future. Secured communication network will be accomplished. Governance, resource utilisation, planning, disaster mitigation, weather and climate will be supported by space programmes only.

Human beings will travel to moon and mars regularly in about 10 to 20 years. There will be space-based manufacturing of materials, medicines and human organs. Space tourism will be regular activity. The affordability and accessibility of space-based services will improve. The economy associated with space sector will reach 5 to 6 times of the present value in next 20 years. People and governments will realize that the safety of human beings on earth and survivability of our species is determined by our capability in space technology. Systems to prevent asteroid strike on earth will be established. All wars, if waged, will be through space and cyber technology only.

Sir, it is curious to note that you were born in the same year as the year when India's space research was born, in 1963. Today you are in charge of India's space research programme. Your thoughts on this interesting coincidence.

This is just a coincidence in time line. I am fortunate to be part of ISRO and this great journey of our country in space technology and capability development.

ISRO makes every Indian proud and dream big. What are your dreams for space research and for India as a nation?

My dream about India is much bigger than that I have on space research. This one nation will stand apart as the future of humanity. A nation having the potential to grow with empowered people to change the face of the world leading to peace, prosperity and survivability of all. If this has to happen, India has to be country which is most sought after to live happily. This is possible only when we are technologically superior compared to all others. Strength to handle affairs of the world comes through technological superiority only. Human knowledge has to be created and learning be thriving here as in Nalanda-Takshasila days. We have to work in all domains of technology and develop capability through systematic revamping of our education system, research establishments, industrial ecosystems and following sustainable practices. Space technology development is an integral part of this process as described in an earlier answer. We believe that the accomplishments of Indian Space Programme are an example that we can achieve all these goals if we passionately chase them with the support of the inspired leadership, supportive governments and political systems and public at large.

From Pathology to Mental Health

The relational emphasis of the postmodernism, opened up the doors of psychology for welcoming a 'two-person' approach, which emphasized both the dignity and subjectivity of the person on the couch as well as the co-creating subjectivity of the psychologist/clinician.

A FRANCIS OFM

Psychology is not a roadless-travelled domain, anymore. Obviously, it is gaining wider visibility and acceptance these days, particularly, among the millennials who show greater degrees of interest in embracing it as a source of healing and wellbeing. Statistics worldwide indicate that during the pandemic, several individuals, specifically young adults and teens accessed psychological services. A lot more workplaces today are keen on ensuring their employees that these services are available for them, either in-house, or on-line or in a suitable near-by clinical setting.

In the past, not so long ago, skepticism towards psychology was the trend among commoners. People shied away from the so-called unconventional and authoritarian methods of classical psychology that bluntly analyzed people and their pathologies. In the scenario of having a family member with mental health issues, and other members displaying an extra care to conceal not only the health issues of the person, but also the person him/herself was a commonly accepted behavioural pattern. The person being helped to obtain psychological services, was not a preferred option because of the staggering social stigma attached to it.

Dismantling the stigma, the millennials today, are a lot more forthcoming in utilizing the benefits of psychology in understanding themselves and

their relationship with others, enhancing their appreciation for the diversity of the world and their ability to cope with various unpredictable phenomena which from time to time wreck the planet and the entire human civilisation, with a potential threat that is nothing less than ultimate extinction. At this time of history, these threats are so obvious: the pandemic, global warming, potential nuclear wars and the list goes on.

Unprecedentedly, in the midst of all these upheavals the millennials are upfront in talking about the importance of caring for their mental health. It has become routine now for them to visit a psychologist, psychiatrist or a psychotherapist and seek help for the intra and interpsychic struggles they undergo. These changing trends of the postmodern life can't just be deemed as capriciously accidental, as much as it can be viewed as a direct outcome resulting from the many changing trends that are happening in the domain of psychology itself.

The 'Two-person' Psychology and the Relational Approach

The flight of psychology from the ego-centered and drive-saturated backyard of Sigmund Freud and the subsequent Freudians who treated care-seeking individuals strictly as 'patients' was not a straightforward or organic trajectory. The classical psychologists, whether they were intentional or



not, constructed a strong theoretical foundation for a 'one-person' psychology. They held the position that the person on the couch was the one whose mind was seriously ill; hence his subjectivity and self-agency can't be counted or credited. Needless to say, he was not taken holistically, as a person united in mind, body and spirit. Exclusively, it was the psychologist, the 'one-person' in this approach who authoritatively 'played with' the mind of the person on the couch, who was counted important in the process of treatment. He (mostly a male and often a white male) singularly was the expert.

The relational emphasis of the postmodernism, opened up the doors of psychology for welcoming a 'two-person' approach, which emphasized both the dignity and subjectivity of the person on the couch as well as the co-creating subjectivity of the psychologist/clinician. The therapeutic relationship between clinician and the client started to take the central stage in the process of treatment and healing.

'Relationship heals' became the striking tag-line of the profession. This was a great game changer, a paradigm shift from the client's experience of stigmatisation to de-stigmatisation, from unrelatedness to relatedness, and from the Freudian 'object' of the classical theories to a 'subject-in-relationship' of the postmodern intersubjectivity!

Pushed by the relational spin, clinicians started to relocate their focus from the mere realm of the individual's mind, to a holistic understanding of human person as an interrelated

whole of mind, body and spirit. The whole person became the focus of the treatment.

Leaving the so-called ivory towers of the absolute neutrality as the therapeutic position, clinicians started to understand their role as one of providing a 'safe attachment base' that enables the client to experience confidence and safety, a 'mirroring presence' that instills the client to feel loved and valued and a 'twinship transference' experience that promotes a strong sense of normalcy, namely, 'I am like anyone else (and everyone else); I am human, not an alien, a phantom or a ghost!'

Having the traces of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, excessive anger, trauma, PTSD, ADHD, and borderline personality disorder are one thing, but accepting it and seeking help without concealing them under an iron-clad carpet of one's persona is absolutely a healthy sign of personal maturity and self-agency. Large numbers of teens and young adults showcase this maturity, today, by daring to obtain a clinical diagnosis and subsequent psychological help, because of the relational spin in Psychology that has transitioned the domain from a scientific discipline that investigates human pathology to human mental health and wellbeing.

Finally, it also needs to be stated that not all branches of psychology are upfront to embrace the relational trend. But for those that have embraced it, no doubt, it certainly is a welcome trend and a ground-breaking paradigm shift that reshapes the domain as a meeting place of incredibly unimposing, transparent and open science.



Right Search, Right Leader

Finding the candidate with that matching frequency of a leader for that particular organisation is challenging.

KENNETH LEAN

Leaders and people are on top of every CEO's mind, why? Because CEO's are constantly seeking the 'right' people. Is there a dearth of people or the right process to find one? —a bit of both I presume. However, a compromise here is what leads to a future gap in the organisation. Many organisations believe that in making these compromises they have bridged the problem of that small gap in the variants of the need. Privately though, many CEOs admit that these are decisions they would like to undo. Hindsight is a great teacher isn't it?

It is against this backdrop that searching for the right leader becomes the corner stone of any successful and balanced organisation. But where do we find them? Finding the candidate with that matching frequency of a leader for that

particular organisation is challenging; even in the midst of thousands of professional portfolios floating on the internet. Some show off their skills, others highlight a few crescendo moments of their career in their years of experience, while most of them trumpet their knowledge on these social media platforms. If all of this is available in the public domain, and advanced technology based search engines are supposed to help solve problems – why this compromise? Thus crucially, searching for that 'leader' goes beyond what we see.

As an experienced leadership 'search consultant', I have discovered very few people who know the *sought* leader well. I have spent a lot of coffee, cocktails and connect time with leaders in the industry. I understand and learn circum-

stances of success, paths of failure, crescendo moments, inflection points, anxieties, fears and at times aspirations of a leader. However, even after a good amount of time spent over a couple of sessions, it sometimes feels that there is still something that goes missing. What goes missing I believe, is that 'difference' of hiring the right leader, or not. In other words compromising over negotiating—'settling' instead of 'foreseeing'. I believe so, because great people may not be the right leaders for the sought position—this is that 'difference'.

In order to 'foresee' it is paramount that credible and strong scientific tools for forecasting success need to be utilised. Most decisively, patience, ability to question, to see with your nose and a genuine interest in people will make this perseverance of the *sought leader* interesting and meaningful. Personality, behaviour, values and motivation drivers are essential information in hiring the right person. In retrospect, I laugh not out of happiness, but out of despair when hiring professionals give us a job description so pristinely well worded, yet ill-defined. These job descriptions can lead to hiring the candidate with the right experience, qualification and knowledge, but may not possess the right *behaviour and attitude*.

The ability of the organisation to call out very clearly the difficult circumstances that the hired leader will have to navigate, will make the search process uncluttered. In parallel the importance of *values* in understanding the culture fitment of an individual also helps. The organisation's stamina in being able to see the larger picture along with the clarity of the sought role in the long run, can be the differentiator in nurturing the culture of perseverance. In addition, the ability of the search consultant to be the *spokesperson* of the client organisation becomes a critical factor in market communication. Shamefully/unfortunately many search consultants take the route of enticing the candidate to a role. A few years back I was hiring for an organisation that were in financial difficulty and found it difficult to attract talent. We ensured that in our communication strategy we communicate only the truth. This made life easy for everybody as the fo-

cus of the discussions were on how the business situation of the client can be solved, and testing the ability of the candidate to live through the said situation. There were a lot many leaders who were ready to take up this challenge. There were no job descriptions that could have captured the essence of the situation other than, a one to one discussion between consultant and professional.

In the last stage of the selection process of hiring a COO in 2011, I discovered that the most eligible candidate was showing big behavioural gaps with respect to the culture of the organisation—it was a last minute discovery indeed. The final interview panel comprising of the global CEO and COO who were in India, were ready to make an offer in 24 hours; but, I had to pull all stops to ring the warning bell. Immediately, we had an ad-hoc meeting with the global CEO and his team which resulted in a meaningful discussion. We all agreed that this *candidate* had everything in terms of experience, skill and knowledge for the role, however something was missing—the CEO summed it up well, 'All through my interactions with him I knew something was missing, but could not put my finger on it—you guys have clarified it for me.' This candidate lost his job with his then current employer for the very behaviour we identified. So true, that people popularly hire for competent professional intelligence and sack for the lack of emotional intelligence.

The *cut-and-paste* attitude of job description should go, simply because this is a common sense process. It is not an easy task to hire professionals with an expertise, experience and knowledge to align with that of the organisation's values and growth strategy. The simple formula is to understand the person behind the professional. Jargons and job descriptions borrowed from other corporations will never help; yet, simplistically describing the future scenarios will be far rewarding. The ability to showcase worse-case scenarios scientifically will not only build the credibility of the hiring organisation but, will also drive away the fainthearted job seeker. Let the women and men be found, while the girls and boys play hide and seek.

The Spiral of Violence

Nationality, religion, skin color, gender, sexuality, or any other possible labels are always and only commercial labels, covering the rich product underneath.

RICHARD ROHR OFM

The root of violence is the illusion of separation—from the Ultimate Reality, from Being itself, and from being one with everyone and everything. When we don't know we are connected, we will invariably resort to some form of violence to get the dignity and power we lack. Return to who we are, which is always beyond any nationality, religion, skin color, gender, sexuality, or any other possible labels. In fact, we finally can see that those are always and only commercial labels, covering the rich product underneath.

When we can become little enough, naked enough, and honest enough, then we will ironically find that we are more than enough. At this place of poverty and freedom, we have nothing to prove and nothing to protect. Here we can connect with everything and everyone. Everything belongs. This cuts violence at its very roots, before there is even a basis for fear or greed—the things that usually cause us to be angry, suspicious, and violent.

To be clear, it is inconceivable that a true human would be racist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, homophobic, or bigoted toward any group or individual, especially toward the poor and vulnerable, which seems to be an acceptable American prejudice. To end the cycle of violence, our actions must flow from our authentic identity as Love.

One of the reasons I founded the Center for Action and Contemplation was to give activists some grounding in spirituality so they could continue working for social change, but from a stance much different than vengeance, ideology, or willpower pressing against willpower. Most activists I knew loved Gandhi's and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s teachings on nonviolence. But it became clear to me that many of them had

only an intellectual appreciation rather than a participation in the much deeper mystery. The ego was still in charge, and I often saw people creating victims of others who were not like them. It was still a power game, not the science of love that Jesus taught us.

When we begin by connecting with our inner experience of communion rather than separation, our actions can become pure, clear, and firm. This kind of action, rooted in one's True Self, comes from a deeper knowing of what is real, good, true, and beautiful, beyond labels and dualistic judgments of right or wrong. From this place, our energy is positive and has the most potential to create change for the good. This stance is precisely what we mean by 'being in prayer.' We must pray 'unceasingly' to maintain this posture. It is a lifelong process. Radical union with God and neighbor should be our starting place, not private perfection.

The Cycle of Violence Mirrors the Cycle of Evil

Brazilian archbishop Hélder Câmara (1909–1999) was a brilliant nonviolent activist who offered a model for understanding how structural injustice leads to greater violence. He wrote: 'If violence is met by violence, the world will fall into a spiral of violence' (emphasis mine). I overlay Dom Hélder's teaching with traditional Catholic moral teaching which saw the three primary sources of evil as the world, the flesh, and the devil—in that order. When evil and institutionalized violence (structural sin) go unrecognized at the first level, the second and third levels of violence and evil are inevitable. If we don't nip evil in the bud at the level where it is legitimated and disguised, we will have little power to fight it at the individual level.



By 'world' we don't mean creation or nature, but 'the system': how groups, cultures, institutions, and nations organize to protect themselves and maintain their power. This is the most hidden and denied level of evil and violence. We cannot see it because we're all inside of it, and it is in our ego's self-interest to protect this corporate deception.

Historically, organized religion has put most of its concern at the middle level of the spiral of violence, or what we called 'the flesh.' Flesh in this context is individual sin, the personal mistakes that we make. Individual evil is certainly real, but the very word 'flesh' has made us preoccupied with sexual sins, which Jesus rarely mentioned. When we punish or shame individuals for their sins, we are usually treating symptoms rather than the root problem or cause: the illusion of separation from God and others.

At the top of the spiral of violence sits 'the devil.' This personification of evil is hard to describe because it's so well disguised and even idealized. If 'the world' is hidden structural violence, primarily through oppression and injustice, then 'the devil' is sanctified, romanticized, and legitimated violence—violence deemed culturally necessary to control the other two levels: the angry flesh and the world run amuck. Any institution thought of as 'too big to fail' or somehow above criticism has a strong possibility of diabolical misuse. Think of the military industrial complex, the penal system, the worldwide banking system, multinational corporations subject to no law, tax codes

benefiting the wealthy, the healthcare and pharmaceutical establishments, the worldwide war economy led by my own country, or even organized religion. We need and admire these institutions all too much.

If we do not recognize the roots of violence at the first structural level (the world), we will waste time focusing exclusively on the second and individual level (the flesh), and we will seldom see those real evils which disguise themselves as angels of light (the devil). Remember, Lucifer means 'Light Bearer.' As Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) taught, Evil only succeeds by disguising itself as good.

A Climate of Violence

We live in a whole climate of violence. There is violence in the area of economics by reason of acute fiscal crises, the repeated devaluation of our currencies, unemployment, and soaring taxes—the burden of which ultimately falls on the poor and helpless. There is violence at the political level, as our people in varying degrees are deprived of their right of self-expression and self-determination and of the exercise of their civil rights. Still more grave in many countries are human-rights violations in the form of torture, kidnappings, and murder. Violence also makes its appearance in various forms of delinquency, in drug abuse as an escape from reality, in the mistreatment of women—all tragic expressions of frustration and of the spiritual and cultural decadence of a people losing their hope in tomorrow.

Here we may not scurry for cover to empty theories or hide behind condemnations of one group by another group. The violence is here; it is a fact. Injustice exists; this is reality. We may not abide this. We may not allow ourselves to grow accustomed to evil, least of all to an evil that is daily and constant.

In a series of sermons, radio addresses, newspaper articles, and public speeches, Archbishop Óscar Romero (1917–1980) of El Salvador called the people of his church and his nation to return to gospel values, particularly those of justice and love as a way to end violence.

I will not tire of declaring that if we really want an effective end to violence we must remove the violence that lies at the root of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, exclusion of citizens from the management of the country, repression. All this is what constitutes the primal cause, from which the rest flows naturally.

When the church decries revolutionary violence, it cannot forget that institutionalized violence also exists, and that the desperate violence of oppressed persons is not overcome with one-sided laws, with weapons, or with superior force... As long as there is not greater justice among us, there will always be outbreaks of revolution.

The Wrong Kind of World

Violence encourages the wrong kind of world, a world that creates conditions for violence against bodies instead of one that seeks to suture the cultural pain and create conditions for bodies to exist without the threat of violence, says Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, in *Body Becoming*.

Buddhist teachers Pamela Ayo Yetunde and Cheryl Giles write about conscious breathing as a practice of being present, which is an integral part of their resistance to racial violence. Recognizing our deepest feelings, we know we cannot live fully with suffering, invisibility, and dehumanisation. Our resistance to oppression is our right to breathe freely, without the force of a hand or foot or knee on our throats constantly draining the life out of us. By watching Black and brown bodies die by police violence without resistance, we slowly die too... And

perhaps by not resisting, we unwittingly make a choice to allow ourselves to be silenced because we are too afraid to claim and honor the most precious gift we hold: the breath. But as Black Buddhist practitioners, we intimately know the breath through mindfulness of the breath. In honor of George Floyd and countless others, we vow to breathe. We breathe for the well-being of all sentient beings.

War Is a Spiritual Problem

The nuclear myth, with its false promises of deterrence and security, gets us off almost all the hooks that the Divine Fisherman uses to draw us to deeper levels of spirituality and consciousness: our powerlessness, our essential insecurity, the desire to give one's life for something bigger than oneself, our fear of death, our capacity for faith, trust, and forgiveness, our restless hearts that long to be united.

Once we squelch spiritual energy in the name of hard-headed intellect and will, three not-so-obvious demons will move in to take the place of Spirit: expedience, law, and propriety. I see many well-meaning people living out of this mindset, unaware that they have abandoned the marrow of the gospel of peace and love and put their hope in 'enlightened' self-interest.

Let's take expedience. It is an early stage of moral development. It is reflected in moral parents who are righteously concerned about the evils of premarital sex but, when questioned, reveal that their real concern is for family embarrassment, future marriage prospects, or setbacks caused by an unplanned pregnancy. Understandable concerns, but hardly dealing with real moral evil.

This brings us to the second false savior: law. For many people, this is what religion is all about: law and order, control, doing what we're told, and obeying the commandments. St. Paul clearly taught the opposite: 'a person is justified by faith and not by doing works prescribed by the law'. But the church got itself into the business of prioritizing good behavior instead of doing what Jesus did.

Finally, propriety. Being proper like everybody else on the block seems always to have been a substitute for real transformation. Middle-class

religion loves to bless 'the way everybody thinks.' It makes the Sermon on the Mount into a tidy lesson while the poor remain oppressed, the hungry unfed, and illusions maintained. From this perspective, the human spirit remains without compassion—especially among nice, proper, churchgoing folks. Self-serving behaviour takes the place of other-serving love.

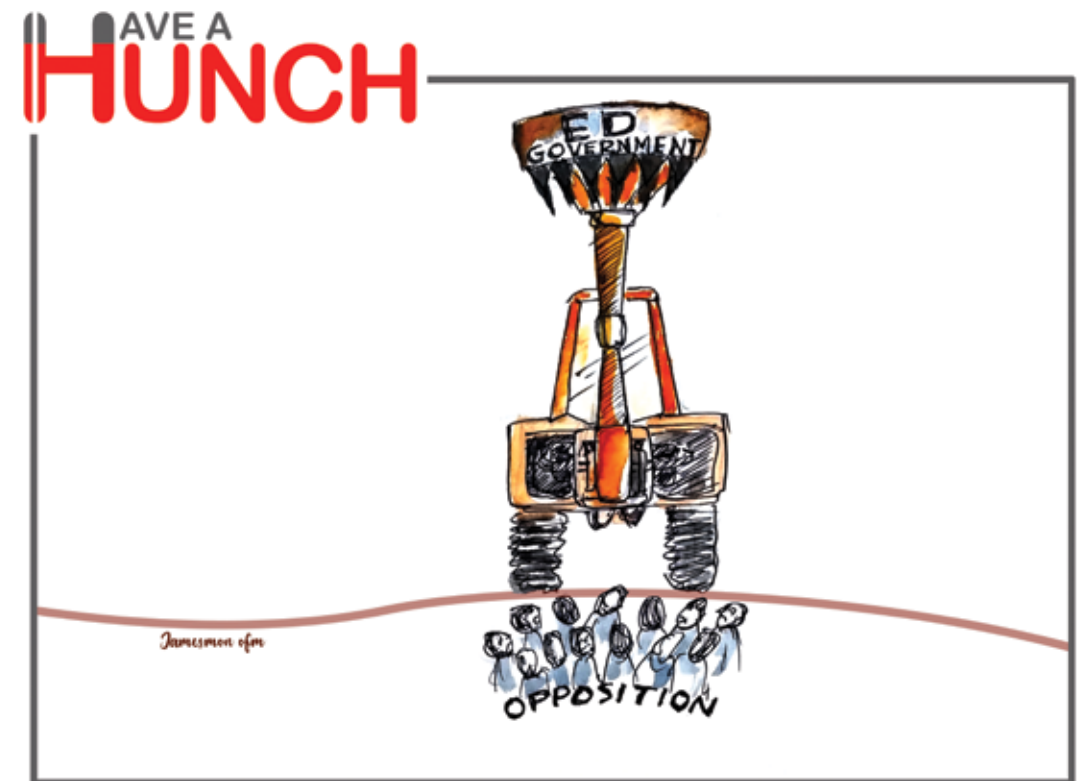
What does this have to do with nuclear bombs and nuclear deterrence? I am convinced, with Pope Francis, that even owning nuclear weapons is a spiritual problem. The way forward will depend on spiritual transformation at a corporate level. Yet now Ukraine and the whole world are held hostage because Russia and the United States own nuclear weapons.

Violence Begins with the Personal

Theologian Pamela Cooper-White has thought deeply about gender and sexual violence, and believes that at its heart, violence is a failure to see the other person as a person. Violence

against women is connected to all other forms of violence, just as all living beings are, in reality and in spite of our forgetfulness or callous indifference, interconnected. We are confronted daily with the many forms of violence in our world. We often end up feeling that our powers are fragmented, as one worthy cause after another is lifted up... What is needed is a way for understanding how, from a personal and holistic perspective, all violence is one.

All violence begins with the personal, with the *I*, and with a point of decision, a crossing of a line, where each of us chooses momentarily to view another living being as an *It* rather than a *Thou*. The ultimate purpose of each act of violence, each reduction of another person from a *Thou* to an *It*, is to control the other... Our choices matter, even on what seems like a small scale. They have resonance in the universe. When we truly see another person or living being as a *Thou*, we cannot dominate or control them.



The Dark Joy of Gossip

The person who is aware of his own weaknesses and strives to overcome them is slow to judge and swift to give others the benefit of the doubt.

JOY PRAKASH OFM

I begin this reflection beating my own breast, moaning ‘mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa’, knowing fully well that I myself am part of the detestable indulgence. I have borrowed the title of this reflection from a 2013 address of Pope Francis. He stated, ‘I don’t know why, but there is a dark joy in gossiping. Sometimes we begin by saying nice things about another, but then we slip into gossip, making the object of our chatter merchandise to be bartered. We need to yearn and seek for forgiveness because when we do this to a friend, we do it to Jesus, Jesus himself being this ‘friend’.

We all engage in some measure of gossip, and most of the time we don’t realize we’re doing it. We think we’re simply being social by conversing with another person, and knowingly or unknowingly we are led into it.

What makes gossip joyful is the sense of superiority that it gives us over another. We lose sight of our own flaws. Gossip always carries with it an undertone of judgementalism. There is a feeling of one-upmanship. This gives us the moral uprightness to feel superior to another. As Richard Rohr says, ‘If I can prove that you are stupid, it makes me temporarily smart. If I can prove that you are a sinner, then there is something in me that tells me I’m a saint. We are relieved by having an enemy, by having someone to hate, someone who is a problem, thus attacking, accusing, I am off the hook.’ Richard also adds, ‘But God never joins this dance.’

There are times when we are only too ready to spread scandal with a bit of spicy gossip, our

sense of self-righteousness making us throw stones. And there’s a lot of stone throwing going on at the moment; the news is full of tales of individuals who have done apparently sinful things. Many of us like to point at them – priests and bishops, athletes, the neighbour next door, whomever, and say, along with the rest of the group, that there is no way that we could have done what he or she did; that even in similar situations or circumstances, we would certainly have acted differently. That’s a comforting thought, though mostly a lie.

‘How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so’ (Jas 3:6-10).

Living spiritually is a serious occupation and leaves no room for complacency. Our words of conversation, the fruits of our tongues are a true indication of our spiritual health and our spiritual life. When we open our lips we should be intent on praising God and refrain from hurting others. We are asked to search as carefully for our own faults as we do for the faults of others, because concentrating on ridding our-



selves of the big blotches of imperfection in our personal lives will leave us with precious little time to comment on the failures of others. The person who is aware of his own weaknesses and strives to overcome them is slow to judge and swift to give others the benefit of the doubt.

How miserable it all becomes when it spills over into spiteful personal gossip. It is no exaggeration to say that gossip is the most vicious and dangerous type of talk. All this tittle-tattle business of passing on scandalous tales about people does untold damage, resulting as it does in shredding reputations. All who have been victims of engaging tongues know the pain inflicted. Socrates once said that nature has given us two ears, two eyes and only one tongue precisely so that we hear more than we speak. If we cannot say something good about another then it is best to remain silent. Isn’t it lovely when occasionally we meet someone who isn’t interested in people’s failings but only in their good points?

‘It is better to eat meat and drink wine and not to eat the flesh of one’s brothers through slanderous words’ (Desert Father, Abba Hyperechius).

FROM AN ANONYMOUS POEM

My name is Gossip

*I have no respect for justice.
I break hearts and ruin lives.
I am cunning, malicious and gather strength with age.
The more I am quoted, the more I am believed.
I flourish at every level of society.*

*My victims are helpless.
They cannot protect themselves against me because
I have no name and no face.
To track me down is impossible.
The harder you try, the more elusive I become.*

*I am nobody’s friend.
Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.
I topple governments and wreck marriages.
I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartaches and indigestion.
I spawn suspicion and generate grief.
I make innocent people cry in their pillows.*

*Even my name hisses.
I am called gossip: office gossip, shop gossip, party gossip,
telephone gossip.
I make headlines and headaches.*

*Remember,
When you repeat a story, ask yourself:
Is it true? Is it fair? Is it necessary?
If not, do not repeat it.*

Keep quiet.

Culturality vs Leadership

Compared to earlier societal discourses of culture in which people were reticent to display their culture, today's reality of culture being shared and learned is far more positive.

DEVIKA M

Are we more interested in people with a diverse cultural background? Do we have a reputation for expressing our own culture? Are we inclined to accept each other's cultures? In this context, I'd like to share my thoughts on how culturally diverse we are, with an emphasis on expressing one's own culture or embracing the other cultures.

We are accustomed to being well-versed in our own cultures, we have welcomed the opportunity to embrace the cultures of others, to the point where we have exchanged our own lunch boxes at school with a variety of tastes of food, shared pictures of festivities and ceremonies, and commented on everything from birthday colour dresses to ethnic wear and graduation outfit. The voyage reminds me of how we were taught to follow one's own way, how times made us feel like yes, this is reality, and how our assumptions changed as we progressed through greater levels of education. People, on the other hand, believe that following culture is more important than accepting practicality.

As the days pass, we are confronted with a variety of difficulties emerging from different cultural backdrops; we investigate ways to fit in, it influences our dressing patterns, and impact our ideas and actions. Can we, however, reach a conclusion by blaming one another's culture? Narrow mindedness, people's attitudinal dimensions, and ethnic background, supply us with scenarios of conflict and individual variances. However, when compared to earlier societal discussions of culture in which people were reticent to display their culture, today's reality of culture being shared and learned is far more positive.

I would bring up an important issue regarding our diverse culture and how it pertains to leadership. This section is critical in guiding, rising youth leaders in an organised manner. People

must learn to accept different viewpoints in a variety of situations. In this context of leadership, we come across various thoughts and opinions; and we are called upon to act. The way leaders engage with one another and their team members is referred to as leadership culture. It's how leaders communicate, act, and make decisions. It's also about their daily work environment, including their activities, interactions, attitudes, and values. Thus, Leadership culture is more important in building an organisational culture.

What matters most is that we get involved, look presentable, participate in cultural activities through reading and researching, and share our resources with one another. These have been a crucial prelude in stepping forward to my leadership qualities in my dealt situations/experiences.

The Majestic Bengal Tiger Is an Endangered Species

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

The Bengal tiger ranks among the biggest wild cats alive today. The beautiful, awe-inspiring tiger is one of our planet's most iconic animals. The tiger is estimated to have been present in the Indian subcontinent for about 12,000 to 16,500 years. Today, it is threatened by poaching, loss and fragmentation of habitat. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has declared Tigers as Endangered species. The wild tiger population in the wild is estimated to be less than 4,000. This is down 96% from 100 years ago (with an estimated 100,000 a century ago). Between 2015 and 2021

there was an average increase in the tiger population.

Driving through the forestlands of northern part of West Bengal is a pleasure. The mountains of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and the plains and tea gardens of Siliguri take your breath away. The deep valleys are filled with huge pine, sal, and teak trees. Teesta River carries the rain waters down to the Bay of Bengal, protecting the valleys from flooding. I kept looking out for the great Bengal Tiger; and finally I found them in the Tiger Safari at Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary. And now I could return back to the South in contentment.

29th July: International Tiger Day

Tigers photographed at Tiger Safari, Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, Siliguri, West Bengal.





THE ILLUSION OF DEMOCRACY

At the cost of the bread of the tax payer and the migrant worker, the street vendor and the street sweeper, the political parties today, in particular the ruling party, are engrossed in 'road-show' populism.

GERRY LOBO OFM

Political parties in a parliamentary democracy are meant to maintain checks and balances in the governance of a ruling dispensation. They are necessary and have definite function to fulfill. Truth that sets one free can only be established and executed in an inter-changing discourse among the elected representatives through meaningful debates and counter arguments so that purified from all partisan interests and one-sided favorable judgments, the socio-economic developments of the needs of the human society be carried out constantly and consistently. Unfortunately in a so called 'democracy' such as ours in this country, the majoritarian rule undermines truth by exaggerated and unintended promises of abundance doled out in order to retain the masses wherever they find themselves and keep them satisfied with cosmetic and unrealistic manifesto grandly released prior to elections. It may be said that a 'fascistic' form of a government, in fact, requires no truth.

Autocracy in the name of democracy is easily declared as truth to which all are forced to submit unquestioned. What has happened and now happening with Putin in Russia, after the fall of sovereign USSR with Gorbachev's reform policies, lays down in clearest terms that human beings are meant only to be subjects to their beneficent ruler whose supremacy is truth, and that by a humble, slavish submission to his narcissistic projects alone existence is possible. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia is a manifestation of the destruction of an independent democracy gained by a dint of struggle and pain of mortal humans who are ever longing for a home for themselves and for their children. That this state of affairs should be found in a forward moving contemporary world is beyond all imagination. It is insanity. Is humanity only this much? Is there no capacity to move beyond an utterly senseless foolishness for power? This is nothing but a 'gladiator' sham, degrading the rightful existence of humans, belittling the higher Power of a Transcendent Divine.

Political parties are not societal segments to fragment the stability and harmony of a society or a country. They are, rather, the formators of democracy, not on the political realm alone but

on all other facets of civil society. The truth, speaking and doing, is their moral code, their conscience, their commitment and sacrifice, their imperative task because they are spokespersons for common citizens. It is the will of the people that promotes them to the service of truth which is to be executed through their conscious and constant attention paid in regard to people's needs – physical, material, social, economical and moral.

Political leaders are conscience keepers and conscience builders, essentially speaking. However, lofty ideals and supreme truth which are their intrinsic shield and breastplate, have been rashly done away with for the sole reason of high positions of public standing, thereby appropriating the will of the people rather than reverently honoring it. Political parties have become power centers of public property, high-ranking posts and are gladiators cheered at their every move. That's why the mushrooming of parties has become a common phenomenon today. What many have turned out to be are factions in the society, dividing the flow of life and activity by inciting passions in people, ill-becoming of humanity. Many have deliberately devalued their rightful and moral conscience in order to suppress freely any conscientious voice that confronts evil. It suits well with them, unfortunately! The formators of democracy? No, creators of anarchy!

Ever since the present ruling dispensation took over the reins of governance of this country at the centre, the poll frenzied dominant political party has been enjoying incomparable standing in the parliament. From the common experience of people one feels the prevalence of fear psychosis, causing divisions of every kind, from social to economic to religious to moral sphere. The Indian society perhaps, has never before experienced the stark divisions wrought by political big-wigs as conspicuously witnessed in the last eight years. Ghulam Nabi Azad, the Congress Leader, openly owned the fact, when he stated boldly that: 'All political parties, including mine, create a divide in the society.' Any person with some common sense will agree with this statement, because it is a reality. Moreover, the success-ridden Hindutva party,



The Formators of Democracy need to question their conscience before the benevolent will of those who promote them as voice of the voiceless.

and recently on the basis of the largest number in the Uttar Pradesh election, has been over frenzied to the extent that freedom of speech, the Constitutional Right, has gone to the length of the 'freedom of hate speech,' abuse, capable of sparking violence, displacing the innocent by inordinate ordinances and rule the country with the iron fist.

At the cost of the bread of the tax payer and the migrant worker, the street vendor and the street sweeper, the political parties today, in particular the ruling party, are engrossed in 'road-show' populism. This has been the prominent feature these past years, meant not to create communal harmony and good-will among citizens but to exhibit mite and injure the human bond that exists among religions, cultures and languages. One thinks that because power is with the dominant category of political ideology, pomp and pride, arrogance and mite are permissible and non-questionable. What is the difference between the oligarchy of Putin in Russia and the rule of leaders in a democratic independent nation such as ours? The lies that lay hidden about Putin are coming to the lime light during the present crisis between Russia and Ukraine. Will there be a day when such revelations about our present political rulers also come out open?

That the resources of a country, natural ones as well as those resulting from the hard sweat of millions, are spent on imperial and triumphant road-shows is to be lamented and condemned. That a Prime Minister of a country who is the 'First Servant' of a Republic acting so showy and stern does not behoove of a leader in a land where only a small percentage are 'sharks' leaving the dignified millions to fend for themselves like the little fish in an ocean. The country has never seen Public Servants appearing in this manner. Today it has become a normal affair, sadly enough. This is a kind of saturated propa-

ganda by the political parties on public screens and on digital media, intended not for unity but for division. The TMC Leader, Mahua Moitra, in her intervention in the Parliament on March 22, 2022, had the courage to state that the present government 'has turned Parliament into Rome's Coliseum when the Prime Minister enters, like a gladiator to the chants of 'Modi, Modi.' The same Ms. Moitra, without exaggeration recalls the words of later Prime Minister, AB Vajpayee which he uttered in the Parliament in 1972 in the context of a majoritarian government: 'Is this situation not fraught with dangerous possibility of one individual getting established as a dictator?' What an irony!

Contemporarily the political parties have lost all direction, with the exception of one or two who are trying to maintain principles of polity in the country. The primary aim has been to rob 'violently' the good will of the electors by dividing them, by injecting fear in them and woo them with 'jam and butter' hand-outs simultaneously. A disciplined, well meant, ethically healthy and consistently conscientious mind among political leaders is far from reality, but certainly wanting, if the tenets of our Constitutions are to be fulfilled. When truth is evaded by a mere lip-service to the principles laid down in the Constitutions, what results is nothing but dis-integration. Economic or technological advances, though essential, will remain peripheral satisfying only the physical hunger, but leaving the soul in distress.

The Formators of Democracy need to question their conscience before the benevolent will of those who promote them as voice of the voiceless. Gladiators are required for the Roman Colosseum, whereas the political servants are required to preserve the principles and practice of democracy – a government of the people, with the people and by the people!

Transfeminism

Dr SUSHEELA B

Emi Koyama's *Transfeminist Manifesto* was published in 2001 and did much to popularize the term transfeminism. It was probably her colleague Diana Courvant who coined the term 'transfeminism' in the early 90s. Both women were trans survivors. Transfeminism's primary principle is bodily autonomy, the idea that each of us has the right to make decisions regarding our own bodies, identities and expressions. Transfeminism advocates that people should not only be allowed to live their own lives in whichever way they choose and define themselves; and should also be respected by the society for their individuality and uniqueness. The 90's were a fiery time for Anglophone trans politics. Patrick Califia's *Sex Changes*, which documents the period and his own struggles to participate in feminism, has the first usage of the word 'transfeminism' in a book. The term transfeminism has been defined by Emi Koyama as a 'movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond.' Koyama notes that 'it is also open to other queers, intersex people, trans men, non-trans women, and others who are sympathetic towards the needs of trans women and consider their alliance with trans women to be essential for their liberation.' Another principle of transfeminism states that each individual has every right, and is the only one to have the right, to possess complete control over their bodies. There shall be no form of authority-political, medical, religious or otherwise –that can override a person's decisions regarding their bodies and their well-being and their autonomy is fully in the hands of that sole individual. Early voices in the movement include Kate Bornstein, author of 1994 *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*, and Sandy Stone, author of the essay *The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*. Transfeminism.org was created in 2000 to promote the *Transfeminism Anthology Project* by Diana Courvant and Emi Koyama. The site primarily devoted itself, however, to introducing the concept of transfeminism to academia

and to finding and connecting people working on transfeminism projects and themes through an anthology of the same name. In the past few decades, the idea that all women share a common experience has come under scrutiny by women of colour, lesbians and working-class women among others. Many transgenders are also questioning what gender means and are challenging gender as biological fact. Transfeminists insist that their unique experiences can be recognized as part of the feminist sphere. Transfeminism incorporates all major themes of third wave feminism, including diversity, body image, self-definition and women's agency. Transfeminism is not merely about merging trans concerns with feminism. It also includes critical analysis of second wave feminism from the perspective of the third wave. Like all feminisms, transfeminism critiques mainstream notions of masculinity and argues that women deserve equal rights. Lastly, transfeminism shares the unifying principle with other feminisms that gender is a patriarchal social construct used to oppress women. Therefore, by many, the 'trans' in transgender has been used to imply transgressiveness. The road to legitimacy for transfeminism as a concept has been different and more vexed than for other feminisms. Marginalized women of trans background and affect have had to prove that their needs are different and that mainstream feminism does not necessarily speak for them. Contrarily, trans women must show their womanhood is equally valid as that of other women, and that feminism can speak for them without ceasing to be feminism. Radical feminist Janice Raymond's resistance to considering trans women as women and as participants in feminism is representative of this obstacle. J.K. Rowling's 2005 novel *The Silkworm* has been criticized as a vicious attack on trans people. One of the characters is a young transwoman named Pippa. The way Rowling chose to describe and emphasize Pippa's character is awfully similar to the points usually made by transphobes to invalidate trans men and women's identities.

Jharkhand: The Fate of the Tribals

These people are identified as those deserving reservation and priority; but are kept uneducated, controlled, and alienated.

Br ROHIT NOEL PHILIP

A four-month long community experience took me to this land of rich history, culture, and languages- Jharkhand. Malom Noatoli is a village in Jharkhand surrounded by rivers, mountains, jungle terrain and many other villages. I reached here at around 8:30 pm; it was dark and cold. I found no street lights or any signs of electricity in any of the villages that I passed through at that time. As I reached my place of stay I was told that electricity is just a an occasional guest for a couple of hours. As I kept my focus on the light from the headlight of our bike I kept thinking of the challenges people face on an everyday a basis. They may not even have heard of the *acha din* for which we are still waiting.

During my four months stay there, working in a small mission school, I made many acquaintances right from the religious in that area to common villagers - youth, children and adults. Many things caught my attention: they lack rights, they are deprived of knowledge, they are exploited in the name of development, and they are alienated from their values and principles.

The tribals here, also known as Adivasis, are one of the highly politically exploited communities. They are innocent and are highly victimised and manipulated. This victimisation and economic divide is partially responsible for the birth of Maoist/Naxalite groups, and consequential violence. Church getting involved in social and economic affairs could be read together with this struggle of the people against

exploitation. Their history is filled with stories of struggle; and one of the recent one is of Stanswamy SJ.

Common amenities like food and water, which are available in abundance indigenously in the region, go scarce at times because of the exploitative trade practices. When it comes to trade they never get their rightful share. The processes that are complex and ever changing laws confuse the common farmers. The middlemen who monopolise the market make enormous profit from the hard work of the tribals. Those who are elected by them to help them also deceive them for monetary benefits.

The mortality rate that I heard of from various quarters, from local newspapers to word of mouth left me dumbfound. The depressing fact is that most of them were due to preventable and curable diseases; but sadly they lack even the basic medical facilities. They are left with no choice but to trust some local quacks. The local hospital is two hours drive from this village; though small clinics with an appointed government doctor is available with 10 to 20 km of distance from the village, there is hardly any chance of doctors being available to the people. At times, it is because the same doctor is appointed to multiple clinics.

A case that left me really sad was of a young government teacher, from a local education institution, who fainted due to heat and exhaustion and was declared dead upon arrival at the hospital which was three hours away. The

These people are identified as those deserving reservation and priority; but are kept uneducated, controlled, and alienated.

local clinic was unable to treat her due to lack of doctors and facilities. She was one of the few educated people in the place. Now the students are left without a teacher.

Most of the village heads also known as Panchayat heads or sarpanch, are elected by the people through voting system; but the process is mostly rigged. The whole election in most cases is orchestrated by the local government bodies who use the candidates as puppets to get their work done. The ultimate losers are the village people. Even if the elected sarpanch has the will and motive, they stand no chance of serving and doing good to the people because of the corrupt and manipulative businessmen and politicians.

Most businesses are controlled by the rich and the powerful; public transport is run by private companies with high travel fare; roads are sanctioned but not built. People have to wait for the visit of a high ranked politician or some extraordinary happening in order to get their roads built. For example the road close to the house I was staying was never built, though it was sanctioned. But recently when an armed forces' officer of a high cadre expired; and in order to get his body home they built the road which is now a blessing to villagers. People who live there are not counted; and do not matter at all to anybody.

These people are identified as those deserving reservation and priority; but are kept uneducated, controlled, and alienated. Though the government documents state the opposite the actuality is huge violation of human rights and dignity.



Are You 'In a State of Flow'?

When we are in a state of flow, we liberate our minds from negative events of the past and from negative thoughts of the present, like, 'I can't do this'.

MONICA FERNANDES

Psychoanalyst Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi coined the term to be in a state of 'flow' in 1975 to define being totally immersed in what one is doing, and experiencing a 'growth towards complexity'. Another term used to define this state is being 'wired in'. The term being in a state of flow brings to mind a river flowing to its destination. It seems to have a clarity of objective and is unperturbed by the obstacles of rocks in its path. It seems ever so calm as it flows along.

A person is in a flow when he enjoys what he is doing which may be painting, reading, studying his favourite subject, writing or improving his football skills. He is so focused on an activity that time seems to slow down and he misses out on a lunch appointment. Another feature of being immersed in the now is that of lacking self-consciousness. Watch a tennis match at Wimbledon. Despite the big crowd of spectators, the tennis players are totally focused on the game.



When we are in a state of flow,
we liberate our minds from
negative events of the past.

Time seems to stand still when we are in a state of flow. A tennis player feels as if the ball is coming to her in slow motion. However, when the game is over and she is out of flow, she realizes that the ball moved really fast.

A great advantage of being in the flow are that it enhances happiness and enjoyment. Steven Kottler, the well-known journalist and author, says that our brain releases as many as five feel good chemicals. Our sense of pain diminishes. Michaelangelo would have been in a state of flow as he painted the Sistine Chapel while he lay on his back for hours on end. Our activity is meaningful, our skills appreciated and its great fun being creative. It is dynamic, ever changing. It also is likely to result in mastery and success.

When they get on to the stage, well known singers have the ability to get the audience involved in the flow. For those few hours, everyone has forgotten their troubles and let go of their inhibitions. The singer gets the audience to sing along with him, sway to the music and clap their hands. This is called 'flow contagion.'

We have to work to be in a state of flow but it's worth it. The first step is to pinpoint our talent and our passion. Let's assume it is playing the piano. To be an expert, we need to set time aside for practice, practice, practice but that's no problem as it is an enjoyable activity. Eliminate all distractions. Don't look at our mobile to check out messages every little while. We may need to locate a good teacher and allocate time slots for the activity. Rome was not built in a day.

Psychologists state that it is important to set targets that are a little beyond our reach and keep on setting these targets a notch higher once we achieve them. Visualise ourselves

achieving each target. If we set our targets too high, we will get frustrated and quit. Weightlifters may aim lifting a certain weight but they increase the weights gradually until they reach their goal. Challenge ourselves, they say, but don't aim for the moon. When we are totally focused in an activity, temporary setbacks or failures spur us to greater heights.

An ideal situation would be if you found your flow in your workplace. You have always dreamt of being an actor. You have the talent as you always played the main role in school and college plays. You are willing to start at the bottom, but you are aware there is a long road ahead. In the meantime you need to earn your daily bread. Perhaps you could find a job during the day and spend your evenings in a theatre group. When there is a will, there is a way.

Ranveer Singh is a versatile and much admired actor who wears many hats. The secret of his ability to take on any role – serious, romantic, tragic or comic – is his sheer love for acting. He is willing to put in hours of practice in preparation. This is because he is in a state of flow while acting.

We have all experienced flow at some point or the other. The saints, who have this intense, all embracing love of God and their fellow human beings, have experienced an elevated, blessed state of flow when they see visions, when they are one with God.

The state of flow is considered to be an essential quality for attaining happiness. When we are in a state of flow, we liberate our minds from negative events of the past such as failures and from negative imaginary thoughts of the present, like, 'I can't do this.' All that matters is the here and the now.

Breaking Down How We See the Churches We Build

The size of your church is no big deal. The lesson is that great structures should be conceived and constructed with great humility or they amount to nothing.

SUSANNA VAS

‘Why do you need such grand churches?’ You’re stumped and blinking at the question or fumbling for a sharp comeback. If you belong to a church answering that description or fancy those that do, you’ve probably spent a sleepless night or two pondering the question even if no one put it to you.

How do we perceive and rationalise simplicity and splendour in church architecture?

Never the Twain Shall Meet?

Jesus had a triple-ministry as prophet, priest, and king. Certain events in the Gospels squarely correspond to one of the three. The Sermon on the Mount and the Last Supper affirmed His priesthood. Both unfolded in modest venues, one God-made (a hill) and one man-made (the upper room). The upper room became the temple for the altar. However, because His was a unified triple-ministry, the moments of glory and the moments of simplicity ultimately fulfil all three functions.

The Gospels give us an interesting medley of venues for these moments: a stable, synagogues, a banquet hall, hills and mountains, homes, fishing boats, water bodies, a desert, and a sepulchre. Jesus never commissioned any of these structures, but consciously chose to reveal His divinity and the will of God in them.

Simplicity and splendour are harmonious aspects of Christ Who famously and seamlessly united the irreconcilable through His nature—fully God and fully man. Ideally, church

architecture should synthesise and reflect this unity. Approaching the structure with denominational conditioning results in equating God and godliness with either majesty or modesty instead of finding them in both.

Purposes, Problems and Possibilities

Our endorsement, preference, and defence of simplicity and splendour should be prudent lest we turn ideas and ideological positions into idols. Architecture and decor can inspire and facilitate worship and reverence without becoming idols themselves.

Magnificent churches elevate the senses; they do not exalt them. Their embellishments and furnishings do not constitute some high-class, high-culture semiotic. Likewise, simple churches discipline the senses; they do not dull them. Their starkness does not point to inferiority, apathy, or miserliness.

Outward appearances and interior decor do not necessarily impact or reflect churchgoers’ interior lives. Sensory grandeur can coexist with spiritual impoverishment; so can sensory denial and spiritual enrichment. Double-positives and double-negatives are also possible.

Art for God’s Sake

We have heard of art for art’s sake and art for the artist’s sake. Because church art is for God’s sake, it demands a *Non nobis* approach from the artists. In the Old Testament, God commands people to build the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple. He invites skilled metalworkers,

► (Right) The Sagrada Familia Basilica in Barcelona, Spain, is a staggering sight.

woodworkers, and embroiderers to participate in the project but keeps their egos in check.

Choosing the style, amount, and purpose of art is challenging because splendour and majesty are often confused for ostentation. What is the difference between David’s psalms and the Pharisees’ prayers? Both used exquisite language, but God delighted in David’s words and denounced the Pharisees’. Art is the artist’s prayer and testimony. But is it like David’s or the Pharisees’? We know the psalms are David’s words, but because of their universal resonance, we can confess them as our own. Though the artist’s handiwork bears his stylistic signature, it is also self-effacing, so anyone who approaches or contemplates it may feel a close emotional and spiritual affinity with the subject.

Is art still a prayer if the artist is financially compensated? Does payment cheapen the spiritual value of the artwork? To answer these questions, we must understand that volunteer work is well-nigh impossible, given the position of artists in society, as well as the role of money and availability of resources in the modern world. As art is work and work is prayer, artists deserve their dues. It’s one thing to make art for money and a whole other thing to make it for the love of money.

Conclusion

Solomon’s Temple and the Tower of Babel were both monumental undertakings. Here, too, the temple pleased God and the tower



offended Him. The Sagrada Familia Basilica in Barcelona, Spain, is a staggering sight. Cynics might call it an extravagant enterprise but the architect, Antoni Gaudí, made it 1 metre shorter than Montjuïc Hill because he did not dare to surpass the work of God’s hands with the work of his hands. Ultimately, the size of your church is no big deal. The lesson is that great structures should be conceived and constructed with great humility or they amount to nothing.

Susanna Vas is a 23-year-old literature post-graduate with a restless curiosity about all things Christian.

12 July Malala Day

Malala was ten when the Taliban took control of her Pakistani region. They said music was a crime. They banned women from going to the market. They said girls could no longer go to school. But Malala was raised to speak up for her beliefs. So she blogged and spoke about girls' rights to education. Then, aged just fifteen, she was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman in a shocking revenge attack. No one expected her to survive. But she did. And she's still fighting for women's rights.

Malala also delivered an eloquent speech at United Nations in 2013. She highlighted the need for worldwide access to women's education and called the world leaders to reform their policies. July 12 also marks her birthday, therefore the UN promptly declared that the day will now be observed as 'Malala Day' to honour the young activist.

TOM JOHN OFM



'When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful.'

MALALA YOUSAFZAI

Someone Is Keeping an Eye on You

BOBBY JOSE KATTIKADU OFM CAP

A memory shared by William Frey in the book *The Dance of Hope: Finding Ourselves in the Rhythm of God's Great Story* seemed very inspiring. It's about a classmate at the university. William Frey had a responsibility to read books for him who was blind. One day William's friend opened his mind.

He lost his eyesight when he was a child in an accident. At that moment life seemed to have come to an abrupt end. He kept getting angry with everything and everyone. Sometimes he ate something only to keep himself from dying. He secluded himself from the people and the world around him by pushing himself inside a room that always seemed closed.

And what then? One day his father came into his room. He was beginning to get tired of seeing his son that way, sad and depressed. His father spoke with a bit of annoyance, 'Winter is coming. It's your duty to keep the storm windows up. If you don't do it before supper...' he warned. Then he shut the door and went out. (The storm window is an additional layer attached to the window to resist cold winds.)

The disgraced and frustrated son decided to take revenge. He fumbled and went to the

garage. The windows were checked. He found the staircase. Tools were collected. He thought that when he got into it and started working, he would stumble and fall, and that his father would forever regret being so rude to him. But slowly, he began to get hold of things. As he walked back into his room, a sense of self-confidence had developed.

He stopped for a moment. His eyes were filled with tears. Then, after a moment of silence, the secret was told. 'During all my work at the storm window, my father had stood alert within the reach of my hands. Only later did I get to know about it.'

That's how things are. Whether you know it or not, someone is keeping an eye on you within visible distance. That man never promised anyone that the times would be the same. But He said that He will be there even to the end of times.

Who said that God's way of shaping human lives is like the sea moulding the shore? Retreat-ing every moment, solidifying at every retreat. No matter how far you have backed off, he keeps encircling you always.

The Virtuous Are Invincible, Yet We Fail to Be One

I feel happy to be alive because I have become a living testimony of faith for many who prayed for my recovery while I was against Covid-19 in medical ICU.

ALWED EKKA

None had anticipated the recent pandemic outbreak across the globe and how devastating its effect would be. By facing it squarely, we learned how awful it was. One good thing about the lockdown phase was that it instructed us about how fragile and vulnerable we humans are.

Having spent nearly two years indoors, provided us more than enough time to think about the nature, life, world, scientific & technological advancement, God, the Absolute or the Creator.

Human Resilience

Many people questioned the existence of God. Atheists won the debate. Egomaniacs thought they could ward off the spell merely by ringing the bells or lighting candles. The greedy were quick to capitalize the opportunity amassing huge amount of wealth while a large percentage of citizens were rendered poor, helpless and jobless. And still others added fuel to the fire in endless human suffering through religious persecution, populist notions, election rallies, farmer agitation, hyper inflation, Russia-Ukraine war etc.

So much chaos & confusion, grief & loss, anxiety & fear, depression and sadness have punctured human courage, faith, resilience and wisdom. It has caused a monumental damage to human psyche. Perhaps, it will take years to repair the dent. Of course, now slowly such conundrum is easing off. Restrictions are being lifted off. People have returned to the streets and human activities have resumed. Offline schools have started,

and what a relief for millions of students who can stretch their wings wide enough to pursue their dreams & goals in free spirit. As a covid-19 survivor, I am forced to reflect on the shortness of life and my personal relationship with my God.

On the one hand, I feel happy to be alive because I have become a living testimony of faith for many who prayed for my recovery earnestly while I was battling for life in medical ICU. On the other hand, I feel sad to think about all those Covid-19 patients who couldn't come through alive, and whose family members—spouses, children, parents, relatives or friends were unable to bid their last good byes or even give an honorable burial.

Death, an Honourable Duty

We could learn from Jesus. Jesus never shied away from embracing the known or unknown challenges even though it threatened and claimed his life. But why would he happily allow himself to be betrayed, condemned, tortured, whipped, humiliated, crucified and killed? If he hadn't gone through such suffering and excruciating pain, would you have acknowledged him as your saviour or a messiah or a friend? I bet, you wouldn't.

Furthermore, he would have easily dodged such false accusation, because he was innocent. But why didn't he grab the chance to bribe the authorities? In normal human transaction, the laws are easily manipulated to escape the consequences, though one is guilty. As a human, born of flesh, Jesus showed us that death is a duty to be fulfilled.

It is one's duty to have an honorable death. It is indeed a joy to die honorably. Pontius Pilate offered him a chance to avert his death. Had he accepted the arrangement, it would have been a cowardice act, not a courageous one. Jesus didn't want to stain his soul. His character was intact. By offering himself as a sacrifice, he kept his integrity, dignity, honesty, peace, justice, temperance, and divinity immaculate; without any stains.

Most importantly, my character is my cherished possession that will remain forever whereas, my body with its five senses will be returned to the earth, and material possessions of any will be distributed among those who are in need. As an ardent follower of Jesus, I must strive consistently to radiate the power of that divine spark.

Keep One's Integrity at All Cost

Next, I am reminded of the philosopher Socrates (300BCE), when a political opponent accused him of impiety condemning him to death, refused to escape and his helpful & loyal friends were upset instead he upheld his moral duty to accept the law and justice system, despite its blatant misuse. He wouldn't bend the rules when the occasion didn't favour him. He accepted death by consuming poison so that he could keep

his honor, integrity, dignity, humanity and divinity unspoiled. His character remained unblemished.

Furthermore, John the Baptist, happily allowed being beheaded, in order to keep his integrity. What counted the most was the bit of God particle that dwelled within him, which no power could snatch away.

Controlled by vices such as greed, malice, envy, gluttony, egomania, fear, lust and power, people sell out themselves. They may preserve their reputation but end up losing their characters. They forget to keep the qualities that they were born with—integrity, humanity, dignity, honesty, will, and divinity.

People even betray their own friends, when lured by greed, malice, self-centeredness, or envy. They never value their character. They compromise their value systems. They lie, cheat, manipulate and even deny others in order to seek and pursue their temporary pleasures.

Jesus is someone who was forged in the fire of suffering and became victorious. He lives on though his enemies murdered him. He is alive on our emotional (that is faith), mental and spiritual planes through his teachings, and valuable insights. It's true: the virtuous are invincible!



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5 LGBTQ+ Shows You Must Watch

SINCHANA SHETTY

From left to right: Stills from *Pose*, *Ratched*, *Queer Eye*, *Killing Eve*, and *Modern Love*

The last month only means one thing for all my fellow queers out there—it was the Pride Month. Whether it's a pride parade all over the Internet or streets; from going to marches or just comfortably sitting in the cosy corner of your house in rainbow socks, we've got you covered with five essential LGBTQ+ shows to watch in July.

1 **Pose**
Pose is THAT show! Created by Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk and Steven Canals, it follows the story of many queers in the 80s and 90s America at the heart of New York City's drag ball culture. Here's an interesting fact: this is a show of firsts. Billy Porter became the first openly gay black man to win an Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actor and Michaela Jaé Rodriguez won the first trans lead nominated for an Emmy Outstanding Lead Actress. Now if that isn't all the more reason for you to watch!

2 **Ratched**
 Sarah Paulson is everyone's favourite. Should one ask if she's my favourite lesbian or favourtie actress, my answer would simply be: Favourite! In this series, Paulson plays the role of Nurse Midred Ratched who is perhaps not as perfect as she presents herself to be. What lurks underneath is a chilling psychological thriller with the most stunning use of colour.

3 **Queer Eye**
 What's more fun than having a glow up? It's the Fab Five raiding your house, dissecting and sometimes judging (here's looking at you Tan!) your sauces from your hairstyles. A refreshing reality TV that always leaves a smile on your face, some happy tears and makes you a connoisseur of the French tuck.

4 **Killing Eve**
 Get this: An assassin serving killer looks and an investigator who might've just crossed a little more than professional boundaries to catch her culprit. Sounds good? With loads of subtle queer romance, this comrades, is the perfect way to start or end your day. *Killing Eve* is also incomplete without its quintessential dry humour with the most awkward-est of awkward pauses. So take that for a realistic show!

5 **Modern Love**
Modern Love is a heart-warming anthology based on the weekly column of the same name published in *The New York Times*. If you find me quoting 'Modern Love restored my faith in humanity', it's because it really did! Note that not all episodes are about queer love but they are all cheering nonetheless.

CINEMA IN TRANSITION

A decade ago what was called as parallel cinema has now become mainstream, whereas the blockbuster heroic movies are losing their popularity.

NIKHIL BANERJEE



Cinema narrates stories through the medium of audio visual images. Indian cinema, since the time of its inception, has followed the conventional way of storytelling. Now it is experimenting with variegated ways in narrating stories. From linear storytelling methods to parallel stories, and alternate ending to the stories; it has entered into the space of web series and web movies. The experiments in Indian film world has come a long way; and is still very dynamic.

Since 2016, with the advent of Netflix and other online platforms for streaming films and videos, there have been many changes and accompaniments, such as, content, portrayal of characters, and the topics discussed in these films. These have changed the perspective of the audience as well as the way in which the audience have been enjoying and critiquing the films.

OTT (over-the-top) services are becoming a trend these days, offering direct streaming services to its viewers worldwide. Popular

platforms of this service being Netflix and Amazon Prime worldwide, the scenario in India is quite different. According to a report released by Counterpoint Research in 2017, the most popular domestic streaming platform in India is Hotstar, followed by Alt Balaji and Voot and Global platforms like Prime comes first and followed by Netflix. These figures have not changed since the last two years. The popularity of OTT platforms is slowly rising with the streaming of local platforms such as ALTBalaji, Voot and SonyLIV, giving direct competition to foreign but popular platforms such as Prime Video and Netflix.

The new trend of releasing theatrical movies on OTT platforms is a significant sign of larger growth of OTT in the country. Theatrical movies made in the most prominent languages were released in OTT platforms before releasing in theatres, for example, *Sufiyum Sujathayum* from Malayalam Industry, *Gulabo Sitabo* from Bollywood, *Penguin* from Tamil, etc. were some of the first Indian direct OTT releases.

With the increasing options and choices for the streaming contents and platforms, the competition among platforms has increased. In order to attract the audience, the platforms are investing in originals and trying to buy theatrical movies for OTT release. The success of Netflix's *Sacred Games* and *Ghoul*, Prime Video's *The Family Man* and Hotstar's *AIB On Air* and *Sarabhai Vs Sarabhai* proved the original series to be a successful working formula.

One of the major factors of the popularity of the certain local OTT platforms when compared to the international platforms such as Amazon Prime and Netflix is that these platforms are available to the audience with paid annual or monthly subscription, whereas most of the local OTT platforms are available free of cost, thus increasing their popularity and demand. With the availability and affordable of data, the consumption of digital media has increased in the country, says the report published by Boston Consulting Group (BCG), Confederation of Indian Industry.

Despite the fact that the number of OTT platforms and original content are increasing day by day in the country, the studies available on the topic is meagre compared to the global level. Slowly Indian urban audiences are slipping away from DTH to OTT services. Majority of the television channels in India have their OTT platform setup and the cost of OTT platforms are comparatively less when compared to the total cost of DTH. After the introduction of 'pay per channel' DTH costs have also gone high. And the main negative aspect of DTH is that there are advertisements in between that distracts the viewers. But in comparison the same channels' OTT Platforms are add free and cost-effective; Xstream by Airtel and JioTV can be examples as these platforms provide free membership for their viewers. Entertainment industry's success depends on the taste of its consumers. When considering changes and movements in the field of cinema, it is easily noticeable that they happened because of the changes in people's perception of art and taste for films. A decade ago what was called as parallel cinema has now become mainstream, whereas the blockbuster heroic movies are losing their popularity.

Usual Bollywood romances are getting replaced by new themes and portrayals of realistic relationships. The teleserial industry in India evolved from mythological *Ramayans* (1987) and *Mahabharata* (1988) to *Hum Log* (1984), first serial drama in the country, to Saas-Bahu shows in the recent past because of the change in taste and demand of the audiences.

However, there is also a commercial aspect to it; without which there won't be any funding. This is the same case with OTT platforms both indigenous and international ones. Amazon's first Indian originals series *Breathe* starring the well-known actor Madhavan was dubbed into three other regional languages and also in English. It's the same with Netflix when *Sacred Games* (2018) was originally made in Hindi there was also an audio track available in English. This is done to cater to a wide variety of audiences.

The Fungal Flourish

FR KM GEORGE



A splendid morning surprise after several days of overcast sky and random drizzles. It was hard to make out at first from a distance. It looked like a piece of delicately embroidered lace design or a fine lattice work in milky white soft-paste porcelain. Then it revealed itself as an exquisite mushroom that lay upside down amidst the decaying fallen leaves. It had unfolded in all silence in the night's darkness on the damp compost of twigs, leaves and fallen fruits from the chikku tree above. No one would normally suspect anything so beautiful to emerge from such sombre circumstances. Yet it is there, the transient beauty, a passing delight to us, passers by as well.

The sudden rise of mushrooms takes us by surprise. But their tiny spores are all around waiting for the favourable conditions of dampness, darkness and decay. Our languages have adopted the term and the metaphor 'mushrooming' from the suddenness of their growth in large numbers and in unexpected places. Found in more than ten thousand varieties and belonging to the humble fungi family of ancient lineage, some mushrooms are edible, some poisonous, and still others 'magical' or hallucinogenic.

Even if our civilisational edifices crumble and decay the mushrooms will still grow hilariously over their sad remains. Does it give us some glimpses of hope for the future of life that we humans try to eliminate ruthlessly in myriad ways?

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The Foundation of the Institute of the Sisters of St Joseph's of Tarbes (SJT) is in France.

On 15 August 1843, God gave six young peasant girls of Cantaus, Diocese of Tarbes in France an experience of His Trinitarian Communion. Each of the girls relished this experience, discerned it, and was spontaneously drawn to share it with one another in simple faith.

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Gather the scattered; Unite the divided with the motto: 'GOD ALONE'

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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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