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together

a national family magazine



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

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

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

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

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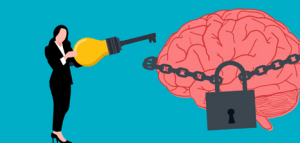
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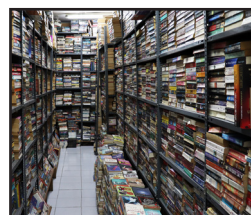
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Mental Illnesses Need the Respect It Requires

We must respond with greater empathy towards mental illness; must replace stigma with solidarity. That would need time, and a lot more conversations.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

I am not a huge fan of lawn tennis but what happened at the French Open in 2021, in these postmodern times of liberty and individual freedom, troubled me. Naomi Osaka, the reigning world no. 2, had to leave the tournament because she was not able to have media interactions after the matches ended, or should we say that in Grand Slam, like in any popularity and profit driven businesses, matches don't end with the last match point. Post match press conferences have its monitory importance. The media popularity of the game definitely helps the sport, and consequently everyone connected with it. I am no one to make a comment on it. What came to the limelight here is the reality of mental health.

Naomi Osaka was long fighting mental health issues. She suffers from social anxiety. She even used to have earphones plugged into her ears to reduce the impact of social interactions around her. It was made known to the authorities. Neither the authorities nor the media cared a hoot about it; and it frustrated her and thwarted her career. Mental illnesses need the respect it requires.

Mental Health Issues Are Normal

Mental health issues are as normal as bodily health issues. Mental illness creates disabilities. As there is growing awareness about physical disabilities, we must also grow aware of mental illnesses and subsequent social and functional disabilities. The Norwegian Prime Minister, Kjell

Magne Bondevik, was fighting depression during his very first year (1997–98) in office. He took a few weeks leave and returned recuperated. His country stood by him. He completed his term and went on to serve a second term as the Prime Minister. It is not surprising that Norway stands first in the Happiness Index. The rest of the world must learn from Norway. We must respond with greater empathy towards mental illnesses; must replace stigma with solidarity. That would need time, and a lot more conversations.

Researchers time and again point out that a person with mental illness can be a functional and productive member of society. Of course a person with no mental health condition is more likely to experience higher levels of mental well-being; but a person with mental health conditions can still experience good level of mental well-being—if only we care.

Mental Health and Human Rights Violations

Apart from living with unkind and painful social stigma, people with mental health conditions often experience human rights violations in their homes, workplaces, and in every public space. They are denied peaceful habitation and right to rehabilitation (companies and firms have less or no issues to sanction leave for a physical illness and accidents, but what about mental illnesses and accidents? In the latter case one is even at the risk of losing one's job). Not having adequate standard of living, taking advantage of a person socially or sexually, having not enough access

WIDESPREAD



1 in 8

live with a mental health condition

UNDERTREATED



71%

people with psychosis do not receive mental health services

UNDER-RESOURCED



2%

of health budgets, on average, go to mental health

► Mental health conditions are widespread, undertreated and under-resourced (World Mental Health Report 2022)

to social protection and justice, and kept away from participation in public life—all amount to human rights violations.

Business as Usual Is Not Enough for Mental Health

One in eight people live with a mental health condition. People with severe mental health conditions die 10 to 20 years earlier than the general population. Twelve billion workdays are lost every year to depression and anxiety. There may be 20 suicide attempts to every one suicide death, and yet suicide accounts one in every 100 deaths globally; and the major cause for suicide is low level of mental well-being. It is an insult to injury to hear from the World Mental Health Report 2022 by WHO that governments around the world allocate just 2% of their health budgets to the treatment and prevention of mental health conditions. 2% perhaps is also the time we spend on matters of mental well-being.

Of course understanding of mental health, and general interest in the subject has increased. Many countries have established, updated and strengthened mental health policies or plans. Advocacy movements have amplified the voices of people with lived experience of mental health conditions. Informed by research, the field has advanced technically. Numerous practical, evidence-based mental health guidelines, manuals

and other tools are now available for implementation. But are we, as individuals, families and communities, taking advantage of it and doing enough?

As individuals we got to take responsibility of our mental well-being: make social connections, stay active, have activities for realisation, make leisure a priority, eat and sleep well, find meaning and purpose in life, and above all, get help if needed.

As a collective we must consciously work on our physical social environment that we live in: homes, schools, workplaces, and the wider community. Social contact is the most effective type of intervention for mental health, and to handle stigma-related concerns. Stop exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and physical abuses because of one's low mental health conditions. As governments, employers, and people who hold authority we must stop being authoritative and arbitrary on matters of people struggling with low mental health. Build tangible structures of tolerance, acceptance, and caregiving.

In handling mental health, none of us are as strong as all of us. Individuals, governments, care providers, nongovernmental organizations, academics, employers, civil society and families all have a part to play. It will take the combined efforts of us all to transform mental health for the better. ■

FROM MOUNTAINS TO MUSIC

Teenagers on Mental Health and How They Cope

SINCHANA SHETTY, NUPUR RAVIKUMAR, PURVI PATEL

Contemporary times, apart from the pandemic itself, has caused an epidemic of mental strain on youngsters of the generation. From all things online to assignments and trying to keep with The Kardashians and social life, things have been piling up on the to-do lists. Research suggests that 54% of teenagers have dealt with mental strain due to self-image and pressure from parents and peers. The following article posed questions to youngsters across India on what mental health means to them and how they deal with mental issues.



What does mental health mean to you?

ARIHANT JAIN, SJCC, Bangalore For me, mental health has never been a conversation at home or outside. I was introduced to it only at work where it was taken seriously.

RIVANSHA MALHOTRA, Delhi University Mental health is the most important aspect in my life as I feel if I am not feeling good mentally, I won't be able to contribute to any other thing to my full capacity.

NIKITHA AMIN, New Horizon College of Engineering, Bangalore Mental health to me means to be able to feel, think, act, and do everyday chores without my mind going to a dark place.

KEERTHAN K, St Joseph's College, Bangalore What the star player in a team means to the franchise is similar to what mental health means to me. It represents my emotional well being which when fully fit and at it's best is taking me from win

to win but is also the reason I understand and cherish loss and know how to get back from it.

GAUTHAM SEERVI, Bits Pilani, Rajasthan To me it's all about trying to staying cool be it good times or bad times.

AMAAN AHMED, RIT, Dubai I didn't really consider mental health until later in college because of excess mental strain. I'd say it's very important to me now.

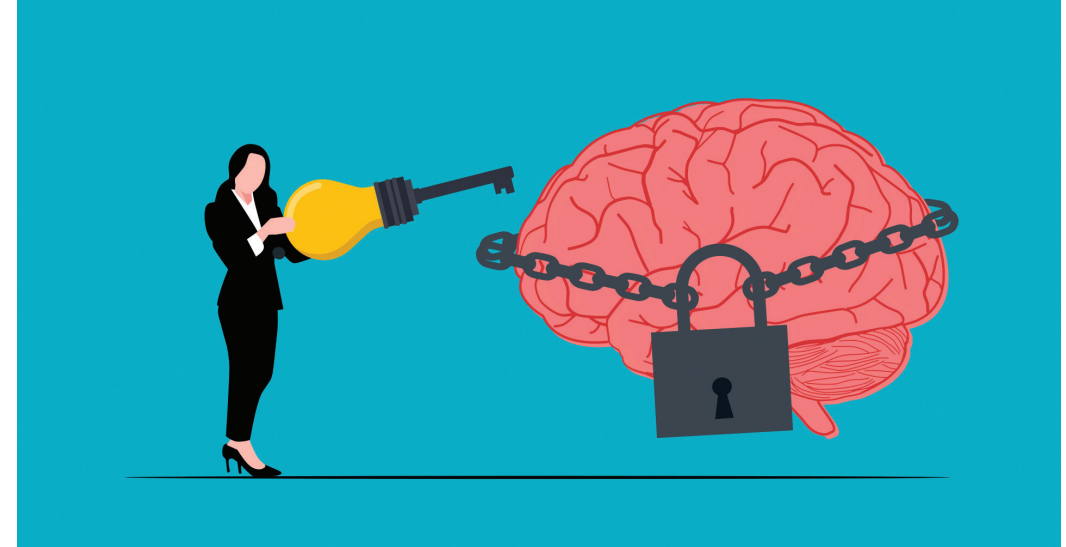
KIRAN PATEL, Alliance University The world not being loud is what grounds me, making my mind feel lighter. Being happy and satisfied even in a stressful situation due to the support of people around is a healthy dose for my mental health.

VISHAL M GODI, PES University Being able to take care of and be content with one's mind, emotions, feelings.

PRATHAM PRAVEEN, RV College of Engineering Mental health is important for stability, peace and proper decision making. It also plays a major role in determining the amount of self confidence and esteem a person has.

ABHISHEK KUMAR SINGH, VIT Vellore Mental health according to me is our ability to continually sustain ourselves through the course of life. It is what defines our ability to deal with the same or new experiences and how positive or negatively we receive them.

SONU Mental health to me is being aware of my feelings and emotions. It is to experience and



channelise every emotions than shutting them or constraining them.

SARIKA Mental health to me equates to physical health. I give a lot of thought and attention to my mental health and take help whenever I feel the need. According to me, taking care of our mental health and keeping ourselves content is the first step toward self-love.



What do you do to destress after a tough day?

ARIHANT: I game and do just about anything to distract my mind when stressed. Sometimes I eat or even go out drinking with friends because they are my safe space.

RIVANSHA: Whenever I am feeling mentally exhausted, I listen to some of my favourite songs or talk to my friends and family. And if nothing helps, I sleep.

NIKITHA: To relieve myself from mental strain, I disconnect myself from people and social media till I start feeling like myself again.

KEERTHANA: Listening to music while taking a walk in the evenings has always been a way to relieve my stress. I also keep a doodle journal and actively go out looking for dogs to cuddle and play with. Beastily is just my thing.

GAUTHAM: Usually, I tend to take some breaks or skate at the local park. It gives me an adrenaline rush but also calms me at the same time.

AMAAN: For me, it's sports. I run and have started playing basketball. It's the way to destress.

PRATHAM: I've started meditation, yoga and exercise. It's dynamic! Sometimes I also prefer low energy activities like reading, taking a walk or playing video games.

KIRAN: Read a book or travel. Mountains do wonders for my mental health.

VISHAL: Listen to songs. Watch your comfort shows. Play highly stimulative games. That's what I do on bad days. It makes me feel better immediately.

ABHISHEK: To bring myself back from mental strain, I talk to people who I've built a very strong relationship with. Such people often share perspectives that could positively impact our own ones. This either solves the problem completely, or at worst, helps temporarily shift my focus until I'm in a better shape to deal with the matter.

ADITI JAIN: I recently started practicing pranayama for a few minutes everyday and I'm trying to incorporate it in my daily routine. I seem to be able to sleep better when I do that. So that helps my mental strain.

SONU: Naps, reading and journaling. These are the ways I try to find my catharsis.

SARIKA: Whenever I feel mental strain or stress, I try to focus my attention on what might be the possible reasons. I try to refrain from thinking about the stressors and practice mindfulness by doing what I love the most- like listening to music, watching light-hearted content, or practicing breathing exercises. ■

Disclosures of My ADHD

Quite often all we need is time, assurance, and encouragement. We work well with carrots than sticks.

Anonymous

I recently watched a Kannada movie where the casual use of the acronym 'ADHD' evoked all the big emotions in me. Although I didn't really express how I felt, I remember it stayed with me.

Growing up was hard. I remember how difficult it was for my parents to get me to study. I was not able to focus, because the usual subjects in school didn't interest me. I would sit with novels in class while the teacher continued to teach maths or science. This led me to failing and repeating a year in school. I used to ask myself, why I can't remember tasks or things I studied at school? Why do I always fail to meet the deadlines for my assignments? Why can't I be like everybody else? Why can't I learn by-heart everything like other kids? The only answer is that I was not them, I was me.

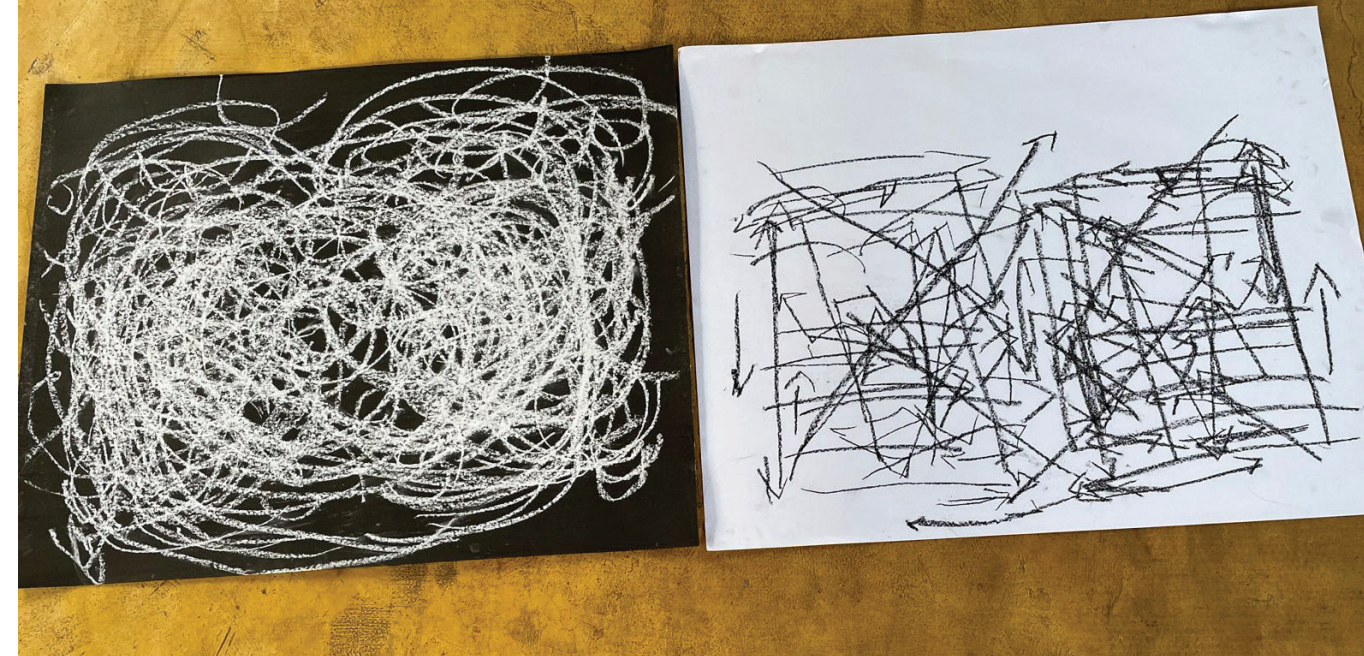
In my college I did better because I liked psychology and sociology. These subjects caught my attention. I learn better through practically learning over theory. I have always been a kinesthetic learner. My course in bachelors involved a lot of practical work. This physically doing things over just studying helped me better, and get better grades. I learned how to operate a camera, edit videos, shoot, write scripts, do theatre, etc. they required me to open myself to a lot of new skills that were movement based. That's how I

realised that sitting in one place to learn and leaning only through books or rote learning is not my game. To function, and to lead a better life I needed to involve movement, creativity, action based activities.

Now here's a disclaimer. I am not diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), by a certified professional. This is a self-diagnosis and it is extremely common in the ADHD community. Often, the symptoms of ADHD are notoriously difficult to be diagnosed among women in general. They are dismissed as depression and anxiety, without probing further. And getting a diagnosis in India is even harder.

Often ADHD is only associated with children. ADHD in adults is barely seen and acknowledged. Only now a lot of people are talking about it. More psychiatrists are seeing the possibility of its existence. My first encounter with Adult ADHD took place while I was studying for my masters.

I was listening to a podcast while riding a bike, I know it's not safe but I felt a huge sigh of relief as I heard the host talk about her symptoms and I remember relating with every single one of them and telling myself, 'I am glad what I feel has a name'. What happened next was that I was in denial. 'Maybe it's not that' 'Maybe



I am overreacting' 'Maybe I am overthinking' and then I stopped thinking about it. But it always stayed at the back of my head. I would read about it randomly somewhere and then relate to symptoms again and again. Allow me to explain a few of them.

- I struggle to complete tasks on time, only rarely do I meet my deadlines.
- I procrastinate until I finally have to get to the task to try reaching my deadline and my mind hyper focuses on the task at hand.
- I have all-or-none thinking.
- Deal with Analysis Paralysis.
- Forget tasks, important appointments, calls, assignments, and you know the drift.
- Shift from one interesting thing to another because now that's interesting.
- Interrupting other people in conversation because I would forget what I am saying, if I am not saying it right now.
- Procrastinating on tasks because it's boring and not exciting.
- Having extreme low days where small tasks feel like a mountain to climb.
- And there are many more.

A lot of these symptoms may appear quite common. But, the difference is in how they affect your day-to-day functioning. For those with ADHD, the symptoms can be so severe that they can prevent us from not only achieving our

full potential but also trigger extreme guilt.

My ADHD has made me extremely self-critical, because what everybody else can manage to do so easily is what I struggle with. People with ADHD work twice harder to fit in, not to do something wrong, say something wrong, or be weird.

Quite often all we need is time, assurance and encouragement. We work well with carrots than sticks. We need a supportive coach who pushes, helps and celebrates us when we do well. A critic will only push us to the brink of depression.

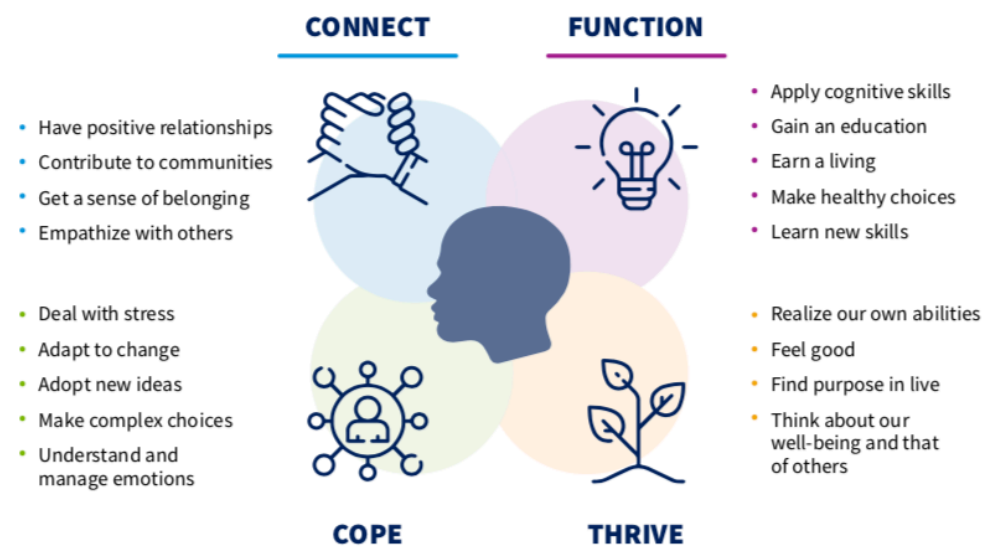
I joined an ADHD support group a few months ago, where all participants discuss our experiences, struggles, hacks to be able to function better. And we do this with the help of movement and art. Many times expressing through art and movement works better. Other times, being able to express in a group setting helps us to cope, recharge, relate, feel, seen and heard; and that seems enough to feel comfortable in our own skin.

Books for help: *Driven to Distraction* by Edward M. Hallowell; *You Mean I'm not Lazy, Stupid or Crazy?!* by Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo. ■

Author's name is not mentioned on request, and considering the person's present position.

UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

Dr ELIZABETH JASMINE RUBEN



► Mental health has intrinsic and instrumental value, helping us to connect, function, cope and thrive (World Mental Health Report 2022)

The teenage years are a very exciting as well as daunting time for many children. It is a time of rapid growth and change, physically, mentally and socially. These are very exciting as well as times of significant stress and apprehension.

Teenage is called adolescence by psychologists. By far most cultures agree that adolescence is the period of transition between childhood and adulthood. It is a time in a child's life where they face maximum changes and challenges in different aspects- biological, psychological, social, moral and spiritual aspects. For some teenagers, change can be scary, whereas others take it in their stride.

Teenage years see the shift from the dependency of childhood to increased independence. With the increase in independence comes an increase in freedom, but with that freedom, comes responsibilities. Attitudes and perspectives change and close family members often feel they are suddenly living with a stranger.

Some of the reasons that are responsible for the increase in unhappiness over the teenage

years are listed below. Awareness and recognition of the reasons/causes is the first step towards overcoming unhappiness:

1. Changes in lifestyle, family and social support:

The present socio-cultural and economic conditions have transformed families and lifestyle. With the increase in parental job responsibilities, stress and distractions from internet, media and allied services there has been a sharp decline in social support. Teenagers may feel tossed in between parents, unable to find quality time and support from either of the parents.

With the advent of nuclear families many youngsters are brought up in cocooned surroundings that fosters low threshold for disappointments, failure, loss and pain.

On the other hand with the children's priorities changing with easy access to media, internet, mobile phone, gaming etc., they seem to be living in a bubble, totally disconnected with the realities of life. They seem to be disregarding the availability of social support, family bonds and live like strangers in their own houses.

2. Immature thought process of adolescence: How we think (cognition), how we feel (emotion) and how we act (behavior) are all interconnected and interact together. Time and again researchers have highlighted the immature thought process of adolescence. This immature thought process is the result of the following-

a. *Egocentrism* – intense preoccupation with one's own feelings and lack of connection to feelings of others. Teenager's self-absorption leads to only being able to see the world through their own perspective.

b. *Idealism and Criticalness* – the feeling that he/she knows better than others/ adults and hence constantly find fault in parents/adult/ authority figures.

c. *Argumentativeness* – Since the teenager is testing their new found abilities at reasoning, it is seen that their arguments lack objectivity & verification of facts.

d. *Indecisiveness* – lack of effective choosing strategies when given alternatives.

e. *Apparent Hypocrisy* – Inability to recognize the difference between expressing an ideal and making the sacrifices necessary to live up to it.

f. *Self-consciousness and imaginary audience* – thinking people are watching/judging them all the time; the belief that one is the focus of others' thinking and attention

g. *Specialness and invulnerability* – Personal fable: the belief that no one else can possibly understand one's feelings and experiences because they are unique

h. *Illusion of invulnerability* – the belief that bad things only happen only to other people- 'Nothing would happen to me even if I take any sort of risk'.

3. Pressures: Pressure from peers, parents, and society to conform to conflicting expectations is yet another cause for the unhappiness of teenage years. Inability to manage time effectively, difficulty with demanding academics, bullying in school and neighbourhoods, lack of good role models and mentors can all be the reason for increased pressure and experience of unhappiness in teenage years.

What can you do to overcome unhappiness and promote positive feelings / emotions during teenage years?

1. Identify your thought process and work towards changing the negative and immature thought process.

2. Enhance your threshold levels to deal with frustrations, failure in exams, loss in relationships or issues relating to your immediate environment by developing effective coping mechanisms.

3. Overcome the social and physical deprivation brought about by video games, social media, mobile phones etc. that has increased your reactivity to stress. Report if you experience cyber-crimes, cyber bullying, and addiction to online materials or video games. Adhere to a personal time schedule and find time for online, offline activities and activities that promote personal health. Don't let virtual realities and gadgets take control of you

4. Connect with people- Parents, siblings, peers, friends, teachers- for social support. Take time to introspect and patch relationships. Practice forgiveness and accept people unconditionally. Learn and practice social skills to managing Relationships.

5. Develop right Attitude towards the pursuit of academic endeavors No alternative to Hard Work and Perseverance

6. Take professional help from counselors or initiate a dialogue with elders or your parents if you experience continued unhappiness. Talk about your friendship or romantic relationship if it's the cause of unhappiness and stress.

In sum, to be happy, remember to be rooted firmly in your culture and value system. Lean to be happy and smile more often. Believe and surrender yourself in front of the higher powers of the universe, the Almighty.

According to Lewis Howes, 'Life is too ironic. It takes sadness to know what happiness is, noise to appreciate silence, absence to value presence'. Be happy always. ■

Dr Elizabeth Jasmine Ruben is the Principal, Indian Institute of Psychology and Research (IIPR), Bangalore.

Minding a Healthy Mind

Dr RAMAA RAJU

*...And so she died: had she been light, like you,
Of such a merry, nimble, stirring spirit,
She might ha' been a grandma...*

William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*

The views of The Bard's character aptly reflect the criteria for experiencing a long satisfying life, a state which we currently describe as one of good mental health and well-being. The significance of the role of good mental health and its absence in all aspects of life is being increasingly researched. Good mental health does not mean just the absence of a mental disorder. It is a state of subjective wellbeing which determines and impacts our interactions and adjustments with people whom we need to engage with constantly. Mental health affects daily living and physical health.

General observations reveal that most people believe that they are fine and that mental disorders happen to others. Either they are in a state of denial that there could be something in them that is 'not so okay' or it could be a sure lack of insight to their maladaptive behavior. Gross mental disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorders can be identified and managed by family and care givers. The overbearing nature of an authority, the covert narcissism of a colleague and the defiance of adolescents are few personality traits which are a greater challenge to cope. While constantly dealing with difficult people, an individual may be left feeling emotionally fragile and mentally exhausted.

Both biologically and psychologically we differ greatly in our vulnerability to stressors and different people are vulnerable to different stressors. Major disappointments, emergencies, early life trauma, prolonged struggle and suffering can increase perception and experience of psychic pain. This chronic psychic pain may leave us feeling even more vulnerable to the dictates of negative thoughts. While most people

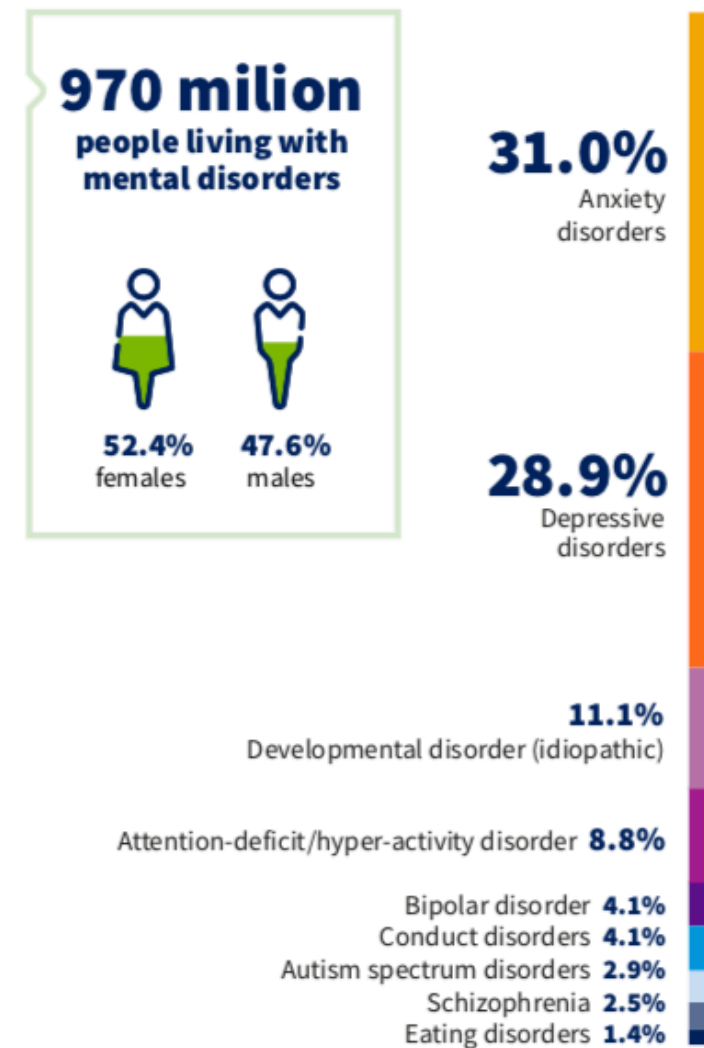
find themselves inadequate to cope with such stressors, for few it's a piece of cake.

What are the unique coping strategies to be able to manage difficult people and situations? Psychologists advocate psychoeducation to enhance problem and emotion focused coping as an effective intervention. Constant attention and care of mental health can preserve a person's ability to enjoy life. Such care involves balancing life activities, responsibilities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience. Research findings directly link high emotional intelligence with good mental health and well-being. Yet when stressors are chronic and life becomes a struggle, quiet often people give up on working on their emotions. A feeling of hopelessness may set in which alters quality of life. An alternate recourse to ensure psychological wellbeing is to work on ones spiritual quotient. People who question the purpose of life, look for the meaning of life experiences, critically examine existential issues are likely to relate more patiently and peacefully with negative life issues. Efforts to help focus on this component of intrinsic growth can be traced to all religious texts which attempt to serve as instruments of positive change. For the ones who lack the patience to internalize a discourse on spiritual intelligence, the strength to cope can be sourced from the insight to the wisdom of the experienced and attempt 'to dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe, to bear with unbearable sorrow, to run where the brave dare not go, to right, the un-rightable wrong and to reach the unreachable star'. If this is the quest to follow that star, no matter how hopeless, no matter how far.... one would surely understand what it is to experience a state of wellbeing. ■

Gen Z, Mental Health and the Indicators

This generation will enter the workforce in the future years, yet little is known about their attributes, requirements, talents, and skills.

ROSELINE GOMES



Generation Z is an essential portion of the workforce today. This generation was born and reared in very different circumstances than previous generations. Caught up in their digital space questions regarding their social interactions remain unanswered. But who are these Gen Z? Have we ever wondered about their psychosocial spaces that are so personalised and, yes, digitalised. Incredible technological advances are shaping our modern reality, influencing our attitude towards community, governance, and forging new territories in learning. A new generation is evolving that is contextually aware and speak a digital language. This Generation Z learners are more technologically equipped than typical Generation X adults. The prototypical Generation Z individuals, often known as digital natives, was the first young generation into a worldwide digitally connected world and hence breathes technology. Generation Z depend on PC recordings rather than writing notes, are more likely to pose questions online, view lectures as entertainment, dislike waiting for an answer, and prefers rapid information and communication. Generation Z's brains have grown linked to advanced, complicated visual storytelling.

► The global prevalence of mental disorders in 2019 (World Mental Health Report 2022)

Generation Z was grown up and nurtured with the online community that made them digitally oriented, and technology is now an extension of their identity. This generation will enter the workforce in the future years, yet little is known about their attributes, requirements, talents, and skills. They appear to have unique attitudes than prior generations. Without a thorough understanding of this generation societal institutions will struggle to engage and retain them in order to sustain their growth. It's relevant that their mental health signs are understood at deeper levels by families, schools, colleges, peer groups, workforce and others.

According to a 2021 Global Governance Report stress was reported by over 83% of Indian Gen Z and Millennials, accompanied by anxiety (66.3%), body-image difficulties and related concerns (44%), and depression (43%). The advent of the COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of focusing on mental health more than ever before. The pandemic with its apprehensions and panic have not only aggravated their mental health difficulties, but have also exposed concomitant lack of understanding and services when it comes to these disorders. Despite the fact that this is a worldwide issue, the situation in India is alarming. With a younger generation and an increasingly competitive employment market, India ranked second on the World Health Organization's list of countries with the highest stress of disease for psychological concerns in 2018, ranking second in Depression and Anxiety-related disorders, and third in alcohol and substance use. To find long-term answers to this ever-growing problem, it is critical to examine the current gaps in awareness as well as the effective grievance procedures in place.

The report also showed that 150 million Indians required active interventions for mental health concerns (one or more), yet only 30 million sought help. Youngsters, particularly Generation Z and Millennials, confront unreasonably high levels of stress and sadness, which are believed to be consequences of discomfort and

hopelessness stemming from a variety of problems that surround them on a daily basis. Anxiety and depression signs have been common among these adolescent age groups. Anxiety is a typical stress response while anxiety disorders are distinguished from typical sensations of uneasiness by the presence of excessive fear.

Anxiety is characterised by muscle tension and avoidance actions in relation to the anticipation of a future issue. Fear is a psychologically driven affective reaction to an impending threat and is more connected with a fight or flight response - either staying to fight or fleeing to avoid danger. Individuals suffering from anxiety disorders may strive to avoid circumstances that trigger or intensify their symptoms. Employment status, academics, and interpersonal relations might all suffer as a result. In order to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, a person's fear or anxiety must be out of proportion to the circumstances, limit one's ability to perform properly.

Learn to Read the Signs

- **GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER:** This is characterised by persistent and excessive worry that disrupts daily activities. This continuous anxiety are accompanied by bodily symptoms such as restlessness, feeling tense or easily fatigued, difficulties concentrating, muscle tension, or sleeping issues. Worries about ordinary things like college, family, health, romantic relations, or little issues like housework, peer messages, or engagements are common.
- **PANIC DISORDER:** Recurrent panic attacks, an overwhelming combination of physiological and mental anguish, are the primary symptom of panic disorder. Several of these symptoms occur in tandem during an attack:
 1. Palpitations, pounding heart or rapid heart rate
 2. Sweating
 3. Trembling or shaking

4. Feeling of shortness of breath or smothering sensations
5. Chest pain
6. Feeling dizzy, light-headed or faint
7. Feeling of choking
8. Numbness or tingling
9. Chills or hot flashes
10. Nausea or abdominal pains
11. Feeling detached
12. Fear of losing control
13. Fear of dying

Because the symptoms are so intense, many individuals who have a panic attack mistake it for a heart attack or another life-threatening condition. Panic attacks can be predicted, such as in response to a dreaded object, or they can be unexpected, occurring seemingly out of nowhere. The average age of starting panic disorder is 20-24 years old. Panic attacks can occur alongside other mental illnesses such as depression or PTSD.

1. **PHOBIAS:** A specific phobia is an abnormal and persistent dread of a specific object, place, or action that is not inherently dangerous. Individuals are aware that their dread is extreme, but they are unable to overcome it. These worries cause so much discomfort that outcome is avoidance. Examples include apprehension about public speaking, flight, and insects.
2. **AGORAPHOBIA:** Agoraphobia is the fear of being in settings where escape may be complicated or humiliating, or where aid may be unavailable if panic symptoms occur. The fear is disproportionate, lasts six months or longer, and interferes with functioning. An individual suffering from agoraphobia feels fear in at least two of the following situations:
 - Using public transportation
 - Being in open spaces
 - Being in enclosed places
 - Standing in line or being in a crowd
 - Being outside the home alone

3. **SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER:** A person suffering from social anxiety disorder is extremely concerned about being uncomfortable, disrespected and abandoned in social situations. Individuals who suffer from this illness would either attempt to avoid the circumstance or would undergo it with extreme anxiety. Extreme fear of public speaking, interacting with new individuals or eating/drinking in company are all common examples. Fear or anxiety impairs everyday performance for at least six months.
4. **SEPARATION ANXIETY DISORDER:** Individuals suffering from separation anxiety disorder are extremely afraid or apprehensive about being separated from those to whom they are attached. The feeling is excessive for the individual's age, lasts for at least four weeks in children and six months in adults, and interferes with functioning. An individual suffering from separation anxiety disorder may be continually concerned about losing the person dearest to him or her, may be hesitant or unwilling to leave the house or sleep away from that person, or may have nightmares about separation. Physiological signs of distress are common in childhood, but they can persist into adulthood.

Thus, as older mentors to our adolescent gen Z population, it's needed that we observe their signs. It's easy to evaluate their time spent in social media, usage of gadgets and other unique actions. But with these we also have to become their peers in opening up forums within our families, schools and colleges or other spaces for them to fearlessly discuss their thoughts, feelings and actions. Many of our youngsters have lost their social skills within the online units of functioning. It has impacted their mental health and hence we all have to let them space out and redefine their potentials. The present generation is so aware and is fueled with dynamic strengths that are waiting to be nurtured and guided by their adult peers. ■

Mental Health and Connectedness

We have a broken relationship with nature, family, community and neighbourhood and we feel it is normal. All that were common and universal are denied to us and rubbished as obsolete and a thing of the past.

TOMY PALACKAL OFM

Mental Health is an inclusive term for emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing of persons. It is an umbrella term for how we think, feel, act in our day today life. It impacts people across their lifespan. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right and it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.

It is important to note in recent times this topic has gained a great amount of attention and reflection among common people. The mental health scenario that unfolded out of the lockdown forced by the pandemic situation has drawn our attention greatly to what was already fermenting in our interpersonal, and intrapersonal realities. The restlessness that has been simmering beneath the surface of modern life was always beckoning our attention to the reality of brokenness and fragmentation of the fraternal bond that existed between every element in this created universe. This brokenness and fragmentation is the ground on which the present generation has built its home.

Our relationship is largely broken with nature, family, community and neighbourhood and we feel it is normal. As we progressed, we are forced to remain in this space thinking it is a healthy way of being. Some of the clinical experiences with clients in sessions indicate a rather frightening malady that has taken deeper roots into our interpersonal, social and psychological landscape and renders us helpless

and clueless about the possible movement to a meaningful future.

About a month ago, Aarav, an young man who had just completed his masters and had begun his career in counselling died of suicide in his apartment. Apparently, he was the only child of his well to do parents who were staying abroad. He stayed with his partner in an apartment in a metropolitan city but found his life unbearably lonely. The easy way out for the boy from all that alienated and emphasized his sense of isolation was death by suicide. But what gave birth to this sense of isolation and alienation in the boy needs to be understood. Aarav is only one of the thousands who adopt such extreme measures to deal with their sense of alienation and isolation. Situations like this shows how deeply disconnected we are while being with everyone. And it points out a fragmented relational fabric, which once grounded and protected us from our rather frightening existential realities.

It is a fact, a quick skimming through the newspapers and communication media during the past three months reveal, the picture of a fragile, disintegrating psychological landscape of humanity. The types of crimes unheard of, the brutality of the acts committed, the violence and malice meditated and executed, the indifference and callousness that is tangible in every form of relationships, the inability for a meaningful engagement with oneself, others, and the society, are all underscored in these news reports. They indicate a very delicate and a vitiated state of mental health and hygiene, both personal and social.



Let people realize clearly that every time they threaten someone or humiliate or unnecessarily hurt or dominate or reject another human being, they become forces for the creation of psychopathology, even if these be small forces. Let them recognise that every person who is kind, helpful, decent, psychologically democratic, affectionate, and warm, is a psychotherapeutic force, even though a small one.

— ABRAHAM H. MASLOW



of uncertainty and changes in the future brings us close to helplessness and confusion. Humans feel unprepared and unsupported as humanity experiences an exaggerated sense of individuality and the resulting isolation. All that was common and universal are denied to

them and rubbished as obsolete and a thing of the past. It is only by reclaiming and nurturing the universal and common links that connected us fundamentally in the uncomplicated life of the past, we will be able to find our steps to the future. It is essential that we must place man back in the complex and intricate network of relationships and connections, which will nurture his sinews and muscles needed for the journey forward. Studies on the centrality of human relationships has emphasized the

importance of connectedness that gives birth, nurtures, maintains and sustains an individual's sense of identity and meaning in life. And this ambience of connections is to be preserved as a sacred sanctuary, as that is a space that cannot be duplicated or reproduced by advancements in science or technology.

It is crucial to remind ourselves of the words of Abraham Maslow to grasp the importance of the contribution that each one of us make (in small or big ways) to the world around us.

'Let people realize clearly that every time they threaten someone or humiliate or unnecessarily hurt or dominate or reject another human being, they become forces for the creation of psychopathology, even if these be small forces. Let them recognise that every person who is kind, helpful, decent, psychologically democratic, affectionate, and warm, is a psychotherapeutic force, even though a small one.' ■

What drove the society and the individuals to a state like this? I think the process had been long on and now we are confronted with the outcomes of that process. Humans conceived an anthropocentric view of the universe and began the process of alienation and exclusion with every step of development and advancement. We activated this process in every known sphere of our existence. This estrangement and alienation have impacted even the sense of who one is as a living being and as a relational being. The links that connects us in the ecosystem has weakened so much that we have become parasitical and devoid of strong roots to ground us.

The space in our interpersonal and relational spheres have become so impoverished and malnourished, that, one is unable to weather through the normal stresses that come one's way. Minor frustrations, fluctuations, and changes in emotional ties, even a remote possibility

Why Is It Okay Not to Be Okay?

Different age brings forth different challenges; and if we develop poor coping mechanisms an issue will manifest into a symptom, gradually progressing into an actual psychological disorder.

DR AKEELA P

During my college days I was desperately trying to fit in with the crowd, struggling with the question whether I am the black sheep of the family. While watching the French Movie 'Amélie', I had the epiphany that changed my perception forever – with every protagonist a narration would follow, the scenes would display each character's unique tics, weird behaviours, and their flaws in a funny way. I finally understood that each one of us have these in our lives too but we carefully camouflage it hiding behind a mask.

It is estimated that about one in four adults suffer from diagnosable mental disorder in a given year and many people suffer from more than one mental disorder at a given time varying in different intensity from mild-moderate-profound.

In today's scenario people are much aware, and acquire knowledge of various psychological issues and mental health than compared to a decade ago; yet we have scratched only the surface of the complexities of a human behaviour, there are infinite personality assessments available, however none are able to capture the whole essence of a human existence -the reason being that we are ever evolving. Sometimes in a day our mood changes from being happy, content and grateful to being cynical, miserable and remorseful. We can't help it since we are part of a system constantly interacting with our environment and its other

cohabitants. As simple as a news on a tragic event could send us in a spiral low mood; then how is it relatively possible that we could expect that everyone should be happy and calm, having no challenges, only dead people can neither feel nor respond. As long as we are alive, constant reaction and reflection is a natural reflex, working as an automatic response to the things surrounding us.

Understanding the Genesis of a Psychological Disorder

Our behaviour is complex; it is a resultant of a multi-variable interaction. We cannot associate any behaviour with a single casual factor. For instance 'anger', it could be because you had a parent suffering from anger issues and in turn you learnt it by observing, exposure to the peer group where anger was validated, or the cultural influence like in some African tribes where anger is accepted as a symbol of being masculine, or the brain itself produced high levels of norepinephrine a neurotransmitter responsible for fear and anger emotion that triggers 'fight or flight' response. Ultimately when the genesis of a psychological issue itself is complex, the treatment for the following is not a one way track.

Life Span and Psychological Problems

In my academic interaction with the students, I often ask them 'Are you crying for the same

reasons when you were in 5th grade?' the answer more likely is 'no', It seems silly right?, We could cry for a pencil, low marks, a friend refusing to play with us, etc. We outgrow them. But now, we cry for other reasons pertaining to our age group the following are some of the common issues we are likely to face:

Adolescence Peer pressure, academic stress, conflict with parents, poor body image, substance abuse

Young adulthood Romantic relationship, career choice, job stress, EMI's

Middle adulthood Marital discord, concerns over our parents' health, loss of a parent

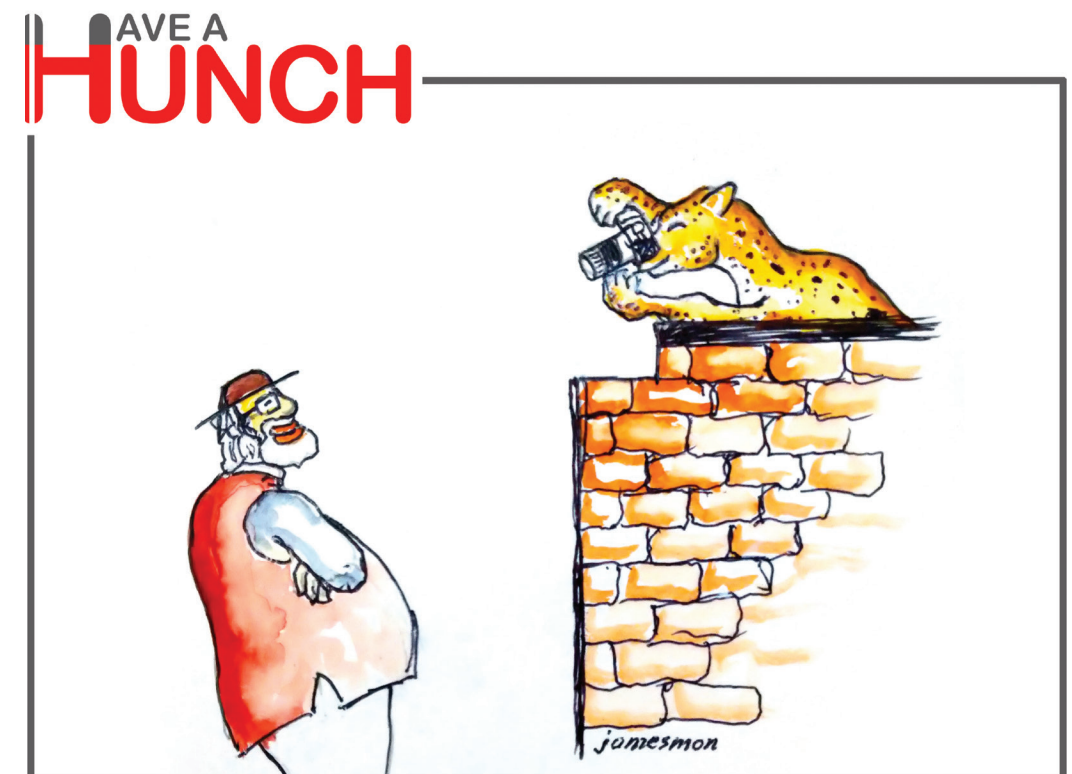
Late adulthood Conflict with grown-up children, health, loss of a spouse, feeling of being neglected and obsessed about death

Different age brings forth various challenges, experiences and if we develop poor coping mechanisms an issue will manifest into a symptom, gradually progressing into an actual

psychological disorder. We need to encounter our challenges as a threshold that we need to cross over with a resilient mind.

The approach of treating any psychological disorder, should be the same manner that we deal with any physiological illness, i.e., acknowledge the illness, normalize it, seek professional help, not by googling it, not indulging in self-diagnosis or assuming that a YouTube video cures the disease, a holistic approach is very crucial. One must take care of the food one consume, the web series we binge watch, cut down toxic people, if not reduce the interaction with them; do not control the symptoms but regulate it.

It is not the negative traits in us but rather a shadow self, present with us all the time, absorbing all that happens to us, rather than running away from it, walk with it and when you least expect it, healing starts to vibrate within you. Finally, you will be okay with not being okay. ■



Remembering the Mahatma

MONICA FERNANDES

A person cannot do right in one department whilst attempting to do wrong in another department. Life is one indivisible whole. — Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Seven Social Sins According to Gandhiji

Mahatma Gandhi believed that a person's life has many facets. He or she must strive to do right in all, what the Mahatma calls, 'departments'. The individual is a part of a society and wrongdoings of several individuals adds up to a decadent society. With this in mind, he defined seven social sins. He first published these sins in his weekly newspaper 'Young India' in October 1925. Management guru Stephen Covey dwelt at length on these social sins in his book 'Principle Centered Leadership'.

1. Wealth without work: Instead of evolving to a higher moral order, we are becoming increasingly corrupt. There is an increase in cyber crime, in hacking into bank accounts in order to get rich quickly at some one else's expense. Some dishonest builders take a big advance from prospective buyers and never give possession of the apartments. The poor buyer has to run from pillar to post for years trying to get either his money back or possession of the completed apartment.

2. Pleasure without conscience: Many seek instant gratification and pander to their own pleasures without a thought of others, including their family. The industrialist has no qualms of conscience entertaining a mistress on the side. Others may spend their time gambling, drinking with friends and going on holidays without the family while their wives has to bring up the children by herself. Women are busy outdoing each other in hosting lavish parties, going for



spas and living it up. Where is the partnership in such marriages and what happens to the kids left in the care of paid help?

3. Knowledge without character: It is a pity that the education system today is highly competitive. The emphasis is on securing high marks in order to get into a good college. The end goal is to get as lucrative a job as possible. Students, in general, are not taught a right sense of values that will provide them with a moral compass for the future.

4. Commerce without morality: Tax evasions, bribery of government authorities to get quick sanctions, siphoning funds to other countries are only a few instances of commerce without morality. Companies stoop down to false claims to sell their products. Some pharmaceutical companies make huge profits by patenting life saving drugs. The high mark ups put these drugs beyond the reach of the common man. Hospitals are run on a business model with doctors being pressurised to bring

in patients by playing on their fear of mortality. They rake in the money with unnecessary medical tests and surgeries.

5. Science without humanity: No doubt science has enriched our lives. Several inventions have benefited humanity. However, on the flip side, science is also being misused to invent bombs and weapons of mass destruction. Where is the humanity in the massacre of innocent civilians including children?

6. Religion without sacrifice: Offering wax images at Mt. Mary and praying are not enough. Religion is not the following of rituals. Jesus said, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' Do we reach out to others in kindness, with empathy even if it means that we have less time to pursue activities that we enjoy? Do we use our talents for the betterment of others instead of wasting time gossiping? If the answer is negative, we are not putting our religion into action.

7. Politics without principles: Volumes could be written on this topic. The games politicians play is dividing people on the basis of caste and creed in order to secure votes.

Conclusion

Conscientious voters, some in wheelchairs, come out in numbers to vote. Once elected, politicians forget all their facile promises. Horse trading occurs regularly and politicians are bought out by a rival party. Freebies galore at the time of elections do not address the deeper problems of illiteracy and poverty. One former Chief Minister put up huge statues of herself for self glorification. Another was involved in a fodder scam. These shameless so called leaders were elected to serve their people but they only serve themselves.

The seven social sins give us plenty of scope for introspection. Where have we gone wrong? If government officials are receiving bribes, someone is bribing them.

We go on a shopping spree of items we do not need because it brings us pleasure and then grumble about pollution, little realising that our spree is adding to environmental degradation. A far cry from the simplicity of Gandhian times. It is the duty of each one of us to do our bit for a healthy society. ■



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IN PICTURES

Blossoms: A Bibliophiles' Paradise

B DARIYA SUBBIAH

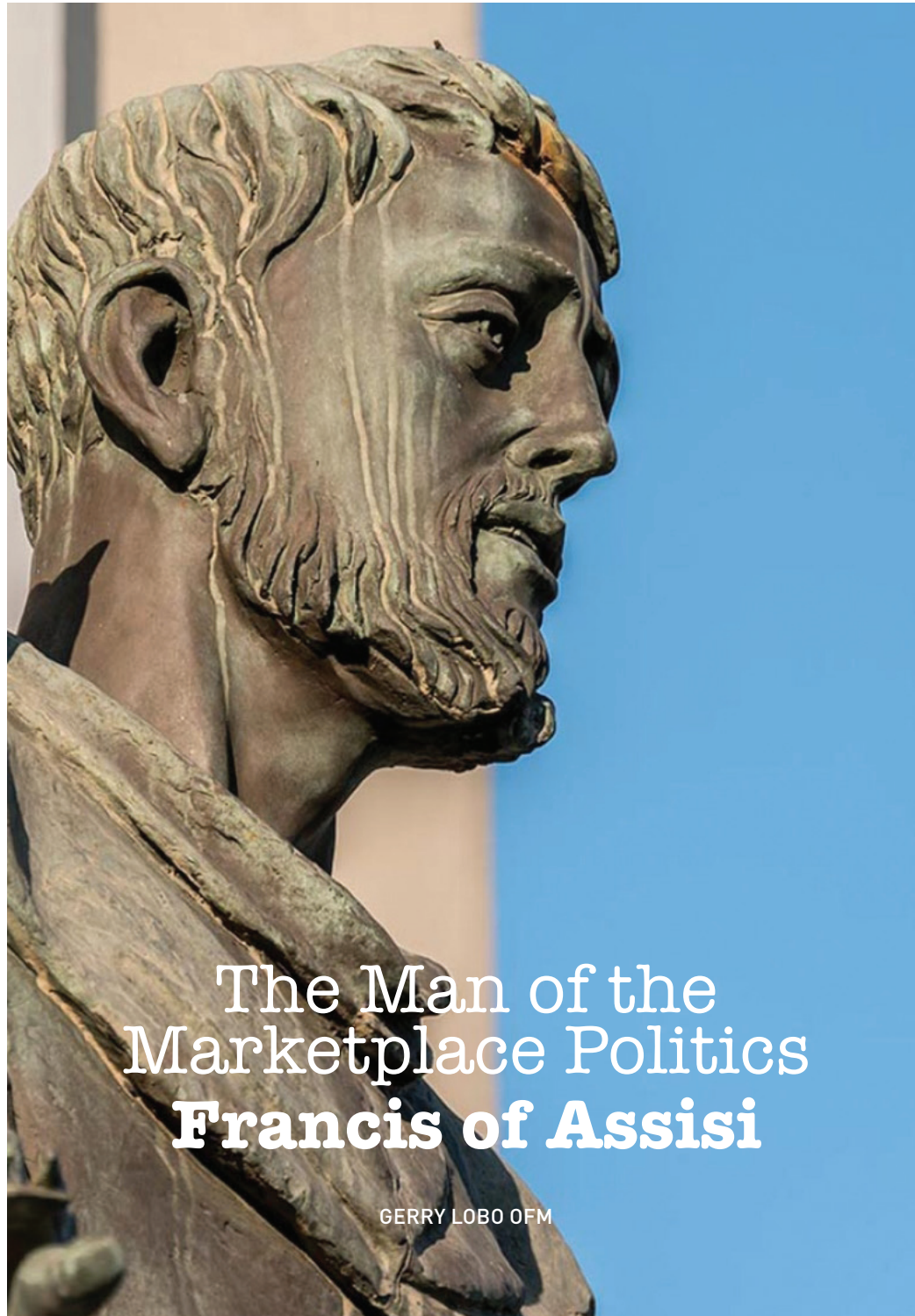
← For most Bangaloreans, a visit to Blossoms has now become a Sunday ritual of sorts. The floors are divided by genre, and has second-hand editions of almost every title you can imagine.

Blossoms is, arguably, the largest second-hand bookstore in India. Located in Church Street, Bangalore, this store is the go-to destination for book lovers. With cheap pricing and a variety of books from old classics like *The Count of Monte Cristo* to the latest collection of John Green books.

According to an employee, Blossoms attracts a large number of customers roughly from 100 to 200 during weekdays and around 500 during weekends. He credits the thriving business to the swarms of students who flock to the store in search of textbooks, notes and reference material

for their college and school work, instead of buying the new copies at other stores, which are expensive. The store encompasses a homely feel as compared to other high end stores around. The employee feels happy when he hears people reminiscing their childhood after seeing books and comics like *Tinkle*, *Amar Chitra Katha* and *Nancy Drew*. One customer told me that if she has to buy a book to read or to gift she only thinks of Blossoms. In an age where the digital medium has taken over everything, including the print, large and affordable bookstores like this one keeps the art of reading alive. Thanks to Blossoms. ■





The Man of the Marketplace Politics Francis of Assisi

GERRY LOBO OFM



Humanity today knows to plunder the world and take it for granted but not to make it a home.

We live in a new phase of history today. Our age is clearly one of transition. Human beings have fallen prey to a sense of emptiness, a lack of meaning and norms. There seems to be a permanent crisis and uncertainty. On looking more closely at our age, we discover that it is an age of reason and production and perhaps a time of high politics, particularly in our nation. There is no more reliance on homogeneous unity of the world and culture, religion and economy, politics and everyday life. Today we live in a pluralistic society which revolves around different and even contrasting poles. However, our country is witnessing the rapid entry of religion, particularly the Hindutva religion into the political sphere. This tendency is gradually destabilizing the secular fabric of the Indian Constitution.

In the context of our world and our nation today, Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), though a medieval personality, and who emerged in a similar context such as ours, would definitely offer to humanity a sense for living. His down to earth choice of life represents the radical understanding of human existence. Perhaps there could be no solution to human predicament created by the modern scientific and technological developments other than the one which the Poor man of Assisi believed and lived. Indeed, his ideals and his philosophy go contrary to those prevalent in our history today. He was not a romantic or a pious figure that alienated himself from the socio-economic-political and religious currents of his time. He certainly did not affiliate himself to any political bands of his city. However being fully knowledgeable about the rat-race in the political realm, he demonstrated with his team made of the fall-outs of their society, which human beings are capable

of going beyond the games people played to secure their egoic existence.

Being born of a wealthy cloth merchant, Peter Bernardone, the luxuries of the society with its political gimmicks, in which he was raised, made it difficult for him to look at the excluded around him. He loved his life to the full and thought it reasonable to remain in it. He loved his purse and his place in the best society of the town. In his youth he was deeply influenced by the ideals of medieval chivalry and had developed an irresistible attraction for military adventure. Having been disturbed in his conscience at the marginalized of his society, created by the power politics attached to measureless profit, Francis deranged his father's ambition and entered into the aspirations of people perceiving them through the kaleidoscope of the leper, the scum of the healthy-wealthy citizens.

Quickly a movement around Francis emerged. The men, who integrated themselves into that movement, having distanced themselves from the power politics of Assisi, named themselves, 'friars minor', Lesser Brothers, a name very unusual and also new in the history of humanity after Jesus Christ. Equality, fraternity and liberty were the hallmark of their movement, the very ideals shunned by the political leaders who only garnered votes at election times by proudly bragging about their achievements. Living in communion with one another with absolute limits in terms of any secured comforts which they freely imposed upon themselves, the new movement around the leadership of Francis demonstrated in clear terms that the world belongs to all and no one has any right to usurp the goods of the earth for one's own selfish ends.

Remarkably, the fall-outs of the society who formed a movement of the 'lesser' ones with Francis, were deeply conscious of the Transcendence in their new found life. That Transcendent One was absolute for them and was their sufficiency. Their political involvement was

in their closeness to all categories of people because these men themselves had abandoned any class system within them. Setting aside all the human ambitions which would have exalted them as 'great ones', Francis by his own life-example motivated them towards the Gospel Beatitudes. Living for no ulterior motives of fame or monetary profit, they drew the attention of avaricious ones towards just and honest dealings with their fellow citizens. Perhaps, these radicals unseated the conscience-less of the society, disturbing them of their deeds.

No one was excluded in one's service to men and women. Francis and his companions were sent for all, to the entire world. G. K. Chesterton put it: 'Francis went through the world as the pardon of God.' He was poor among the poor, a marginalized by the society. It was not enough to love others; one needed to be humble of heart, a 'lesser'. From the king to the beggar the love was to be lived. Hence Francis consciously and mindfully moved through the world with the only Love, which was God. Having denounced all secure measures he remained close to the created world, men and their condition in contrast to the *fuga mundi* or the contempt of the world, of the religious tradition. He sought not the isolation of the desert but the buzz and business of the market place. In this sense, Francis was a true politician!

Do Francis and his way of life have anything to offer to this age? Yes, they have. Francis had been a true habitant of the world in which he knew to discover a sense of home and dwelling. He was able to appreciate the gift of life and was able to discover community in the world. Humanity today knows to plunder the world and take it for granted but not to make it a home. Francis teaches us how to live as a citizen of the world not merely by paying tax but also by taking care of the 'neighbour', by being a person of the polis.

History has always dealt with human people by classifying them and thus raising conflict

among them. In a multi-cultural context of our nation people are classified, segregated and denied the basic human rights. Therefore, we term people as lepers and healthy, rich and poor, blacks and whites, superiors and subjects, masters and slaves, Brahmins and Dalits. What we learn from the philosophy and practice of Francis is that he lived beyond the 'class-ness'. There was no friend-foe dialectic in him. He used only the foundational category that of 'brother-sister-mother' which alone is necessary for living in communion.

In a world which is growing in abundance of everything, while at the same time millions are deprived of the basic human amenities, everything is sold and bought. Everything has been taken for granted and treated casually. One presumes that a thing is there and will be there without knowing its origin and cause. The space for a supreme value is not perceived. Francis, who dispossessed himself of everything and was content with the little and had no desire for anything more, could never go through the world without gratitudinal consciousness. Thanksgiving was fundamental to his existence. It is necessary to discover gratuity today or else we will destroy ourselves.

The exclusion of humanity based on caste, creed, religion, class, is a daily experience in our country. Scientific and technological developments of our time have not redeemed millions from their displaced condition. Humans are suspicious of one another and they keep others at a distance, even though communication systems have facilitated easy approachability of one another. The 'other' is still a threat to 'my' existence and therefore I keep him/her at a distance. Francis, on the other hand, moved out of himself consciously to the 'lepers' in his society and 'had mercy upon them.' He shared their life. They were his 'Christian brothers.' Francis knew how to embrace others and participate in their life. He did so with all creatures as he epitomized such an experience in his *Cantic of Creatures*. ■

Many of us probably haven't seen the underside of an *ampel* leaf (water lily). The leaves are floating flatly on the water surface, and they always keep the same level with the water, rising or receding. We simply look at the flat leaves from above, unless you are a scuba diver who can see from below. If you check the more than 200 celebrated water lily paintings by the well-known French impressionist artist Claude Monet you will hardly come across a leaf turned upside down. So one is lucky to see this leaf by the river Kodoor, rising vertically to display its other side. It seems the poor leaf was jammed and lifted up by some flowing objects moved by heavy monsoon rains. The network of nerves seen on the other side is remarkably beautiful.

Well, the leaf has not only two sides but a third dimension as well. It's thickness, the third, may be too thin for us to see! Of course, the leaf, like any other matter in the universe, is three-dimensional. Then it has a fourth dimension—Time, if we trust our science gurus. Then a fifth, sixth and so on. Modern string theory in physics would postulate at least ten dimensions for the material universe. How would the world look like if we humans are able to perceive reality with all those dimensions?

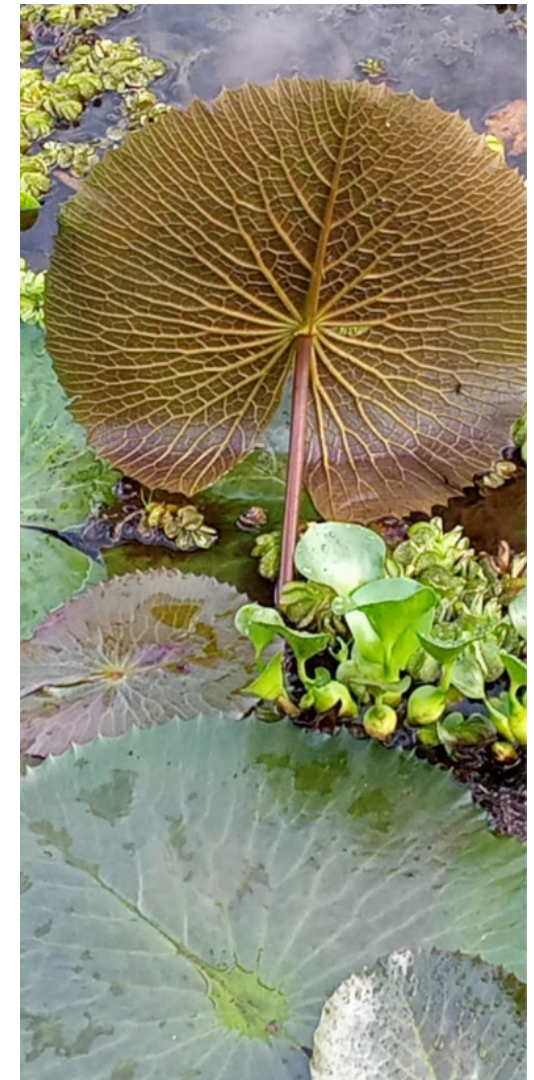
Worldly wisdom says: Everything has got two sides. It is good counsel especially while settling disputes when you are not expected to be swayed by the opinion of one side only. But spiritual wisdom suggests there are innumerable dimensions to reality—the outer and the inner, the marginal and the mainstream, the saved and the deleted, the opulent and the oppressed, the visible and the hidden.

Yes, it can be disconcerting. But it would be great if we keep at least the two sides: the inside and the outside, the *Akam* and the *Puram*. Even in this minimum there are possibilities to delve deeper and deeper ad infinitum. ■

► If you check the more than 200 celebrated water lily paintings by the well-known French impressionist artist Claude Monet you will hardly come across a leaf turned upside down.

THERE ARE INNUMERABLE DIMENSIONS TO REALITY

FR K M GEORGE



The State of Women Prisoners in India

DR VASUDHA M C

Prisons represent a world of their own with their own customs, and cultures that are way different from the world outside. But since the dawn of civilisations, they have been an integral institution woven into the fabric of society, some civilized and some barbaric depending on the purpose for which they are evolved by the societies. They truly and crucially reflect the ethos and pathos of the larger society. Nelson Mandela, who spent the prime years of his life in prison reflectingly said, 'No one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should be judged not by how it treats its highest citizens but its lowest ones.'

According to Jackie Turton, Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Essex, 'it has long been acknowledged that our criminal justice system was originally designed by men, for men and that it is still largely dominated by men. As a result, women get slotted in to a framework that treats them like men, and fails to recognise some key differences and complexities.' Put simply: women's experience of prison and incarceration is palpably different than men's.

'Globally, women represent between 2–10 per cent of prison populations, but their numbers are increasing rapidly—more rapidly than the increase of male prisoners'

As criminal justice systems across the world move towards gender-blind sentencing, this has resulted in a tremendous increase in the rate of female incarceration. Concurrent elimination of parole and toughening of penalties for parole violations in many areas of the world also contribute to high rates of reentry and reoffend-

ing, further driving up rates of incarceration of women.

Women prisoners are placed in the criminal justice system both as victims of crime and perpetrators of offences. Despite Constitutional guarantees of opportunity and civil rights, millions of prisoners face deprivation and discrimination, then how does it affect women prisoners languishing in jail differently? What are the social constraints that prohibit women prisoners from taking appropriate advantage from socio-political and legal systems? What are the causes of their plight? Do the state, civil societies and NGOs fulfill their obligation towards the women prisoners? Should judiciary be more active to mitigate this social problem? Should we break the mindset of institutional care for women, which have been posed as the only solution? These are some of the vital questions currently debated and the plights of women prisoners languishing in jail are also closely linked to this general debate.

Women Prisoner Scenario

Globally, women form an underrepresented population within prison systems, as the vast majority of incarcerated people are men. Although women form a minority in the global prison population, the population of incarcerated women is growing at a rate twice as fast as the male prison population.

According to Human Rights Council, there are more than 700,000 women prisoners across the globe out of which India has more than 18,000 female prisoners and not all of these are live-in female prisons.

As per Prison Statistics India 2015, NCRB,



While poverty stands as the biggest impediment to access justice, gender aggravates the challenges they face in custodial institutions.

from the end of 2015, there are 4,19,623 persons in jail in India. Women constitute 4.3% of this figure, numbering a total of 17,834 women. Of these, 66.8% (11,916) are undertrial prisoners. In India, an analysis of prison statistics at five-year intervals reveals an increasing trend in the number of women prisoners—3.3% of all prisoners in 2000, 3.9% in 2005, 4.1% in 2010 and 4.3% in 2015 were women. While women prisoners continue to be a minority in all parts of the world (less than 10%), the female prison population has increased faster than the male prison population on every continent. In the year 2019, The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has released its Prison Statistics Report for 2019, and it showcases the ever-worsening plight of women prisoners. As per the data, out of the 4,78,600 prisoners, 4,58,687 were male prisoners and 19,913 were female prisoners.

Women Prisons: In India, women prisons are not sufficient in number. According to the Prison Statistics India 2018, the number of total prisons is 1412, Women's jail are prisons that exclusively house female prisoners. Women's jail may exist at the sub divisional, district, and cen-

tral (zone/range) level. There are 20 women jails across India with a total capacity of 5'197 and an occupancy rate of 60.1% as on 31 December 2018. Due to the limited capacity of women's jails, most of the female prisoners are housed at other types of jails. As of 31 December 2018, around 83.12% of all female prisoners in India were incarcerated at jails other than a Women jail.

Problems and Challenges

Women are a vulnerable group in prisons, due to their gender. While poverty stands as the biggest impediment to access justice, gender aggravates the challenges they face in custodial institutions. The socio-economic condition of women prisoners adversely impacts their access to competent legal representation and therefore the possibility of a fair trial. Lack of trained correctional staff like psychologists or social workers, to deal with women centered issues, add to the plight of women inmates. Women convicts find themselves at the receiving end as long periods of incarceration often result in fading family support/disappearing family ties.



Many women detainees face inhuman and degrading treatment during arrest, interrogation and in custody, including being stripped; invasive body searches; rape and threats of rape; so-called 'virginity testing'; and other acts, insults and humiliations of a sexual nature.

Female prisoners often lack an understanding of their legal rights in many countries, female prisoners have very limited access to legal advice and support. They may be poor and illiterate without the means to pay for legal aid. For this reason they are at risk of signing statements that may have serious legal implications and their lack of legal representation can lead to long delays in the criminal justice process, lowering their chances of being considered for bail.

Existing prison conditions, gender discrimination, custodial torture, inhuman treatment towards children, lack of basic humanity and inaccessibility to legal services further aggravate their sufferings. Many women detainees face inhuman and degrading treatment during arrest, interrogation and in custody, including being stripped; invasive body searches; rape and threats of rape; so-called 'virginity testing'; and other acts, insults and humiliations of a sexual nature.

Basic facilities are lacking for the women and their children. Most conversations with people who have spent time in prison featured a common complaint—the complete lack of privacy. Women prisoners are also visibly scared of the prison staff. There is scope for vast improvement on all levels, particularly in the attitude of the prison staff that needs to learn to respect the human rights of women prisoners. Most of the women prisoners are also a mother and their children are staying with them in the prison but the prison is not a place for the healthy growth of children. Prison environment affects the growth,

survival, and development of the children. Children who stay with their mothers in prison are denied their basic rights to pre-school education. As a result, their children seldom have access to learning, and often lack social skills, having lived in a closed jail environment. After turning six, children are separated from their mothers and housed in state-run institutions until their mothers are released, or they are capable of earning a livelihood.

While in jail, communication with the outside world gets snapped with a result that the inmate does not know what is happening even to his near and dear ones. This causes additional trauma. Women prisoners are more likely than men to take part in self-harming behaviour such as slashing and cutting as a coping strategy. Levels of suicide among women in prison are considerably higher than among men.

Women prisoners report being forced into unprotected sex with male guards, sex work, sex for favours, and rape. Sexual assault to the women prisoners is also a major problem which they are facing. There are horror stories about the torture in custody to the women prisoners. Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) stated that custodial rape remains one of the worst forms of torture perpetrated on women by law enforcement personnel and many custodial rapes of women take place at regular intervals.

Sanitation problem is one of the biggest problem faced by the women prisoners as women face menstruation problem every month and still they don't get proper sanitation facility due to which they are prone to various diseases.

Lack of nutritious food is being provided to pregnant women which is causing a severe harm to the health of mother and child, thus pregnant women prisoners should be given extra facilities with nutritious food and healthy environment. Women prisoners who are mother are unable to take care of their children inside the jail premises due to poor facilities and arrangements made for them.

Stigma, Lack of Family Support

Imprisoned women also bear the brunt of a stigma – they are seen as legally but also morally

deviant—which means they are often abandoned by their families. In many countries, the crimes for which women are convicted are highly stigmatised, more so in a traditional country like India and this impacts women both during incarceration and following release under trial prisoners undergo 'mental stress and agony' because they do not know the situation of their close family members for a number of reasons, such as families not wanting to visit them in jail, or the jail administration not facilitating interaction.

In India the status of women prisoners is a problematic situation as the women in the prisoners are either under trial or convicted which leads to lots of issues like the overcrowding of prisons and due to lack of funds the women are provided with proper sanitation facilities, as the number of prisoners are more there is no adequate staff members in the prisoners which causes lots of trouble in the prisons, rising to conflicts, poor management in the prisons, etc. There are certain cases which reflected that due to poor security in the prison system there has been the occurrence of custodial rapes. Women are at risk of being killed by their families after release from prison, if they have committed 'moral offences', or are victims of rape or other sexual abuse.

Legislation and Government Measures

Judiciary has been playing an active part in responding to violations of the human rights of female prisoners through its interpretation of Articles 21, 19, 22, 37 and 39 A of the Indian Constitution. The Legislature has also come up with different laws enacted for the protection of prisoners in India including Prisons Act, 1894, Prisoners Act, 1900, Identification of Prisoner's Act, 1920, Transfers of Prisoner's Act, 1950, Prisoners (Attendance in Court Act), 1955, Probation of Offenders Act, 1958, Repatriation of Prisoner's Act, 2003 and Model Prison Manual, 2016. Apart from these, we also have the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2000, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 and Indian Penal Code, 1860 where the emphasis is on rehabilitation, vocational training and transfer of prisoners from over-populated prisons to less congested ones.

In the last few decades, the urgent need for prison reforms has come into focus and it has been reiterated by courts that existing prison conditions are not conducive for their reformation. Focus has shifted to restorative Justice wherein victim and offender meet to reach a resolution with the help of a facilitator.

A National Policy on Prison Reforms and Correctional Administration had also been framed in 2007, which gave a number of directives relevant to women prisoners – maintenance of human rights of prisoners, avoiding overstay of under trials etc. It further states, 'Women prisoners shall be protected against all exploitation. Work and treatment programmes shall be devised for them in consonance with their special needs.'

The key features of the updated Model Prison Manual 2016 include emphasis on prison computerization, special provisions for women prisoners, focus on after-care services, prison inspections, rights of prisoners sentenced to death, repatriation of prisoners from abroad, enhanced focus on prison correctional staff.

In India, at the instance of the Central Government, care programs are being envisaged. This can greatly benefit women prisoners who commit fewer crimes compared to their male counterparts. The path is not easy because, for restorative justice programs, there is a lack of awareness among people and prison inmates. In case of pregnant prisoners, the provisions of the National Model Prison Manual must be followed strictly to make arrangements for temporary release for delivery of children in a hospital outside the prison. Suspension of sentence may be considered in the case of casual offenders. Information about a woman's pregnant status should also be made to the Court that has ordered the detention, to enable the Court to grant bail (where appropriate) or modify the detention order as deemed necessary. The manual also makes special provisions for pregnant and lactating women, who, it acknowledges, 'need more proteins and minerals than [others]'. The food to be served itself is left to the states, since prisons are a 'state subject' in India. But prisoners frequently struggle with both the quality and quantity of food they're provided. ■



One More Reason to Forgive

A FRANCIS OFM

His ex-wife used to tell him, 'It may sound like a cliché to you when I say I am going to forgive. Still, I am going to do it. Because this cliché has an amazing personal benefit!'

He would retort to her, right away, with a flashing sarcastic laugh followed by a nasty jab, 'Is it about the satisfaction of fulfilling some religious virtue?'

He had no insight, whatsoever, to her sense of the personal benefit, until one day he had been in that cringing space. Burdened by the unbearable prick of a wounded inner self that was exposed relentlessly to a mixed bag of excruciating emotions - betrayal, shame, resentment, anger and what not? - he sought helplessly for a magic pill that could possibly calm him down.

He tried using all the self-help resources available to him.

He tried the principle of trivialization, 'As humans we are not perfect, and from time to time we step on each other's toes,' which people frequently quote regardless of its appropriateness (or inappropriateness), while comforting a person who is wronged by another.

He even tried the 'Forgive and Forget Mantra', an important parental advice he received as a child for handling the pain inflicted on him in such situations.

Nothing really worked.

In this particular instance, forgiving was very difficult for him, almost, next to impossibility, as he reflected on the intention, context and disposition attached to the wrong done to him.

His offender had piled up blatant lies of Himalayan heights to tarnish him (intention) in front of a bevy of individuals who silently swallowed everything his accuser uttered (context). With an overwhelming vulnerability (disposition), rife with an exceeding sense of power-imbalance, he tried in vain to defend himself.

Emotionally beaten up beyond bounds, he shambled away from this harrowing encounter with a horrendous sense of inferiority, and a severely bruised ego.

Why should he think of forgiving a bully, a liar, and a manipulator who sliced him down with the sharpness of a thousand razor blades, pulverised his name, reputation and personal integrity? Even if he desired, and earnestly attempted, too, how could he possibly forgive such a monster? Moreover, by nature, he wasn't the one who would forgive easily, particularly when the offender remained stone-heartedly unapologetic, and displayed no remorse.

Living through those despicable moments of nightmare and the piercing mental agony, he realized that what he had been experiencing was not really good for his health. It was weighing him down, and his spirit had plummeted way too low.

In that moment of reckoning, he remembered his ex-wife's words about forgiveness which he used to slyly challenge.

Helpless as he was, he sensed the tiny beacons of hope strewn amidst those words which could lighten the burden of his sinking spirit that was interminably exposing him to all of the savaging emotions that he was going through, all at once!

But still he was indecisive about embarking on a journey of forgiveness, because a series of battles were being waged inside of him against the act of forgiveness, each trying to prove a point.

There was the pure religiously motivated battlefield: 'It is good to forgive your offender, even if he doesn't say, 'sorry'. Because it will ultimately channelize the divine forgiveness to you for your own transgressions.'

This however, did not seem to stand in the

face of another intense battlefield motivated by ethical contentions combined with questions of justice: 'My offender is a nasty, abusive and power-hungry bully. He might have done the same to many others, too. He should be exposed. Forgiving him is going to get him off the hook.'

Triggered by utter helplessness of indecisiveness, he phoned his ex-wife; he asked her what she had meant by the 'personal benefit of forgiving.'

He expected her to retaliate to him with the same spiel of sarcasm, which he used to throw at her. On the contrary, she sounded placid.

In an extremely serene tone, she spoke to him: 'Forgive your offender for yourself! A sound appetite, health, peace, happiness, and sleep will be the personal benefits you cherish for forgiving your offender, if you are able to do it unconditionally.'

He heard the phone going disconnected from her end, leaving him to make his decision, whether to forgive or not.

Lingering in the singularity of that all-encompassing personal decision, he heard his inner voice, 'This is exactly what I am missing since the day I started tallying up my grudges. It has affected my health, peace, happiness, appetite and sleep!'

Leaving the phone on the table, he stretched his hands to reach for his diary. Grabbing it effortlessly, he opened it and started to scribble on a new page:

'March 12th, 2022.

I shall certainly remember this day again. May be a million times for the rest of my life.

I want to promise to myself today that I don't want to remember it again for the toxic, dehumanizing lies that were hurled at me on this day; but for the opportunity it solicited to me for giving forgiveness a chance!'

He then went to sleep.

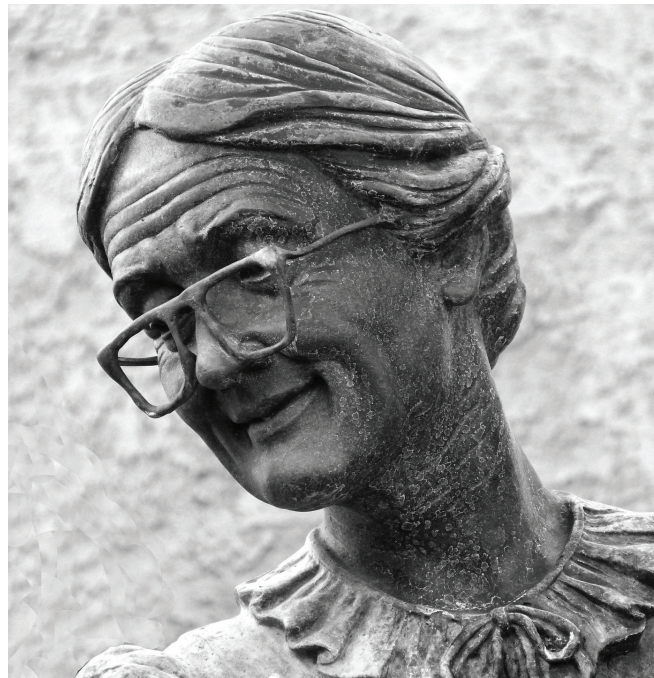
He slept that night, peacefully, and all the nights that followed.

In his wakeful moments, though, he would remind himself as in an autopiloting mode: 'Eliesa was right, the act of forgiving sounds like a cliché. But it has amazing personal benefits.' ■

Growing Old Is to Become Spacious

Children can feel secure in the presence of their grandparents because, while their parents are still rushing to find their way through life's journey, grandpa and grandma have hopefully become spacious. They can contain problems, inconsistencies, inconveniences, and contradictions—after a lifetime of practicing and learning.

RICHARD ROHR



The word 'ripening' helps us move beyond any exclusive concern with physical aging, because our concerns are much more than that. If I am to believe the novels, myths, poems, and people I have met in my life, old age is almost never described as an apex of achievement as one sits atop a summit with the raised arms of a victorious athlete. It is something else, almost always something else—usually something other than what was initially imagined, or even hoped for.

Ripening, at its best, is a slow, patient learning, and sometimes even a happy letting go—a seeming emptying out to create readiness for a new kind of fullness—which we are never sure about. If we do not allow our own ripening, an ever-increasing resistance and denial sets in, an ever-increasing protection around an over-defended self. At our very best, we learn how to hope as we ripen. Youthful hopes have concrete goals, whereas the hope of older years is usually aimless hope, hope without goals, even naked hope — perhaps real hope.

Such stretching is the agony and the joy of

later years, although one can avoid both of these rich experiences too. Old age, as such, is almost a complete changing of gears and engines from the first half of our lives, and does not happen without many slow realizations, inner calmings, lots of inner resistance and denials, and eventual surrenders. All of them by God's grace work with our ever-deepening sense of what we really desire and who we really are.

Reality, fate, destiny, providence, and tragedy are slow but insistent teachers. The horizon of old age seems to be a plan that God has prepared as inevitable and part of the necessary school of life. What is gratuitously given is also gratuitously taken away, just as Job slowly came to accept. And sometimes we remember that his eventual pained response was 'Blessed be the name of the Lord!' (Job 1:21).

If we are to speak of a spirituality of ripening, we need to recognize that it is always characterized by an increasing tolerance for ambiguity, a growing sense of subtlety, an ever-larger ability to include and allow, and a capacity to live with contradictions and even to

love them! I cannot imagine any other way of coming to those broad horizons except through many trials, unsolvable paradoxes, and errors in trying to resolve them.

The ripening of mind and heart is most basically a capacity for non-dual consciousness and contemplation. So my guidance is a simple reminder to recall what we will be forced to learn by necessity and under pressure anyway—the open-ended way of allowing and the deep meaning that some call faith. To live in trustful faith is to ripen; it is almost that simple.

Getting Old as Falling Upward

Most of us tend to think of the second half of life as largely about getting old, dealing with health issues, and letting go of our physical life, but I simply don't believe that's all there is to it. What looks like falling can largely be experienced as falling upward and onward, into a broader and deeper world, where the soul finds its fullness, is finally connected to the whole, and lives inside the Big Picture.

It is not a loss but somehow a gain, not losing but actually winning. We probably have to have met at least one true elder to imagine this could be true. I've met enough radiant people to know that it is possible. They have come to their human fullness, often against all odds, usually by suffering personally or vicariously and empathetically. They are models and goals for our humanity, much more than the celebrities and politicians whose actions we seem to care so much about today.

Remember, no one can keep us from the second half of our own lives except ourselves. Nothing can inhibit our second journey except our own lack of courage, patience, and imagination. Our second journey is all ours to walk or to avoid. My conviction is that some falling apart of the first journey is necessary for this to happen, so don't waste too many moments lamenting poor parenting, lost jobs, failed relationships, physical challenges, economic poverty, or other tragedies. Pain is part of the deal. If we don't walk into the second half of our own life, it is surely because we do not want it. Let's desire, desire deeply, desire ourselves, desire God, desire everything good, true, and



Most of us tend to think of the second half of life as largely about getting old, dealing with health issues, and letting go of our physical life, but I simply don't believe that's all there is to it.

beautiful. All of the emptying out is for the sake of a Great Outpouring.

What Kind of Person Are We Becoming?

Contemplative elder and Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister writes of the humility we must cultivate if we hope to grow in love and compassion as we age: If we learn anything at all as time goes by and the changing seasons become fewer and fewer, it is that there are some things in life that cannot be fixed. It is more than possible that we will go to our graves with a great deal of personal concerns, of life agendas, left unresolved. . . . So has life been wasted? Has it all been for nothing?

This is the period of life when we must begin to look inside our own hearts and souls rather than outside ourselves for the answers to our problems, for the fixing of the problems. This is the time for facing ourselves, for bringing ourselves into the light.

Chittister invites us to consider aging as an opportunity to grow into our true and larger selves: Now is the time to ask ourselves what

kind of person we have been becoming all these years. And do we like that person? Did we become more honest, more decent, more caring, and more merciful as we went along because of all these things? And if not, what must we be doing about it now?

Can we begin to see ourselves as only part of the universe, just a fragment of it, not its center? Can we give ourselves to accepting the heat and the rain, the pain and the limitations, the inconveniences and discomforts of life, without setting out to passively punish the rest of the human race for the daily exigencies that come with being human?

Can we smile at what we have not smiled at for years? Can we give ourselves away to those who need us? Can we speak our truth without needing to be right and accept the vagaries of life now—without needing the entire rest of the world to swaddle us beyond any human justification for expecting it? Can we talk to people decently and allow them to talk to us?

Now, this period, this aging process, is the last time we're given to be more than all the small things we have allowed ourselves to be over the years. But first, we must face what the smallness is, and rejoice in the time we have left to turn sweet instead of more sour than ever.

A Noble Task

Known for her deep wisdom around death and dying, Kathleen Dowling Singh also wrote about the awakening that can occur when we consciously address aging: Opening deeply to the truth of our own aging is wise. Opening deeply to the truth of our own impermanence is wise. Although such opening may not come easily at first—we all know how the ego tends to resist vulnerability—it is important to do so if we wish to mindfully use the time remaining to us.

To live a life of an elder is to ripen into being that is more than simply elderly, more than just old. It involves ripening into clear-eyed acceptance of the way things actually exist. That ripening involves, for each of us, many difficult reckonings in the multifaceted, multidimensional understanding that everything that can be lost will be lost.

Grey hair and sagginess notwithstanding,



When we can let go of our own need for everything to be, as we want it, and our own need to succeed, we can then encourage the independent journey and the success of others.

many of us still cling childishly to so much that is unreal and inessential. Many of us still cling to reputation, to imagined security, to unexamined habits of attitude and behavior, and to self-image. We have deep aversion to having all of our cherished illusions stripped away by life-in-form's seeming indifference.

We all have reservoirs of fear, some large and some small and subtle, around entering this new terrain of unknown and mystery: our last years. What will aging do to me? To my body? To my mind? Will I matter to anyone? Will I be a burden? How will I die?

We do not know. We have no clue what these years will hold for us. We have no clue what will happen tomorrow. The 'moment that changed everything' usually arrives unannounced.

The only person who can answer the questions posed by the often painful challenges of aging is the person we will be in the moment we confront those circumstances. The shaping of that person into someone with greater wisdom and equanimity can begin in this moment.

For Singh, when we choose to ripen, to awaken as we age, we offer a gift to the world and future generations: If we are to claim the last years of life as years that hold the possibility of awakening into equanimity and lightness, into the very embodiment of grace, we need to bear witness to the



ripening of that possibility. Not only would it be a blessing for each of us, it would be a blessing for a world starving for such witnessing.

Mindful of impermanence, the breath-by-breath arising and abiding and falling of each moment, we can remain in remembrance of our longing to exist in wisdom and love and compassion. We can remain in our intention to ripen into the spiritual maturity that is our birthright to cultivate. There is no more noble way to spend these years than to become an elder, to bear witness to the world as placeholders for peace, love, wisdom, and fearlessness.

Becoming a Grandparent

The final stage of the wisdom journey in mythology is symbolized by the ruling image of the king or queen or what I like to call the grand father or grand mother.

When we can let go of our own need for everything to be, as we want it, and our own need to succeed, we can then encourage the independent journey and the success of others. The grandparent is able to relinquish center stage and to stand on the sidelines, and thus be

in solidarity with those who need their support. Children can feel secure in the presence of their grandparents because, while their parents are still rushing to find their way through life's journey, grandpa and grandma have hopefully become spacious. They can contain problems, inconsistencies, inconveniences, and contradictions—after a lifetime of practicing and learning.

Grandparents can trust life because they have seen more of it than younger people have, and they can trust death because they are closer to it. Something has told them along the way that who they are now is never the final stage, and this one isn't either. We need to be close enough to our own death to see it coming and to recognize that death and life are united in an eternal embrace, and one is not the end of the other. Death is what it is. I am a grand father when I am ready to let go. To the grand mother, death is no longer an enemy, but as Saint Francis called it, a 'welcome sister.'

The soul of the grandparent is large enough to embrace the death of the ego and to affirm the life of God in itself and others, despite all imperfections. Its spaciousness accepts all the opposites in life—masculine and feminine, unity and difference, victory and defeat, us and them and so on—because it has accepted the opposition of death itself. Grandparents know that their beliefs have less to do with unarguable conclusions than scary encounters with life and the living God. They have come to realize that spiritual growth is not so much learning as it is unlearning, a radical openness to the truth no matter what the consequences or where it leads. They understand that they do not so much grasp the truth as let go of their egos, which are usually nothing more than obstacles to the truth.

I cannot imagine a true grand father or grand mother who is not a contemplative in some form. And contemplatives are individuals who live in and return to the center within themselves, and yet they know that they are not the Center. They are only a part, but a gracious and grateful part at that. ■

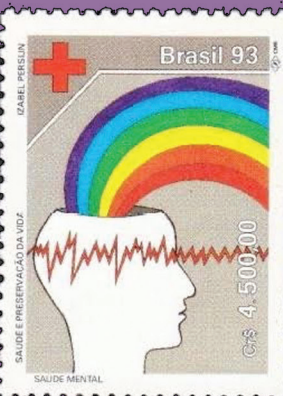
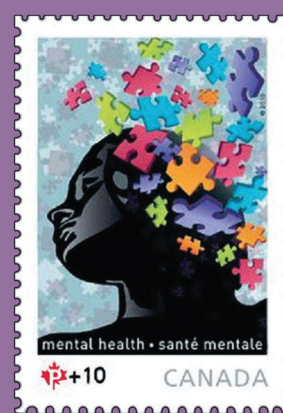
10 October

World Mental Health Day

The overall objective of World Mental Health Day is to raise awareness of mental health issues around the world and to mobilise efforts in support of mental health. The Day provides an opportunity for all stakeholders working on mental health issues to talk about their work, and what more needs to be done to make mental health care a reality for people worldwide.

Organised by the WFMH, this World Mental Health Day we be with the theme, 'make mental health & well-being for all a global priority'.

TOM JOHN OFM



ART

Mind with Many Chapters

SANGEETH SIVAN

Mind is the invisible part of the body. In comparison with the body, mind is much broader, deep and has many layers. Most often mind is considered as enigmatic and mysterious. The mind has a capacity to store things up, and depending on the emotional impact, it can store things up to decades.

In the book of our life, every wound that is inflicted upon us remain etched on its pages often like scars. They can never be erased from our memory.

This work was done a few years back and has a sculptural quality to it. I have used mixed medium like, book, charcoal and water colours. To create this effect, a book was burned in a controlled manner, revealing layers after layers, leading to a black hole in the center. The burning and the colour scheme creates a kind of dark mood and emotion. Staring at it long enough can give one a feeling of being pulled into its depth like whirlpool.

Through this work I have tried to reflect on the nature and workings of the mind. The book represents the mind with many chapters. The wounds and scars that the mind may encounter are represented through the colors and the burning. The black hole in the center can also represent the subconscious layers of which we have no idea.

From another perspective, this representation stands as a reminder about how we need to be sensitive and compassionate towards people who undergo tremendous amount of stress, anxiety and even mental disorders. It is quite difficult to fathom the depths of despair one can undergo in such states of mind. Theodore Roethke, in his collected poems, would say, 'What is madness but nobility of the soul at odds with circumstance.' ■





Jean-Luc Godard

From an influential upper-class Swiss family, he discovered to his horror that his paternal grandfather was a close ally and sympathiser to the Nazis. It made Godard leave home in protest and later he had to fend for himself.

SUMIT DASGUPTA

A film should have a beginning, a middle part, and an end but not necessarily in that order.' These words, although quite common nowadays in pretentious cinephile conventions, screenings or discussions were not as such when it was first uttered by Jean-Luc Godard in an interview back in the 60s. Godard was a Marxist, iconoclast, and creative filmmaker who refused to work under established conditions. He tore up the 'rule book' of cinema and decided to do what his story demanded. I, with my limited knowledge and space in the vast world of Godard's cinema, cannot even begin to put to words his influence. He definitely would be in the Mt. Rushmore of influential filmmakers, especially in the French New Wave film movement. Although, knowing Godard (not personally) he would detest such a parallel.

From an influential upper-class Swiss family, he discovered to his horror that his paternal grandfather was a close ally and sympathizer to the Nazis. It made Godard leave home in protest and later he had to fend for himself. A fascination for cinema blossomed at an early age. As a teenager, he went to a dam site, which was under construction at the time, and worked there as a helper while trying to chase the high of visual storytelling. The money earned was put into making a documentary film on the very construction of that dam and also a couple of short fiction films.

As a student in Paris, he came close to several of the aspiring young men who had been bitten by the cinema bug, so to speak. The Cinematheque in Paris had already established itself as the Mecca-Madina of cinema and for a lot of aspiring filmmakers, a natural destination. The director of the place, Henri Langlois, was all help, mentoring and guiding the young aspi-

rants, including the late modernist himself. At the age of 19, Godard wrote his first film review which was noted for its mature views and an unrelenting passion for cinema.

I would like to bring to the reader's attention the modernist line I used earlier. I, truly believe he was one of the last true living modernists of the 20th Century. Time spares no one and will stop for no one and he knew that. Over the decades of existence Godard almost became a cult leader, albeit a recluse cult leader. He was first hero-worshipped and adored and then shrugged at and yawned at as thoughtlessly mocked and jeered at as he was once unthinkingly swooned over. He was influential in the sense that French New Wave shook up Hollywood and all filmmakers; his rarefied experimental procedures have these days, migrated to video art or video essays.

Jean-Luc Godard is best known for his iconic, rebellious, and experimental film *À Bout de Souffle* aka *Breathless*, in 1960. Francois Truffaut, another master of the French New Wave devised the treatment of the film which follows an American woman in Paris, played by Jean Seberg, and her doomed-to-fail love affair with a too-cool-for-school tough guy on the run from the law, played by Jean-Paul Belmondo. Godard, out of sheer frustration decided to ditch traditional cinematic conventions to hook onto his wild digressions, offbeat, yet organic dialogues interaction, verité location work, non-linear narrative explorations, and jump cuts. Godard was able to inspire an entirely new language of filmmaking and editing.

The 1960s was a wonderful point in time when pictures and mottos could impact the world; he was making films with amazing familiarity and speed. Godard was chatty, easily



Godard insisted that cinema is dead, in a dramatic fashion, to be honest, his idea of cinema being a tool for expression was dead.

elegant, the exemplification of cool. That image of him holding up a roll of film and reviewing it is well notorious—however crotchety unconvinced sorts contemplated whether he might have the option to see it better if he removed those dark glasses. Sexual morality, power dynamics, and the horrifying difficulty of closeness and love were his topics, joined by cerebral conversations with social systems. *Bande à Section* (1964) and *A Few Things I Am Familiar with Her* (1967) have his signature marked deep there.

But for someone so influential he detested the idea of popularity. In multiple interviews, he had stated that he worked better if he was considered a failure, or boring. He insisted that cinema is dead, in a dramatic fashion, to be honest, his idea of cinema being a tool for expression was dead. He never wanted to make films, he wanted to make 'cinema'. Something, a lot of hardworking filmmakers and pretentious cinephiles seem to talk about without completely understanding the crux of it.

Many simply gave up on Godard or were embarrassed at their extravagant former hero worship of a 60s figure, who declined to sell out, grow up, make commercial movies, or drift to the right, but carried on in the same old way. Some people thought he was not that great to be but an accidental genius. To that, I would say, Godard was never a thinking man's filmmaker in an upper-lip sort of way, he believed films, were abstract thoughts put into imagery that can break out sound and image from the four walls of the screen. He was inspired by André Bazin, a founder of the New Wave movement said, to criticise was to intervene decisively in cinema, and to make films was to intervene in life itself. Cinema was a seizing of reality. Godard was trying to do just that. Satyajit Ray, on multiple occasions, said that he never liked all of Godard's movies but clarifying you cannot simply 'like' his movies because they are to be intellectually engaged with and to dichotomise a film into like and dislike is an aberration and Godard should not be treated as such.

Godard, on September 13 chose to end his life via assisted dying in Switzerland at the age of 91. He never had any intention to live life as a vegetable. His passing was peaceful and has been buried in an undisclosed location. He lived the way he died, on his terms. So, kind and curious reader, go watch *Breathless* if you haven't already. Watch *A Woman is a Woman, Masculin/Feminin*, whatever you can get your hands on just to be reminded why his films were so impactful, ideological, and stylishly sexy. ■



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 Cantaous, 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.

A Sister of St. Joseph of Tarbes (SJT) is called to:
Gather the scattered; Unite the divided with the motto: 'GOD ALONE'

In and through: Prayer, through her service to the young—in schools and colleges; to the sick—in hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation of leprosy and HIV/AIDS patients; to the aged, orphans, women in distress, the poor and the needy—in and through the social-service ministries.

Dear friend, do you hear this call to reach out?

The Lord Jesus is calling you dear friend, to be part of the SJT family.

Do you hear the call of Jesus? COME AND SEE!



CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH'S OF TARBES

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

May they all be one.
JOHN 17:21



For Further Information

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