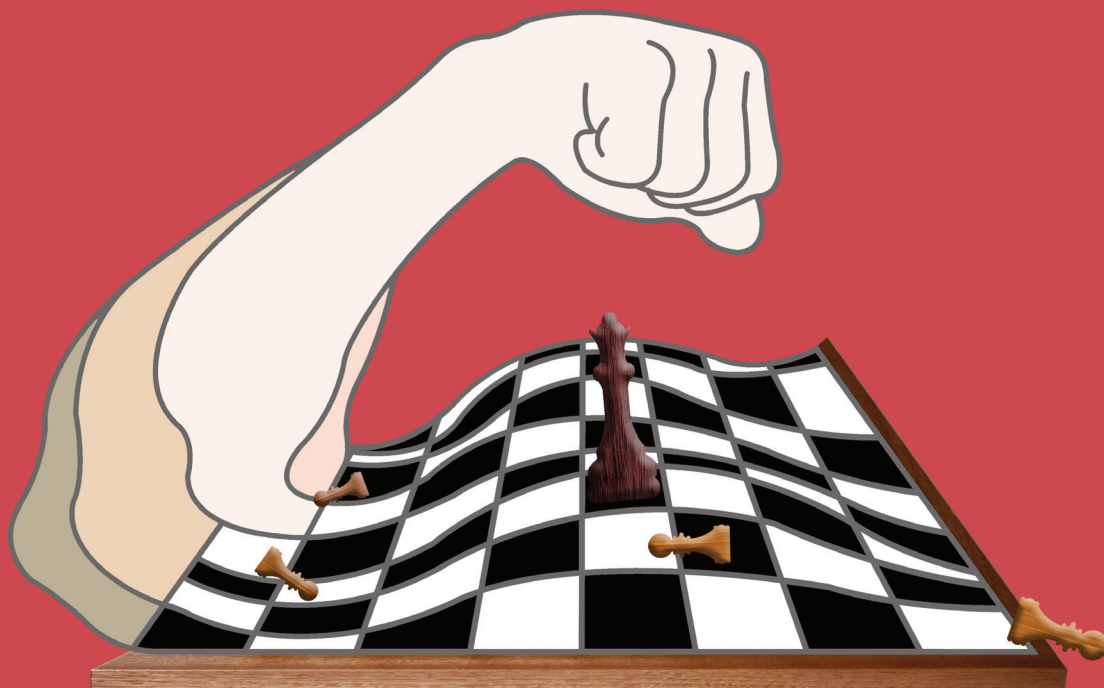


together

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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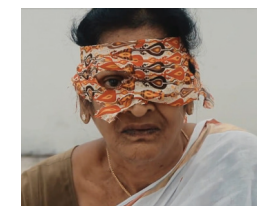


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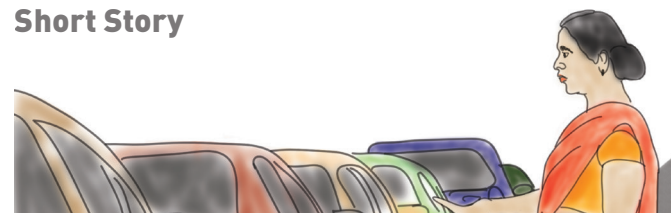
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Gender, Hijab, Ukraine Conquerors and Victims

Once in a while we must stop the unconscious mind and make it listen to the conscious mind clarifying vital questions of what, why and how.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

They pay a price. Victims pay a heavier and immediate price. Victors take time to understand the price they are paying. William Shakespeare's words, "all the world is a stage", now sounds very naïve, instead 'the all the world is a battlefield'. People are forced into battles on multiple levels on an everyday basis.

Gender studies is disrupting power structures. When gender is tied to biology and is binary with categories of male and female it is easy to stratify, control, and otherise. Gender Fluidity unsettles control. It ascertains that gender is neither something into which we are born nor something that we eventually become, rather gender identities remain relatively fluid, capable of adapting to the particular social settings or contexts in which people find themselves. Gender justice is we giving up the urge to dominate and control.

Hijab has divided the classroom. Saffron stoles have found entry into classrooms. The ideological extremists and hate mongers have won: the majority has lost their sense and reason, the victims are pushed to the corner. This is not just about hijab and saffron stoles, but about people who use them for reasons even religion would fail to fathom. No child should be denied education because of what she or he is wearing. No one has the right to disrupt education. Trade education for hijab or saffron stole, we will begin our journey back to times before Lincoln, Luther, and Ambedkar.

Ukraine is invaded. There have been ukraines all the time. It has been called, Tibet, Vietnam, Gaza, Syria, and in many other names. On the click of a button neighbours become enemies; citizens become refugees. Superpowers find opportunities; weaker powers break-

down. World order trembles. The fragility of our political systems is exposed time and again. International organisations, like the United Nations, look on helplessly as millions lose their lives, war crimes upsurge, and human rights erode. No amount of governmental dogmas of a country, however logical they may seem, would justify the lose.

Othering as a Means to Power

There are many ways to supremacy; but in recent times there is nothing as successful as othering. Othering is the process of labeling or categorising people as opponents with the rationale, 'they are not like us, therefore they are not one of us'; or going even to the extent of saying, they are against us. The considerations for othering could be on the lines of religion, caste, colour, abilities, sexual identities, sexual orientations, ethnicity, language, age, and more. One of the unbroken parameters for othering in history, which we become conscious of, on days like International Women's Day, is gender. In recent times we witnessed and are witnessing othering because of one's dress (hijab), or because one happens to be born on the other side of national borderline. How do we explain the Russian tankers rolling into Ukraine in otherwise a normal winter month?

John A. Powell, the director of Othering and Belonging Institute in the University of California, says, this othering happens because of the repeated stories we hear, read and tell others; stories of fear, like, "they are not like us, they are out to get you, be careful of them, build a wall or kill them", etc. John Powell gives a simple example from the not so old American context, he says that the reason why the right wing folks are against Social Security is not because it takes a trillion or more dollars to meet this expense every year; they were against it because it is 'social'. It makes people more equal, more connected. Anything that builds bridges disturbs people who spread the ideology of othering. We could find parallels in the affirmative action of reservation in India.

Is othering a serious threat? See how we react to people of other gender, religion, caste, or capabilities. We are guilty of othering in our

institutions, workplaces, even in our homes. The tangible signs of othering is that we avoid them, we ignore their ideas, opinions, contributions, we withhold recourses and information from them, we exclude them from meetings and social gatherings. John Powell continues to say that othering is an unconscious act. As soon as we see someone, even before we have consciously processed anything in our minds, we have already categorized him/her and decides to do nothing with them, or decides to do something against them. The unconscious works much faster than our conscious mind. Much before we consciously consider the relevant questions of what, why and how, the unconscious has already finished the work. Therefore, once in a while we must stop the unconscious mind and make it listen to the conscious mind clarifying vital questions of what, why and how.

Everyone has a right to belong. People of different gender identities and sexual orientations have the right to belong to a society. People who are less rich and powerful have the right to live in a country they call as their own. A daughter or a son, who is physically or mentally challenged, has the right to belong to the family; elderly parents have the right to belong to the family. To exercise power over them because they are not like us is a structural iniquity.

It is so uncreative and barren to have a nation, people, or religion lost in their own kind. The solution is in helping ourselves to see beyond. One getting busy only with scriptures, books, people, and thinking that confirm one's views and ways is a formula for systemic downfall.

Say Enough to Power

When is it enough? This is a question of justice. When you say enough, othering will lose its relevance. I repeat the question, when is it enough? When will men be satisfied? When all in power are from my clan and party? When all in decision-making are from my gender. When all offering sacrifice at the altar are men? When all land is under my command? When all businesses are merged, bought, and owned by my company? Unchecked power is tyranny.

Gender Justice

We could call God “rock, fire, light, wind, door, key and father”, but never, ever “MOTHER”. It was a moment of soul-shaking revelation for me.

Sr INIGO SSA

When Dalits are attacked and they take out a rally, we don't bother about it. It is their problem. When the Tribals are affected and demand their rights, we don't see it as our problem. When people of other religions are killed, we don't join them to protest, as it is their issue. When women are affected and come out in public to raise their voices and demand their rights, men label them as ‘prostitutes’ and leave them alone as if it is their issue. We cannot alienate ourselves in this way and see only our problems as real problems. Such a selfish world has to disappear and a new world order has to emerge. Wherever human rights are violated and whenever human beings are reduced to objects, it becomes everyone's issue.

So gender issues are not merely women's issues. They are human issues, moral issues and spiritual issues. I am not a feminist. I am neither an anti-feminist. What am I? I am a realist, a humanist!

We are not talking only about the issues of women among marginalized communities but our concern here is just “Women”. We are not talking about marginalized women but the marginalization of women. Most vulnerable marginalized groups in almost every society are women. Under different economic conditions like poverty and under the influence of specific historical, cultural, legal and religious factors, marginalization of women is one of the manifestations of a Patriarchal society. Basically India is a Patriarchal society which is dominated by men. Sex is natural; being man and woman is natural but gender inequality is a man or a human made discrimination.

Women Face Challenges from All Fronts

Nowadays we find women working in all kinds of fields like space, banks, schools, the police, the army, politics and so on. Even after so much progress, women face a variety of issues and challenges. The major challenge is a patriarchal and a stereotypical mind-set. Rape is the fastest growing crime in the country today. As the country talks about smart cities, we also need inclusive cities. The endless incidents of rapes coming to light both in society as well as in the Church should make us ponder over the issue in depth and work out a strong strategy to deal with it. I feel as if Sodom and Gomorrah have been reborn in our country.

Women also suffer from dowry deaths. They are vulnerable to trafficking, subject to torture—both mental and physical—marital rape, genital mutilation, demands of dowry, polygamy and forced marriages. They are being forced to commit suicide, undergo virginity testing and endure unwanted pregnancies. They are subject to honour killings by their own people to save the reputation of the family or the community. They are abandoned by partners and found in brothels in cities for their livelihood. The children are the victims in this system.

There are also problems associated with domestic work and with the migration of women in search of jobs. These women are exploited: long hours of work, poor wages, no annual leave or medical facilities, sexual or physical abuse, treated as inhuman beings, etc. Nearly 40% of female suicides in the world occur in India. There are 30 million missing women in India. 21 million girls and women are

Limited in Communion, Participation, and Mission

I just witnessed the marriage of my nephew recently and was aghast to see the bride made to kneel down for the groom to tie the mangalsutra around her neck. Someone from the bride's family obviously had instructed the girl to kneel down for reasons known to them alone. How I wished that my nephew in response had requested the bride to sit on the chair rather than kneel down. What I see lacking to a great extent in society, particularly in religious circles is mutual respect and equality in its true sense. Just including a woman in parish or diocesan committees is not the way forward to see a synodal Church that calls all of us for intense communion, participation and mission. Women in equal numbers need to be part of the committees that give direction and value to the life and mission of the Church. Unfortunately, this culture of seeing man as the head of the family has been deeply ingrained in all Church institutions and organisations that women are almost mute spectators to the so-called ‘PROGRESS’ of the Church.

Dr Sr MARY MARGARET NIRMALA SCN

‘I Am Not A Nice Little Feminist’

As a woman, it becomes tiring to talk about what it means to be a woman. It's like constantly explaining how your day goes every time you have a bad day. Let me talk about someone who inspires me. Dr Mithu Alur is the founder chairperson of The Spastic Society of India, now called the ADAPT: Able Disable All People Together. She is an educator, a researcher, and a “bad-ass” disability rights activist. She recently told us, “I'm not a nice little feminist.” We constantly need to be inspired to stay grounded and passionate. I found mine. I hope you find yours. Till then, and further, we will not be nice little feminists.

SEKULU NYEKHA

From acid attacks to raping and burning them alive, women are being pushed to the margins of society. The reason is gender inequality and gender injustice.

unwanted. “Even the mother’s womb is not a safe place for girl children”. Girls can be named this way: My name is *kachada*, I am a piece of waste, an extra. Selective female foeticide is still rampant in India.

From acid attacks to raping and burning them alive, women are being pushed to the margins of society. The reason is gender inequality and gender injustice. The women are treated as the weaker sex. Our socio-cultural system is such that it gives special priority to a male child and the birth of a girl is considered a curse even in this ultra-modern world. Women have been victims of violence – be it at the domestic level or in the public sphere or even in the Church. Since the legal provisions were male oriented until the recent past, females and their roles were defined conveniently in a way favourable to the males. It is necessary to address its root cause.

What is wrong with the Indian male? Is he unable to deal with modern empowered women? Does he feel that he can get away with crimes against women? Almost no woman is safe. This should be frightening us. It is a very sad reality of the country that its women citizens are living with fear all the time.

The women are still treated as the weaker sex, though she is inclusive – weaker sex, opposite sex, complementary and Reciprocal (S/HE, WO/Man, Fe/Male, M/Adam) This is a spirituality.....Though the leadership in the church condemns violence against women in the country, it seems to condone violence in religious institutions. The church leaders silence the victims. This leaves us in disbelief and shock. The time is now for the Churches to demonstrate that they have zero tolerance to any form of violence, especially sexual violence.

A vast majority of women are still in bondage. They are economically dependent,

poor and illiterate. Women belonging to the lower castes and Dalits, women from tribal areas fall under this category. In this context, the Church’s primary path of mission needs to be the same as that of Jesus who became the voice of the voiceless. To be the leaven in Indian society today urges the Church to recognize the contribution of women and to create structures that will enhance the greater participation of women in all aspects of ecclesial life. Jesus took sides with the women: Mk: 14: 4-5. But even after 2,000 years of their existence, half of the followers of Jesus are not counted. They are neither visible nor audible in the Church. In India religious women constitute nearly 82% of the Consecrated people. “Women as Victims” is further problematized in the light of contemporary issues in India.

We had been singing God’s praises as “Morning Star, rock and refuge of sinners and gate of heaven” for century after century. And always, always, God was “our Father”. In the book “Called to Question”, John Chittister says: We never ever prayed to “God our Mother”. God, the source of creation, God the eternal womb, was never, ever recognized as a Mother God. We could call God “rock, fire, light, wind, door, key and father”, but never, ever “MOTHER”. It was a moment of soul-shaking revelation.

Where were women in these images of God? And if they weren’t there, what kind of God was this? I had given my life to a God who did not see me, did not include me, and did not touch my nature with God’s own. The system never changes because the people with the power to change it know that they would stand to lose power if they did. So they say they can’t change it because it has always been this way. And the circle goes round and round.

This means God is a pure being. God is Father as well as Mother. Therefore nobody



is going to empower women or speak about equality. We have to prepare women and women religious ‘through drip irrigation’ to get enlightened. Such on-going formation is important.

Gender inequality has been everywhere for centuries in different societies in different dimensions. Whether or not a society is literate or illiterate, progressive or non-progressive, religious or non-religious, every society has invariably been practicing some sort of discrimination against women, though the degree and category might differ. Thanks to the hard and sustained efforts by several social movements, women’s organizations and enlightened men and women with a liberal mind-set, we see a great drive to establish equality among the genders and eradicate any type of discrimination against women.

Nonetheless all these good efforts very often stop only at the institutional level and don’t percolate among the common masses to move towards a society that is liberated from such gender discrimination and prejudices. To achieve this goal what is urgently needed is to have attitudinal changes, both in men and women.

Human beings are basically good. All of us are in the divine image, divine power and divine energy. We need to develop this positive spirituality. Once a person recognizes the divine presence within the human person, then that person will see the other person with dignity

and respect. They are called empowered people. An empowered person can motivate others to become empowered.

We see that the bisexuality ratio has grown over time and so has discrimination. It has become one of the hot topics for debate even internationally. Do we know the challenges they face? LGBTQ discrimination has been encouraged by the Indian Law till recent years. Section 377 in 2018 has led to a new opportunity and would help a great deal in the future. From the theories of X and Y to the hormonal theories, we can say that it’s a revolution in the human sciences. Instead of blaming them for something that wasn’t their mistake, let’s rather understand them and encourage them so they can make their contribution. This community deserves the dignity and respect that most people take for granted.

Finally: This is the Age of Information. I feel both men and women should be given a radical on-going formation to understand the signs of the times. Both men and women in the church are called to be prophets, the conscience of society. Then only both could be courageous, creative and compassionate missionaries in the world.

Ultimately, it is women who must determine what a woman’s worth is. To wait for a husband, a father or a brother or a religious man to undergo an attitudinal change might take too long, if at all there is a change. Into that heaven of freedom, my Father and Mother, let my brothers and sisters awake!

Waves of Feminism

Dr SUSHEELA B

Feminism is not a singular or unitary concept, but a polyvalent amalgam of diverse, multi-layered, complex and often, contradictory ideas. There are various approaches to the issue of feminism, which makes it difficult to arrive upon single definition. Lisa S Price, in *Feminist Frameworks: Building Theory on Violence against Women*, offers an interesting definition of the term: 'Feminism is also a method of analysis, a standpoint, a way of looking at the world from the perspective of women. It questions government policies, popular culture, ways of doing and being, and asks how women's lives are affected by these ideological and institutional practices.' It must be acceded, from the onset, that feminism needs to be understood in the plural; exploring and identifying 'feminisms' is therefore a more authentic approach. Feminisms address the issue of women's inferior position in society and seek ways and methods of alleviating the social, cultural, political and economic discriminations that women are subjected to. But the differences in

the approach to this central problem contribute to the complexity, diversity, fragmentation and contradictions underlying 'feminisms.'

'Who can speak and for whom? 'Who will listen?' How do we represent the self and others?' Such questions point to heated issues concerning representation and essentialism. Feminist theories are occupied with similar questions of representation, voice, marginalization and the relation between politics and literature.

The origin of the term 'feminism' is uncertain and debatable. The term can be tracked back to 1871, when it was used as a medical term to define symptoms of 'feminisation' of the bodies of male patients. In 1872, Alexander Dumas used it in a pamphlet titled *l'homme femme*, to identify women who behaved in a masculine way. And the term had spread through Europe and America by 1910. Thus, 'feminism' as a term had confliction implications on both medical and political discourse. The term is made up of two components: 'femme', 'woman' in French, and '-esme', which refers to a social movement

or a political ideology. It has been a controversial term and many activists struggling against sexist oppression have even rejected the label. Women fighting for better wages and job security could not always identify themselves with the middle-class, educated, suffragist feminists, while the middle-class women were very apprehensive of its radical implications. The earliest use of the term 'feminism' held negative connotations.

In order to classify the shifting movements in the history of feminism, the paradigm of 'waves' came into use. Thus, 'First wave feminism' is used to signify the feminist movements of the nineteenth century and the early-twentieth century that were aimed at acquiring equal rights for women. 'Second wave feminism' refers to the feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s that addressed issues as women's employment, role in the family and sexuality, along with their political rights. However, the practice of using 'waves' to classify historical moments in the feminist movements runs the risk of implying that there was no feminist activity outside the scope of these umbrella terms. The fact remains that there were numerous political, cultural and social movements which cannot be contained within these neat divisions. Rather, the heterogeneity of the theories and actions related to feminist issues run beyond the convenient compartments intended to understand the development of feminist thought. Apart from the historical approach, attempts are also made to group feminist activity and attitudes under three categories: Liberal feminism, Marxist or socialist feminism and radical feminism. Liberal feminism argues for equal rights for women based on the ideology of the liberal state of equal rights and privileges for all citizens. Marxist or socialist feminist system believe that gender inequality is related to the capitalist mode of production, while Radical feminists' identity patriarchy to be the root of all evils against women. Apart from these broad categories, there are several other categories such as psychoanalytical feminism, postmodern feminism, black feminism, postcolonial feminism, post structural feminism, cyberfeminism and so on.

The first wave of feminist movement was simply 'the woman's movement'. The movement comprised struggle for legal and political rights. The suffragists, however, did not override the idea that motherhood wielded social and domestic authority. After 1910, a younger generation of activists articulated a marked preference for a 'feminist' political identity, advocating equal rights, often rejecting the maternal paradigm. The earlier feminists were concerned with the 'right to earn their living', but with time, feminism acquired varied connotations across different parts of the world depending on the heterogeneity of experiences. Since its origin, till its wider circulation in the 1960s, the feminist label had a pejorative undertone. Universal adult suffrage was extended to women in England and other countries between 1928 and the 1940s, but there was an ongoing debate the comparative merit of the terms 'humanist', and 'feminist' vis-à-vis the women's movement. Liberal feminism advocates women's equality in professional, political and public life. They argue that society's discriminatory attitude towards women is solely predicted on the assumption that they are the 'weaker sex'. This impedes women from exercising free choice. Liberal feminists do not reject the capitalists system of production, since they believe this system will provide them with opportunities of realising their potentials.

Liberal feminism starts with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women* (1869) and women's suffrage movements in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Liberal feminists found discrimination against women in the public sphere-in society's denial of giving them access to education, politics, financial independence and general intellectual life. Men wielded power and authority in the Church, in the state and within families. Women had no legal or political rights and had restricted access to higher education. Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne of England in 1558 and reigned successfully over a long period of time. Subsequent political events, such as English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, destabilised the sovereignty of the monarch.



There were also perceived tentative attempts at challenging patriarchal rule. Some subversive texts challenging the Genesis myth were in circulation, such as Jane Anger's *Her Protection for Women* (1589) and Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617). Working-class women often protested against legislative and social discriminations. Writers like Aphra Behn (1640–89) and Lady Chudleigh (1656–1710) were articulating their views on the subordination of women at the hands of men. Quakers played a crucial role in inculcating awareness against discriminatory practices based on gender and race. In an ideal Quaker family, men and women enjoyed quality of status, which was reflected in the fact that 'Quaker women comprised 40% of female abolitionists, 19% of feminists born before 1830, and 15% of suffragists born before 1830.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several thinkers and social reformers debated in favour of women's claims to social and political equality. The legacy of the Enlightenment, the emphasis on rationality instead of faith, and the increased importance of free inquiry resulted in challenges to the status quo. This included arguments and polemics about the subordinate position of women in society. John Stuart Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Martineau (1802-76) provided the intellectual impetus for this first wave of feminism. These first-wave feminists struggled against inequalities in opportunities of education, employment and political rights, the unjust marriage laws. Wollstonecraft challenged the assumptions of Rousseau in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, advocating equal participation of women in public life and greater empowerment in economic and private spheres. Her insistence on sexual equality and her radical views on marriage were not well received in her time. This was largely due to the unconventionality of her personal life, revealed in the *Memoirs* authored by her husband, William Godwin, social reformers like John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-58) debated the 'woman question' gender roles, inequality and subordination of women in essays such as *On Subjugation of Women* (1869) and *The Enfranchisement of Women* (1851). Though their views occasionally hinted at

certain prevalent prejudices about motherhood and domesticity, they were largely supportive of social transformation that accommodated the rights and dignity of women.

In the turbulence of the 1960s, women's movements gained momentum under the banner of 'women's liberation' which soon was derisively abridged as 'women's libbers'. The 60s offers an interesting area of investigation. During the Second World War, women were compelled to join the workforce but by the end of the war, women were expected to return to their 'homes'-domesticity was emphasized, as was women's role as nurturers and care-givers, the agencies of socialisation; and consumerism became significant. Women were also present in the workforce in significant numbers, which was at odds with the idealisation of the nuclear family unit. As a result, feminism in the 60s acquired a diversity of perspectives depending on race and class positions. Feminist movements in the 60s were also influenced by, and overlapped with, other political, social and cultural movements like the student's movements in Europe and America, the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam War movements. The second wave was, however, far-reaching with women not only demanding political and legal equality but also control over their reproductive and sexual roles. Another significant paradigm shift was discerned after the 1960s-feminist movement championed not just demands for equality but also insisted upon the acknowledgment of the 'difference' between men and women. This coincided with the ascendancy of the term 'gender', instead of 'sex' underscoring the importance of the social 'constructions' of the idea of the 'feminine' and not just biology determining the paradigms of masculinity and femininity. As the term 'feminism' did not enjoy wide popularity, but it signified, with moderate success, certain political, social and cultural goals. This is largely due to the fact that feminism, as a concept, has continuously modified itself to address varied concerns, stakeholders and debates. Thus, over the last decades of the twentieth century, feminism was appended to qualifiers to produce new compounds, all addressing the diversity of its praxis-black fem-

The third wave of feminism and postmodern feminism attack the binaries of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine', 'sex' and 'gender' inherent in patriarchal structures.

inism, Asian-American feminism, postcolonial feminism, lesbian feminism, ecofeminism and Islamic feminism attest to the complexity of this label.

The third wave of feminism and postmodern feminism attack the binaries of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine', 'sex' and 'gender' inherent in patriarchal structures. The third-wave feminist assert the importance of difference in speaking, thinking and writing for and about women. It is increasingly a challenge for contemporary feminists to merge the inevitability of the contradictions in women's experiences and the necessity of finding shared dimensions and commonality in these experiences. This makes us question whether the possibility of a global sisterhood is a reality or a myth. Again, the validity and authenticity of such of such a sisterhood can also be put to test.

In the 1980s, the idea of 'post feminism' started gaining around. It is diverse in its implications. The prefix 'post' led to a number of analyses of the phenomenon. To some, it implied a movement beyond sexism and feminism, while to others, it meant feminism's adolescent altogether. A significant aspect of post feminism is its marked departure from any social agenda. Post feminism is, on another level, connected to anti-feminist attitude, not just restricted to the twentieth century; it is present whenever feminism poses a threat to the patriarchal status quo. In this respect, 'post feminism' as a concept is ambiguous. It subsumes the contradictory discourses of discouraging

women from pursuing their own interests and bemoaning the inequality of status inflicted on them.

In the 1990s, the younger generation of women made a decisive and conscience movement beyond the 'second wave'. Rebecca Walker, daughter of Alice Walker, the African-American who famously coined the term 'womanist' prefers the term 'third wave' to 'postfeminism'. The third-wave feminists, insignificantly, accept the label 'feminist'. Feminism is now understood as broad-based and not restricted to white, middle-class, educated women. It addresses and encompasses the diversity, differences and contradictions of women's experiences across race, caste, class and sexuality. The definition of feminism put forwarded by Estelle. B. Freeman, in *Not Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, contains the key elements of feminism as a social, cultural, political and personal movements for freedom and equality:

Feminism is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. Because most societies privilege men as a group, social movements are necessary to achieve equality between women and men, with the understand that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies.

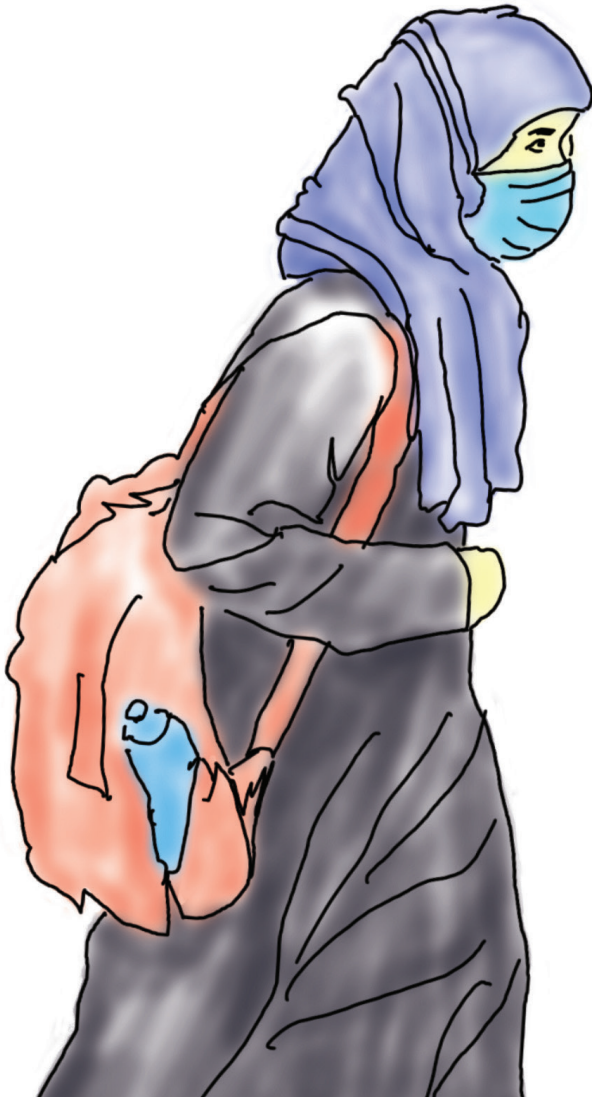
For many feminists, the contentions within postmodernist, poststructuralist and psychoanalytic criticism are merely academic, since they elide the 'real' experiences of women. It is alleged that these debates are situated within the context of intellectual, affluent, urban women and their limited intellectual circle. Feminism fundamentally entails

The struggle against the sexist oppression perpetrated by patriarchy. Women were traditionally discriminated against on essentialist grounds-the qualities of rationality, aggression and leadership were held 'masculine', while gentleness and intuitiveness were considered 'feminine' traits. These assumptions, compounded by the biological differences among the sexes, resulted in the marginalisation of women.

My Hijab and What It Means to Be a Muslim in India

We've been labelled as terrorists, we've been accused of love jihad; ironically, the government wants us to stand for the national anthem, give our lives for the land, but at the same time, they deny us our land, call us anti-nationals.

ISRA MOHAMMED NADEEM SHAIKH



I remember reading the news as it first happened. January 1st, a government college in Udupi, six hijabi students, banned from entering their classrooms because they were veiled. I initially didn't think of it too much- but when the issue snowballed its way into the High Court, every time my family tunes into the live proceedings, I hold my breath and sit in silence. It is an ode to my community, it is the only music I can sing for us.

If you type up the word 'hijab', you'll be swamped with news articles. *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, NDTV, *India Today*—Google Trends show that the rate at which the word was searched increased by ten times since the controversy began, and reached its peak. But what is the essence of this word? What does it mean in the context of a larger socio-religious population, and especially, a socio-religious population in India? I attempted to answer this question for myself, as someone who is not only Muslim in blood, but also liberal and unorthodox—and angry.

When the waves of protest started one after another, and colleges and schools began to lick certain asses, I began to witness what it means to be a minority.

A recent video of a young woman in burka being heckled went viral as boys rounded her up in saffron scarves yelling 'Jai Shri Ram'—and the courage she had to yell back at them as a lone woman against several men still sends shivers down my spine.

Not minority in number, but in thought and intellect. People I considered friends and family started posting content endorsing BJP and their Hindutva ideology. My neighbours, who often sent biscuits and tea suddenly seemed distant, and I could feel the burning gaze of passers-by as I jogged with my scarf on my head in the name of exercise—when in reality I just wanted to escape the same thing flashing on my screen all day long. Just yesterday, my mother was harassed on the streets for wearing her religious attire. That's when I started to see my place and the people I have passed by for three years straight.

There is a group of old men who gather around seven and disperse at ten in the evenings. They sit surrounding a segment of the footpath which also serves as the jogging track in my compound. They talk about everything from Dilip Kumar to their wives' chutneys to miss-Kulkarni's-fantastic-laddoos. And politics, of course. Old men and politics go together like bread and butter. I often cross this segment while on the way to buying groceries or even just pointlessly taking a stroll. I must admit, their conversations have become deeply disturbing these days- and sometimes when I walk through their circle, I hear throats being cleared or everyone collectively stops talking and immediately begins as I walk away. I didn't pay much heed to it in the beginning, but their point has been made.

Many videos of Muslim women being targeted have surfaced on the internet. It is the same men who have a problem with 'women dressing scantily' who also have a problem with 'women covering up too much'. A recent video of a young woman in burka being heckled went viral as boys rounded her up in saffron scarves yelling 'Jai Shri Ram'—and the courage she had to yell

back at them as a lone woman against several men still sends shivers down my spine. She is Muskan. Remember her name—even though she might be just one of the million other unsung warriors, remember her name.

But all of this has only made me more conscious of my identity. It has forced me to go in search of what I have been avoiding for a long, long time. I started reading up, devouring books- anything to give me some guidance. I connected with old friends, extended family from my community, even random people I saw in common social circles. I didn't come across anything new, anything I haven't already read before or come across before, but I began seeing a trend. We've been labelled as terrorists, we've been accused of love jihad, every damn thing under the sun- but the people I interacted with were proud and welcoming. They wore their religion the way you wear a badge of honour. Of course, there are conservatives in every religion, but perhaps it was this new perspective that I approached my religion again with, that I was made to believe that there was something dangerously alluring to me about taking my religious identity more seriously. And I fell in love, and never looked back.

'You want to see our heads? What you should be looking at is our Education, at our Policies and Rights.' That's a quote I heard a burka-clad woman saying at a protest in Karnataka last month. I have never agreed more. We don't want the sympathies of different communities advocating for freedom against wearing the hijab. Of course, there are cases that require attention and support, especially those which involve abusive or forcible households- that is a different issue altogether. That doesn't happen just in Muslim communities, it happens in all religions, across all cultures. What we actively

Oppression Is My Enemy

This is the time for self-respect, this is the time to stand there with anyone who is fighting for what is rightly theirs. We have the right to live, we have the right to exist because we are still a democracy.

MUSKAN RAJ

Oppression is my enemy, it ought to be every oppressed person's greatest enemy. The recent happenings in Karnataka is one of the many venomous attacks made by the extremist Hindutva ideologues. The relentless efforts the Hindutva brahmanvaad invests in strengthening their roots in this country is commendable, because every time a Muslim woman is stripped off her burqa without her consent, they win.

The devastating state of affairs in Karnataka today is the result of an already deeply instilled hegemony through caste and religion. A casual survey or a conversation with a middle class corporate employee who slogs 10 hours a day to pay off his credit card bills will give you an idea of how he believes in veganism, organic food, yoga and of course BJP.

Sanghis always existed my friends, there is probably a sanghi lurking around right now in your school, college or work place waiting to give you his piece of mind on how cow is a sacred animal. Hindutva is merely using these pre-existing notions of hatred towards minorities and caste supremacy for sustenance. But the extent and reach of this divisive tendency surprises us every time a violent mob lead students harass a Muslim woman.

The beef ban then, and which is now the burqa ban are milestones for a government that promised total eradication of Muslims and establishing the great Hindu Rashtra. They promised it in the NRC and CAA bills too; they took away Kashmir from Kashmiris; they beat up the Pasmenda Muslims black and blue in UP; and the list goes on. Shouldn't

we be exhausted? Shouldn't we be disgusted? Shouldn't we just leave the country then?

What we need to address is that this stigma around Muslims is not new, they have always been ostracized in India. This is the child of a much poisonous evil which is Brahmanvaad; Modi is just their poster boy trying to keep them happy to stay in power. Periyar rightly said, "The reason for the present chaos and deterioration in our country is that we have been hindered from enquiry and cogitation and repressed from the use of rationality."

The students today who harassed that girl or are staging protests, have denied even a remotely scientific enquiry, it is like they are in a hypnotized slumber, all they know is to keep retain the glory of caste and save Hindu religion. This mob mentality is similar to what happened during the Babri Masjid riots too, we could see the anger and sheer hatred towards a community. No amount of money or power can buy that, it is just the pride of religion and caste that supercedes material wealth. The only way out is to combat superstition with Science.

This is the time for self respect, this is the time to stand there with anyone who is fighting for what is rightly theirs. We have the right to live, we have the right to exist because the last time I checked we were still a democracy.

The fight has just begun, there will be many more road blocks on our way to vote this draconian government out of power, many more decisions to make, but there is hope and an undying belief in the constitution that Babasaheb drafted for all of us because oppression is my enemy.

want you to protest for is basic human rights—allowing us to exist the way we are, without fearing for our lives every time we step out of our houses. Ironically, the government wants us to stand for the national anthem, give our lives for the land, but at the same time, they deny us our land, call us anti-nationals.

"The two think tanks of Hindutva ideology," Lal Dena, from *The Wire* writes, "Thus lay down three essentials of Hindutva, namely, a common nation (*Hindu Rashtra*), a common race (*jati*), and a common civilisation (*sanskriti*). In Savarkar's vision of Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation) there is only one culture that is a Hindu culture: there is only one language, that is Hindi and there is only one religion, that is Hinduism." Scary, but so very real at the same time, to me, it seems that the human race just doesn't learn from history. I am reminded of Nazism, and what it did to the Jews. I see a similar fate looming over every other religion as well, as the

government slowly begins its process of ethnic cleansing. The recent High Court proceedings don't give me much hope either. Even if they do turn out to be in our favour, I doubt they will continue being that way. One day a judge is going to take that seat and he is going to pass a verdict that will affect my community. And I am terrified of that one day.

I can't say for sure where I find myself in this context, but there is one thing I would like to state. You can call me a hypocrite if you wish, but I have never felt more at home in my religion than I feel today. I may not know the answers I have been searching for, and maybe I never will- but I am proud, and I will fight if I have to protect my family, my friends and my people. I now look at my burka the way the men in a Raymond's ad look at their suits. And I continue wearing the hijab as I have- and I continue to walk through that segment of the footpath with my head held high.

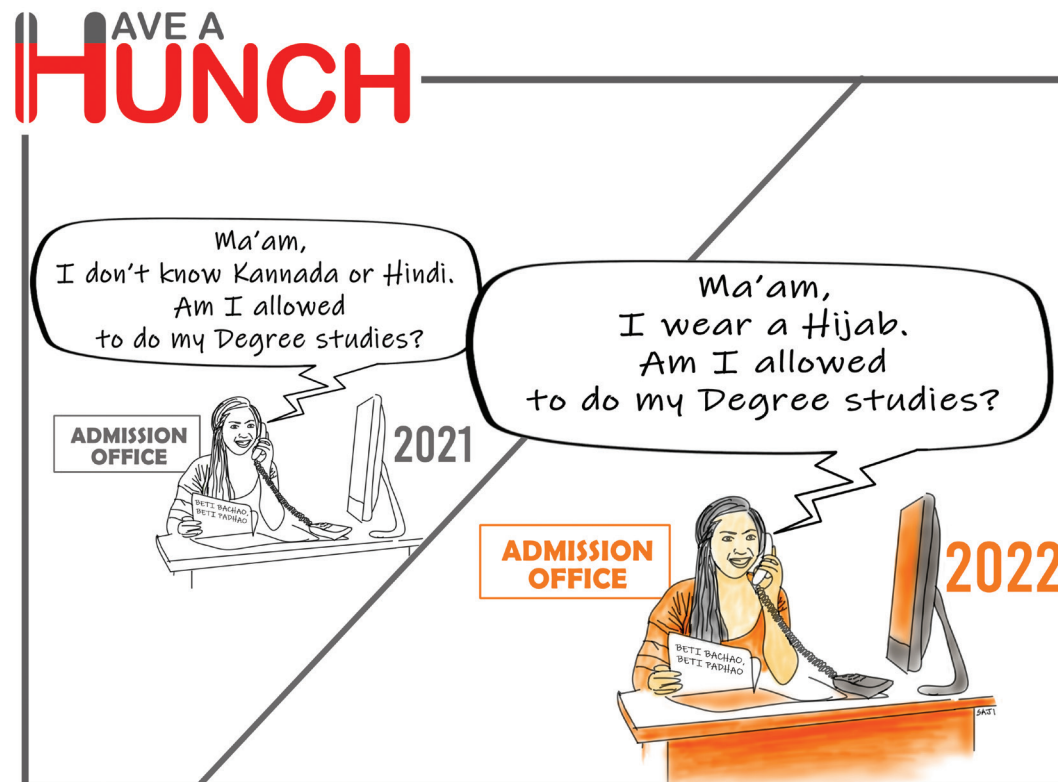




Image: Garry Knight/Flickr

Ukraine: The Dogs of War

KAPIL ARAMBAM

In what is considered as one of the largest conventional warfares after the WWII, Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February from three sides that some observers also maintain that it could bring about a paradigm shift in the global security order.

The Russian defence ministry, in an *Agence France-Presse* coverage, officially justified that President Vladimir Putin decided to conduct the “special military operation to demilitarise and de-Nazify Ukraine so that, freed from oppression, Ukrainians themselves could freely determine their future.”

Meanwhile, the Russian president has also warned global leaders against actions that will stop Russia’s operation in Ukraine. Any interference, he emphasized, will attract immediate response that will lead to consequences they have “never faced in their history.”

Beyond the veil of the ongoing conflicts, there are the shadows of geopolitics, energy security, conflicts in the Russian-controlled territories of Luhansk and Donetsk, revisionist politics, the annexation of Crimea, interference from the NATO and the US and so on.

Less than a week into the war, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi tweeted that 500,000 Ukrainians had crossed into Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova and other countries. As of 2 March, according to Russian military, 2,800 Ukrainian troops had died in the fighting. In any battle for supremacy, however, civilians always pay the highest price. In this brief period, the Russian currency also plunged about 30% against the US dollar.

Bertrand Russell succinctly put it: “War does not determine who is right—only who is left.” And sadly, it’s just the beginning in Ukraine.

Top: Photos taken at the London protests against war in Ukraine. **Below:** Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February from three sides that some observers maintain that it could bring about a paradigm shift in the global security order.



Image: Anofra/Wikimedia Commons

Men, Women and War

CLARA FRASER

*When Johnny comes marching home again,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
We'll give him a hearty welcome then,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
The men will cheer, the boys will shout,
The ladies they will all turn out...*

Soldiers returning from World War I were hailed as heroes. They were even more celebrated after World War II when our boys fought the horrible fascists. Everybody hated Hitler—workers, Jews, Blacks, women, nice people, liberals. We watched the Nazis gobbling up the world with incredible brutality and we hated them and adored our brave soldiers. They were our champions and nothing was too good for them—jobs, the GI education bill, bonuses, social prestige.

But today, after Korea and Vietnam, the veteran is not seen as a hero. And the U.S. Army and Air Force are the enemy. How did this happen? How did the Vietnam War become the most hated and resisted of all wars in American history?

It started with the radicals. They said this was an imperialist war against a poor colonial country struggling to decide its own fate. They said the U.S. had no right to interfere. They said we were on the wrong side. They said this is not our war.

Then the Blacks and other racial minorities began refusing to support the war. They identified with the Vietnamese for valiantly resisting a brutal white invader. And they resented the heavy preponderance of Blacks, Chicanos, and Indians in the front lines—due to a draft system skewed against the poor and non-white. They said this is not our war. Then the students began resisting the draft. They wanted to fight injustice and vicious, oppressive conditions here, rather than conquering people elsewhere.

And then a brand new group emerged on the anti-war scene: women. Women identified completely with the Vietnamese people, with

the women and children being bombed and napalmed and raped and tortured on an unprecedented scale.

And out of women's experiences in the anti-war movement, a whole new movement was born—Woman's Liberation.

Women connected the rape of Vietnam with rape at home. They linked the plight of the Vietnamese prostitute who survives by selling sex, with their own dilemma as cheap labourers and enforced husband-hunters. Women realized that military aggression abroad was an expansion of the male domination they suffered—a sexual ascendancy propped up by economic supremacy, educational superiority, legal privilege, cultural habits, and old-fashioned brutality.

At that very moment in history when the military was training males to be men, to find manhood in war, to be real males by being violent, belligerent and power-hungry—at the same time, women were vehemently denouncing this concept of masculinity.

They were denying that men are intrinsically despotic, competitive and warlike and that women are biologically passive, subservient and submissive. Feminists said these sex roles—tough Tarzan versus sweet, dumb pussycat—were a bunch of nonsense. Women announced they were in no way inferior or mentally different. They traced gender variations, including body strength and size, to cultural conditioning, educational channelling, and psychological terrorism. In addition, motherhood, far from being a mark of weakness, results in greater longevity, better health, and more general adaptability. Women discovered that in the past a matriarchy existed, where women were the main food providers, the political leaders, and the fighting force! Scientific studies in biology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, history, and law bore out all these new findings.

So—a funny thing happened to a lot of

you on your way back from Vietnam. Here you were—supermen, machismo operators, conquerors—and, yet, lots of the women you were running into weren't impressed.

They refused to be dominated. They declined to be patronized. They wouldn't play an exclusive domestic, sexual, caretaker role for you. They objected to being treated like a different breed of human being. They rejected your concept of manhood-murder and scorned your ideal of sweet, submissive femininity. They said we are all people!

Many of you began to complain bitterly: what the hell happened to American women? It was harder to make it with the chicks. They were often insulted and repelled by your tone and approach and attitude, and you didn't know why. You'd always treated broads like that!

Sorry, pal. This is a new day and a changing country. You can't treat Blacks and Chicanos and Indians and Asians and women and children and old people and convicts and the poor like dogs anymore; they won't stand for it. The wretched of the earth are standing up tall and announcing to the white American male ruler of the earth that his godliness is no longer worshipped or even accepted. The people of the world, and the women of this country, are standing up and demanding their rights: equal rights and equal justice and equal respect and equal opportunity.

All of you need to understand this and respect it. And learn to welcome and commend it. Because without this understanding of the basic equality and right to respect of all people, you will not be able to organize your projects or advance your goals.

In the face of this incredible new reality of women's liberation, you have a choice: You can behave like the post-Civil War slaveholder who drowned his woes in booze; or the stockbroker who jumped off a building after the Wall Street crash; or the aging movie actor who couldn't play romantic leads anymore and turned to dope. Or you can do what women have always had to do: adapt and adjust to the new reality, and become a better person by learning to work with 51% of the human race in a relation of equality instead of oppression, friendship instead of shuck and jive. You will learn that love means partnership,

not tyranny, and that you yourself can never be free as long as you enslave others.

After WWII, all the women went home from their jobs in the war industries and they didn't emerge as a mass until the '60s. But this time, they'll never let themselves be shut up at home again. The war blasted them out of their feminine mystique, their adjustment to second-class citizenship, and their half-human social roles.

The sisters are becoming increasingly militant and radicalized because they have become painfully aware that they are the bottom of the totem pole. Who are the poor? Women. Who are the lowest paid? Women. Who are the most needy and desperate for decent housing, medical care, transportation and education? Women. Who are the most exploited and most oppressed by everybody else? Women. Who is beaten and raped and robbed and insulted and ridiculed and hated? Women. Everybody's scapegoat, everybody's doormat, everybody's My Lai, everybody's Vietnam.

Women hate militarism because in life they are always the buck privates, the flunkies, the shit workers, the helpless victims, and the bereft mourners. As eternal underlings, women despise elites and bureaucrats and dictators and mindless discipline and the stupidities of officers and bosses and the regimentation of the human mind and human will.

In your quest for a better life, women are a tremendous source of skills and energy. But if you want to tap that well, you'll need to display a new respect for women as your comrades, not your old ladies or your chicks.

Women intend to create a new society where everybody can stop being sheep and stop being generals and start being human. You must play a part in bringing this about, because today's world of war and sexism, poverty and brutality, racism and violence cannot endure. Together, we must either change the world or be blown up by it. Together, we can win.

■ **Clara Fraser** was an American socialist-feminist, radical activist and trade union organizer. Founder and leader of the Freedom Socialist Party and Radical Women. Author of numerous articles and the book *Revolution, She Wrote*. **Text Source:** Marxist Internet Archive/Clara Fraser (1972). *Men, Women and War in Revolution, She Wrote* (published 1998, pp. 142–146). Red Letter Press, Seattle

Multiple Levels of Marginalisation

KRITI KAUSHIK

Women have been the subaltern, who have accepted silence and obedience as their duty. Perhaps it is time women are made aware and conscious that they speak up for themselves, and that they have roles in this society that go beyond child bearing, domestic chores, or as victims of poverty.

Women have forever been looked upon as the bearers of culture, traditions and societal value systems. But patriarchal practices have confined them within the walls of the house while the men go out and earn for the families;

their duty has been to look after the household and the children. There have been women like Thathri Kutty, a Namboodiri woman who broke all kinds of societal stereotypes, or Geetha in the film *Swades* who refuses to marry a man whose family expects her to stop working after marriage. Women must have their rightful opportunity to study and play their role in nation building.

As the African proverb has it: 'If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation.'



Gender and Sexual Fluidity

Human sexuality is fluid and dynamic, fashioned and influenced by the socio-cultural, and situational factors.

TOMY PALACKAL OFM

For most of our parents especially for our mothers the first words she must have heard after we emerged from the womb must be a declaration of our biological gender: “It’s a boy!” or “It’s a girl!” Our parents bought crib sheets and clothes that were pink or blue to match our gender. We soon learned the socio-cultural meanings of gender: Boys and girls are socialized to play in different styles and usually learn to prefer different sets of toys. Our moms and/or dads tended to do gender-specific chores.

If I may assert that the first scientific view on human sexuality seems to have been that men and women are strikingly different in their sexual nature. This viewpoint was vehemently opposed by the rise of scientific psychology and the emphasis was on the similarity between men’s and women’s sexuality. And researchers in the field captured the attention by proposing a human sexual response cycle applicable to both sexes. Feminist scholars cautioned against exaggerating male-female differences and argued for women’s sexual equality with men.

Recently, researchers have looked through the scientific materials available to them and was surprised to see striking indications pointing towards the earliest perceptions on male-female sexuality. Reviews of empirical research on diverse aspects of human sexuality have identified four important male-female differences. These gender differences are pervasive, affecting thoughts and feelings as well as behaviour, and they characterize not only heterosexuals but lesbians and gay men as well (Peplau, 2003). These male female differences are observations noticeable on their ‘Sexual desire, Sexuality and relationship, Sexuality and aggression, and Sexual plasticity.

Considering the volume of information

available to us from scientific research we will be forced to redefine and restate our understanding of human sexuality and particularly female sexuality. The picture that we have is too inadequate to capture the complexity and dynamism it embodies. The indications are that human sexuality is fluid and dynamic, fashioned and influenced by the socio-cultural, and situational factors. This discussion will centre on two important themes that forms the core of scientific investigation concerning this experiential and enigmatic facet of human existence: ‘Gender Fluidity and Sexual Fluidity’.

Gender Fluidity: An adjective describing a child who is unconfined by one single gender identity, and whose gender identity manifests differently over time. Some gender fluid youth will identify differently day to day, while others will shift over longer periods of time. While speaking about gender fluidity, we need to remind ourselves that our gender identity contains two important dimensions. One is founded on our anatomy which is recognised and declared to the world as “It’s a boy!” or “It’s a girl!” It is the condition of being male, female, or neuter. In a human context, the distinction between gender and sex reflects the usage of these terms: Sex usually refers to the biological aspects of maleness or femaleness, whereas gender implies the psychological, behavioural, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female (i.e., masculinity or femininity.)

The second is designated by the self as a member of one sex or the other, an identification both behaviourally expressed and known by the individual who possesses it. The first part is greatly determined by our biology and the socio-cultural and situational factors have very little to contribute to it. But the second dimen-

sion ‘the psychological, behavioural, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female (i.e., masculinity or femininity.)’ is greatly influenced and guided by these environmental forces. And since these influences lasts the entire lifespan of an individual; and not as conceived by some of the earlier theories in behavioural sciences; the possibility for its continued influence and possible plasticity needs to be considered and studied.

Sexual Fluidity: Sexual fluidity has been defined as a capacity for situation-dependent flexibility in sexual responsiveness, which allows individuals to experience changes in same-sex or other-sex desire across both short-term and long-term time periods. The reality of sexual fluidity does not invalidate the understanding of sexual orientation or imply that people are fundamentally bisexual. This reality points to the fact that our sexual orientation does not rigidly predict every desire a human person has during his/her lifespan. Most individuals are bound to experience periodic same sex attractions or other sex attractions in those people who do not conform to the gender binary. Some may show constant same sex or other sex attractions at various periods in their lives whereas some others show variations in their sexual attractions.

Scholars from many disciplines have noted that, in comparison with men’s sexuality, women’s sexuality tends to have greater plasticity. That is, women’s sexual beliefs and behaviours can be more easily shaped and altered by cultural, social, and situational factors. One sign of plasticity concerns changes in aspects of a person’s sexuality over time. Such changes are more common among women than among men. For example, the frequency of women’s sexual activity is more variable than men’s.

Lisa M. Diamond in her research on sexual fluidity consider the extent of gender differences in sexual fluidity by examining the prevalence of three phenomena: nonexclusive (bisexual) patterns of attraction, longitudinal change in sexual attractions, and inconsistencies among sexual attraction, behaviour, and identity.

The nonexclusive (bisexual) patterns of attraction or desire points to the question that how is sexual fluidity different from bisexuality?

After all, both sexual fluidity and bisexuality produce the same phenomenological result: sexual attractions for both men and women (although not always concurrently).

The primary difference between sexual fluidity and bisexuality is that the latter is conceptualized as a stable sexual predisposition giving rise to consistent experiences of nonexclusive desires (i.e., desires for both men and women) over the life course. In contrast, sexual fluidity is conceptualized as a capacity for change in erotic responsiveness. For some individuals, this capacity may never be expressed. Others may only encounter one or two circumstances over their lifespan which give rise to changes in sexual feelings.

The second phenomenon is the longitudinal change in sexual attractions. The studies show that any pattern of sexual attractions change over time. Exclusively same-sex patterns of attraction proved less stable among women than among men, and in women, there was no difference between the stability of bisexual versus exclusively same-sex patterns of attraction. In men, bisexual patterns of attraction proved less stable than either exclusively same-sex or exclusively other sex patterns. This pattern of results is consistent with the possibility that greater sexual fluidity in women.

Thirdly, inconsistencies among sexual attraction, behaviour, and identity. It is commonly assumed that individuals with exclusive same sex attractions pursue exclusive same-sex behaviour and adopt lesbian or gay identities, whereas individuals with bisexual attractions pursue bisexual behaviour and adopt bisexual identities. But the reality and research point to the fact that there is great amount of discrepancy and inconsistency around this assumption.

All three of these phenomena appear to be widespread across a large body of independent, representative studies conducted in numerous countries, supporting an emerging understanding of sexuality as fluid rather than rigid and categorical. These studies also provide evidence for gender differences in sexual fluidity, but the extent and cause of these gender differences remain unclear and are an important topic for future research.

Gender Equality Goes Beyond Mere Talk of Bridging the Gender Gap

How long are we going to continue with these spineless noncommittal speeches merely camouflaging the issue with pseudo-sentimentality?

A FRANCIS OFM

As usual at election rallies and on International Women's Day, we are bombarded with an onslaught of speeches and write-ups on the theme of gender equality. Ironically, for most politicians and male speakers with allegiance to patriarchy, the conversation about gender equality means nothing more than the repetition of a recorded speech, which they have spoken or written previously, focusing around the theme of bridging the gender gap. With no substantive commitment, what so ever, to whatever they say, as it lacks the bigger picture of the matter both in their own capacity for comprehension and in their speeches as well, they may at the most stretch themselves up to piggy-backing some cross references about the atrocities on women. In this vein it is also noticeable that the members of the ruling party conveniently turn a blind eye to the barrage of atrocities targeted on women particularly, in their respective constituencies, states and the country.

Noncommittal Talks with Pseudo-Sentimentality

Is the issue of gender equality exclusively about bridging the gender gap? Is that the long and short, at the heart of it? The recent hype from some vested political quarters over the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data that India now has 1020 female for every 1000 male resoundingly demonstrated somewhat a similar tone and message. Or at least, I feel it that way! For some reason these individuals who hold their own gender biases conveniently overlooked the limitation of

this survey. According to the BBC report, the survey only covered 630,000 of India's 300 million household. A general rule of thumb in any research study is that the findings from a controlled sample needn't necessarily reflect the findings on the entire group! A similar storm of hype was also generated previously, subsequent to the 2019 elections. Although the women representation in the parliament is appallingly below 15%, this sect of politicians and the media with their vested interest of patriarchy hailed that it was a great sign of change. By the way, the bill regarding the 33% of women representation in the parliament continues to remain a pipe dream, even after twenty-five years!

How long are we going to continue with these spineless noncommittal speeches which instead of capturing the crux of the matter, merely camouflage the issue with pseudo sentimentality? The bottom line here is the stark truth which nobody can deny. And that is, in words we uphold the middle space of complementarity of women as symmetrical with men, indicating that both genders are entitled to equal rights, but in action there is a huge polarised hierarchical space, an 'uncrossable chasm' between men and women.

The Implicit Bias of 'Male Preference'

Traditionally, the role of man is endorsed with the right to make decisions at home and be the leader of his family. This is so deeply ingrained in our collective DNA as well, that in the arena of our societal living we unconsciously showcase the preference for male over female

when it comes to hand-picking a leader. Imagine for ourselves for a moment, what is the picture that spontaneously comes to our minds when we hear the words, "a home-making parent" or the words, "a working parent"? Truth be said that most of us identify the 'homemaking parent' with the female parent, the mother and the 'working parent' with the male parent, the father. Why don't we think the other way around, the father as the homemaking parent and the mother as the working parent? These kinds of biases are not just sheltered exclusively in the minds of men, but in women too, and these are the taproot for all kinds of gender inequalities that thrive in men and women.

'Men are the confident leaders', is a common bias that got circulated from time immemorial. There have been many proven research data out there that when the credentials, talents and leadership qualities of two individuals submitted without any gender details, the selecting body, with a least trace of prejudice and doubt, chooses the most deserving candidate. But when the same candidates are presented with their gender identities, the selecting body exclusively prefers the male candidate over the female. This is because the bias of 'male preference' over female is so deep-rooted in us and we seldom dare to walk outside the box of our gender biases. It is time we went after these abysmally deep-seated biases and jettisoned them once and forever.

Starting from Our Biological Roots

Janet Crawford, a female scientist and an ardent advocate for the application of

neuroscience research to corporate functioning, advises that going after our biological roots of gender biases needs to be the starting point in our conversation on tackling gender issues. Both men and women carry multitude of indelibly ingrained gender biases. Start from here, the very place of our biases! It is from there the brain gathers the individual's learned patterns of ideas and beliefs and makes the grist for the mill of our daily interactions. As a man, starting from this point would mean that I check my male chauvinistic biases that stay implicit and hidden, uncover them. It is painful but worth working on them because it will broaden my understanding of women as symmetrically equal to me, and are entitled to have the same rights as I have, as a human person. This cannot however, come true easily, and overnight. We all need help with it because, as Maureen Fitzgerald puts it rightly, "We are just casualties of our limited thinking."

One of the great tools that Harvard scholars developed in collaboration with the American Association of University Women (AAUW) is the 'Implicit Association Test' (IAT) which helps people to bring to light their implicit gender biases. By all means, its worth taking this test if we are committed to gender equality and starting at the right place in dealing with gender issues. A greater and promising help we could offer to our younger ones is that an anti-gender bias education programme be advocated in their school curriculum, which will provide them with the needed training and skills in creating appropriate mental associations about complementary roles of men, women and other non-confirming genders.



Covid-19 Does Its Bit for Wildlife

Dr MARIANNE FURTADO DE NAZARETH

When Covid-19 first locked us human beings indoors, the media slowly began to report about the sightings of rare wild animals in the urban landscape. Animals which had never ventured out of the forests or skulked in the shadows as we humans dominated the landscape. Then, Leopards and Civet cats and a whole host of birds which were only seen on the outskirts of the city or in the forest appeared and thrilled us humans with their close sightings. During the days of lockdown across various parts of India, we saw reports of 'wild' animals walking nonchalantly on the streets of cities, towns and urban clusters.

It was obvious that the animals and birds found fewer people and cars on the streets during the countrywide lockdown to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), and this we in our ignorance believed had healed the environment.

The streets were bare registering hardly any human footfall. In Hyderabad, this silence was broken on the empty streets with an unusual visitor: A leopard walked out of the forests, made his way to a road, leaving residents fearful and surprised and in awe of his beauty. It majestically walked unhindered through the empty street.

Such instances were reported the world over: Wild animals took back what was once theirs, as people were forced to stay home. While Sambar deer wandered on the roads in Chandigarh, a small Indian civet was spotted on a zebra-crossing in Kerala. A herd of spotted deer explored the streets of Haridwar without the fear of being killed by moving vehicles. And a magnificent sight was the increase in the number of flamingos migrating in from Europe and congregating in Mumbai, according to news

reports. Bird groups chortled with glee training their binoculars on the fabulous sight.

The now pristine beaches across the country's coastline became hatching grounds for tiny Olive Ridley turtles, while critically endangered Ganges dolphins made a return to the ghats of Benares. The lockdown appeared to be a god-send for the environment and our flora and fauna. Environmentalists were overjoyed, as nature seemed to decide to venture out, as man was locked in. With decreased pollution levels in the cities and increased instances of wild animals in urban landscapes, the lockdown appeared to be a respite for Mother Earth to recover herself.

In Uttarakhand, an elephant was reported to come down unusually near Hari ki Pauri in Haridwar. Wonderful videos of elephant crossings complete with little babies showed up on social media and WhatsApp sites in Karnataka. A leopard was sighted in the town of Almora. In Karnataka, elephants, spotted deer and sambar deer had decided to show off and walk about in towns, while in Maharashtra, people spotted scores of civet cats, mongooses and porcupines in urban gated communities.

Here in Bangalore we have been enjoying the visits of the Asian Paradise Flycatcher. A beautiful and exotic bird I had seen only in my tiny village of Pilerne in Goa. It still comes to the massive tamarind trees surrounding the property and it's so exciting to think it lives in the Himalayas and has migrated here for the winter! It flies between the branches doing a ribbon dance for us with its enormous, ribbon-like tail. We just stand there entranced, watching it fly catching insects on the wing, as it's an insectivore.

All these 'trespasses' have been happening

Over the millennia we have built cities and urban clusters, thus making what was 'wild' land into 'civilised' land. With Covid-19 at least our animal and bird life have enjoyed some respite from us humans.

not only in India but across the world, wherever lockdowns took place and regular human activities have been curtailed. The Bosphorus in Istanbul, Turkey, is normally one of the world's busiest marine routes. Huge tankers, cargo ships and passenger boats criss-cross the straits that cut the city in half 24 hours a day. Now, with a lull in traffic and fishermen staying at home during the city's lockdown, dolphins are swimming and gamboling in the waters. A magnificent and thrilling sight for people living in the area.

There were reports that it was not uncommon to spot the tell-tale dots of a dolphin from the city's quays, far away in the distance in the past. But videos posted by residents of the animals swimming near the banks show how much closer to the city they're happy to come now. Dolphins are happy creatures, diving and cavorting in the waves to the joy of humans who got a chance to see them up close.

Wild boars were seen snuffling and foraging for food around the city of Haifa in Israel, before the pandemic, but the absence of humans has encouraged them further, residents say. They can be vicious if they have babies in tow. So, the issue is now so serious that local officials held a Zoom meeting to discuss the expanding population.

"I'm scared that after the coronavirus passes, the boars will have gotten used to coming every day, every night, every hour," said a resident, worried that they would turn aggressive once humans came out again.

However, some species are enjoying solitude in previously busy natural reserves or parks. In Albania, pink flamingos are flourishing in lagoons on the country's west coastline, where numbers have increased by a third to 3,000, say park authorities. Thousands have been seen soaring over the waters at Narta Lagoon where

they go to mate after flying from Africa and the southern Mediterranean.

In Thailand, a herd of 30 dugongs was caught on camera swimming in the Hat Chao Mai National Park where tourism has ground to a complete halt due to Covid. The Dugong, also known as the sea cow, is classed as a vulnerable species and can often fall victim to fishing nets or suffer due to water pollution.

The national park has been posting videos on Facebook of large swarms of fish and other species, and says there has been a revival in wildlife since the pandemic began. People have been enjoying viewing the videos and the authorities are happy there has been a revival and reversal of lost numbers.

However some animals enjoying these new adventures aren't able to stay around for long. A Cougar can be aggressive in human habitat. Several cougars were found wandering the streets of Santiago, Chile and were captured and released back to their natural habitats. Can't imagine accosting one at the corner of the street!

But the thought comes to mind – once these lockdowns are lifted, are these animals expected to retire back to their wild environment – wherever and however limited the space is? To get a perspective of this, note that of the total land area of the world, which is about 510 million square km, 30% is desert and 24% mountainous, leaving us humans to occupy about 45–50% of the remaining area when we started to live as communities about 17,000 years ago. Prior to that, humans lived in the wild, along with animals and plants, as hunter gatherers. And over these millennia, particularly during the present one, we have built cities and urban clusters, thus making what was 'wild' land into 'civilized' land. With Covid-19 at least our animal and bird life have enjoyed some respite from us humans.



Gluttony

We need to consider gluttony in the context of the prosperity that a privileged few enjoy.

JOY PRAKASH OFM

Gluttony is the overindulgence and over-consumption of anything to the point of waste. The word derives from the Latin *gluttire*, to gulp down or swallow. One reason for its condemnation is that gorging by the prosperous could contribute to leaving the needy hungry. When it comes to prosperity, however much one may have, the human being becomes a cracked vase that ironically, despite having no scope for retaining any fill, still has the ability to give more than it could have otherwise retained!

We need to consider gluttony in the context of the prosperity that a privileged few enjoy. Abbot Christopher Jamison says, “Never has so much food been as easily and quickly available as it is today, and yet Western culture suffers from both too much eating and too little, from obesity and anorexia, or other eating disorders” (*Finding Happiness*).

Today, in the area of food, there is no difference between the East and the West. Food has

become the main preoccupation, given the difficult time we are going through on the ubiquitous pandemic. In times preceding the pandemic, we used to notice the mushrooming of eateries and restaurants in our cities and towns. During the pandemic, the home-delivery of food gave the young more liberty with food whereby, in the privacy of their work-space, they could gulp down anything to satiate their hunger. Family meals thus became a rarity, each individual getting used to satisfying their own taste buds due to the easy availability of food supplies!

One of the pitfalls of prosperity is that the more we have and the more we possess, the less we seek to possess God, and the more our spirits become distracted. Thomas Merton says, “The fact that men who refuse to believe in God, because they think that belief is “unreasonable” do in fact surrender without reason to baser forms of faith: they believe blindly in every secular myth, whether it be racism, communism, nation-

alism, or one of a thousand others which men accept today without question” (Thomas Merton: *In my own words* p. 86).

Saint Paul exhorts the Philippians (3:19) in this manner, “For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ: I have often told you and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.” And the Book of Proverbs (23:1) says, “When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you have a big appetite. Do not desire the ruler’s delicacies, for they are deceptive food.”

When there is material and economic prosperity, we permit ourselves indulgences galore. We rationalize and adopt a Hobbesian spin as we say: “Life is nasty, brutish, and short, and so we deserve the splurge.” We justify ourselves and try to admonish others with saying: “Life is short! So, go ahead and give yourself a huge treat like there’s no tomorrow!” Saint Bernard of Clairvaux of the 12th century has well warned us thus: “The deceitful charms of prosperity destroy more souls than all the scourges of adversity.”

Carnal & Spiritual Pleasure

Permissiveness in parenting raises untrained, ill-mannered children who are constantly trying to push boundary lines, failing as they do to understand the very idea of a boundary. Any wonder then that the monastics of old used to say, “Allow one fault and you will another”! Oughtn’t we then to guard against becoming complacent to the point of permitting ourselves the impermissible?

As a matter of fact, diminished perspectives broaden self-permissiveness, excuses and rationalization becoming easier, within no time our spiritual life getting sabotaged through the comfort of our excuses and rationalizations. Before we know it, we have allowed ourselves into permissiveness, and the line has already been crossed.

There is a great difference between the pleasures of the body and those of the heart... In carnal pleasures the appetite causes *satiety* and satiety generates dissatisfaction. In spiritual pleasures, on the other hand, when the appetite gives birth to satiety, satiety in turn gives birth to greater appetite for them. Spiritual delights

increase the extent of desire in the mind even while they satisfy the appetite for them. The more one recognizes the taste of such things, the more one recognizes what it is that one loves so strongly (*From a Homily* by Leo the Great).

How to break away from gluttony

Analytically, maintaining vigilance in honestly assessing our indulgence before it becomes a bad habit is of paramount importance; otherwise the boundaries become blurred and hard to discern. The problem with too much self-treating, with the over-assuaging of our appetites, is that after a while we don’t taste the chocolate; we just want more. Just like indulging in anger makes us want to destroy the person we are angry with. Gluttony will take hold of our hearts and begin to own us, unduly colouring our perspectives. What began with a small “treat” permitted without examination, leads to gourmandizing devoid of social consciousness.

Personally I have found the dictum “a few seconds in the mouth, and a life-time on the hips” effective in controlling my food urges. I give a deaf ear to utterances like, “You only live once! So why not indulge a bit!” Not for the likes of me allowing our health concerns to work overtime at dousing the flames of our appetite!

I cannot help but maintain strict vigilance. After all, one’s health condition can be driven by emotional deprivation disorder. Psychiatrists tell us that there are patients who develop intense urges to gorge on sweets. They attribute it to a frustrated sexual drive or lack of intimacy. Psychiatric patients are known to tell their doctors, “When I am lonesome, when I feel the need to be with someone, I crave for sweets that children go for: licorice, caramels, jujubes, sugar cookies, cotton candy and suchlike, which prolong the pleasant sensation in the mouth. The more you have in your mouth the more intense the sensation.” Hence I need to frequently introspect whether my eating is a compensation for something that I am deprived of.

Finally, all those graphic images of starving children in Biafra, and the present day children of Haiti who eat “mud cakes” and the numerous children and adults who scavenge through garbage heaps in our cities for grains of leftovers, do help me reign in my overindulgence not merely during Lent, but at all times.

Erasing the Historical Memoria

Fanatic human powers guided by political advantage are thwarting innocent minds.

GERRY LOBO OFM

Among the many notorious acts, since 2014, of the ruling Central Government, is erasing of History from the annals of our nation. Is it also preoccupied with the erasing of Mystery? God forbid the arrival of that day! Does this phenomenon not indicate in clear terms that the rulers at the helm of affairs, the stiff-necked and stern-minded despots within the ring of the present dispensation, are making themselves as history-makers for the future generation disregarding all that the past has taught the children of our nation? Does 'New India' mean that it has no historical foundation at all? It seems so! My reference on this subject is only to the recent act of withdrawing the grand old classical tune composed for the lyrics of "Abide with me" from the traditional manner in which the 'Beating the Retreat' ceremony used to be performed. After all what harm do the words and the tune create? It belongs to all who love humanity and who wish to bring the Divine in human setting.

There prevails a stubborn closure mentality rooted in the religion-oriented dominant political party leaders which is vividly expressing hate towards any other religion than the one strongly held by them. Political hate has spilled over into religious hate, making it a habitual practice as an unquestioned value. This is not sanity and is not consonant with a belief in the Divine Absolute. The closure mentality is bereft of a philosophical foundation and a spiritual source. It is purely a



personal and consciously developed mind-set, ultimately to reign supreme by eliminating all others – parties, ideologies and faiths. However, anyone who believes in the Divine Absolute, God, is never deterred by the presence and the innate spiritual power that resides in those who profess whatever faith it be. No threat can ever eliminate the inner source of human beings which indicates the Divine Power. Fanatic human powers guided by political advantage are thwarting innocent minds. Does the withdrawal of "Abide with me" provide solace for the troubled, bread for the hungry, health for the sick? Does it in any way wipe out the prolonged pandemic which is appearing in varied forms today? Do our leaders believe that the common good, harmony amidst diverse voices, peace and justice are all that should matter ultimately?

Erecting 'palaces' of worship cannot be to incite people to oppose the presence of other religions. The worship structures can never be armor against any other religion. Neither should it be a competitive exercise in order to exalt one's own

religion and demean the face of another. No matter how magnificent and pompous the edifice of a worship space might be, it should remain only as a selfless outpouring of a poor human towards the generous Transcendent One. Human history bears witness to the creation of stupendous structures of worship – mosques, temples, cathedrals, gurudwaras – meant to express the grandeur of Divinity and the abyss of humanity. One must also bear in mind that the places of worship are for the creation of fraternal communion among people of all the earth, for liberty within and without and for a sense of equality. If it is arrogance and animosity towards others due to political reasons which is driving religion-lovers to erect monuments for God, may it be known in such spaces God can never be residing. It must also be known that the Creator never restricts Oneself to any spectacularly constructed spaces. If, on the other hand, the pilgrim humanity is mercifully served and loved for its own sake, then physical structure is validated.

The perverted mind and the violent attitude reigning supreme in the discourses of our national political masters contemporarily leaves a strong impression that venom of aggression is what sustains the very ones who are meant to serve. Clearly aimed at garnering votes from the subdued populace who can easily be wooed by the offer of softies, these perverted minds go to any length at the cost of human toil and struggle. On the other hand, a universal mind of educated and illumined leaders would never ever be interested, for example, in withdrawing "Abide with me" tune from the ceremony marking the closure of the Republic Day (January 26) celebration in the national capital every year. The lyric and the soul-melting music of "Abide with me" which was so dear to Mahatma Gandhi, and which delighted the citizens of our nation all along, being withdrawn at the stroke of a pen reveals how narrow a human mind can bring itself to. How narrow is the heart of those who thought this should happen! Adding, not replacing, any other melody of our ancient culture would have manifested an open mind towards universal values and human sensibility. Retaining an uplifting melody, no matter who or of whatever religion he or she belonged composed it, would have demonstrated the strength of a Republic such as ours,

which has a free space for all cultures, languages, religions, history, customs, art and music to play their role in order to enhance better understanding among each other.

It must be noted that only the one who loves deeply his or her religion and all that it embraces, opens the heart towards all others no matter what historical background or religion a person hails from. The One whom humanity worships does not require religion; the humans do. Hence disregard for a historical value only reveals a deep-seated anger and a venomous attitude nurtured to oppose others in the name of patriotism. However, genuine patriotism always creates abundant space for others, their tradition, value system, religious-spiritual practices and the wisdom found there in. Abrupt brushing aside whatever is foreign to one's religion is denigrating genuine patriotic feelings and brewing of nationalistic sentiments and narrow-minded attempts at achieving self-oriented gains. Erasing of the historical *memoria* is building a house on sand!

Founders and leaders of ancient religions aimed at integrity of human beings including a sense for the other, for social connectedness and human well-being. However, adherents of these holistic personalities have deliberately erased the prophetic and demanding challenges from their teachings to suit their own cheap products, mostly aimed at monetary profit. On account of this, abandoning of religion and being open to any human concern has become the trend of many people for quite some time. This goes to show that true lovers of religion need to expand their horizon and concentrate on existential issues that affect people and engage themselves in compassionate accompaniment rather than busy themselves with the erasing of the history on which people were built – physically, emotionally, culturally and philosophically. Here, perhaps a stanza of a poem by F Pratt Green could best illustrate what true religion is:

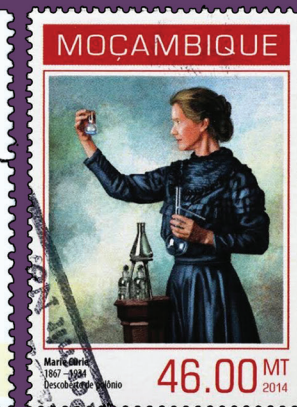
*In the just reward of labour,
God's will is done;
In the help we give our neighbour,
God's will is done;
In our world-wide task of caring
For the hungry and despairing,
In the harvests men are sharing,
God's will is done.*

8 MARCH INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day began as a labour movement and has now evolved into an internationally recognised yearly celebration. In 1908, 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding shorter labour hours, higher pay and the opportunity to vote.

In 1910, Clara Zetkin proposed the idea of making the day international at a Copenhagen International Conference of Working Women. There were 100 women present, representing 17 nations, and they unanimously agreed with her suggestion. When the United Nations began commemorating the day in 1975, it became official.

TOM JOHN OFM



“Women have discovered that they cannot rely on men’s chivalry to give them justice.”

HELEN KELLER

Gender Is Fluid and Ever Evolving

JAMESMON PC OFM

The painting tries to open a window or insight into gender as fluid and ever evolving, like a cloud.

‘I wandered lonely as a cloud...’, thus muses the poet in a pensive mood about his experience with the daffodils. Can a cloud be lonely and wander? Yes, W. Wordsworth would think so. The surreal element in the poem cannot be missed.

Clouds have been a great source of amusement and curiosity to me. Their freedom and fluidity, their diversity of form and color, all these are a source of contemplation and enjoyment. This recent work of mine carries an image of a cloud within the four boxes of a window. Windows, doors and masks have been motifs in my paintings.

This painting is inspired by the works of Judith Butler, who speaks about gender as performative. Though her works can be quite controversial, in the backdrop of the public discourses on gender equality and the sharing of power and opportunities for all, the ideas of Judith Butler would serve as insights into certain aspects of society and its functioning. The masks in the painting points to performative aspect of gender that Butler speaks about. There is a pressure from the society in which

one lives to conform to the identities that are socially constructed. People are hooked up into permanent performance, at work, at rest and at home. “For Butler, to say that gender is performative is a little different, because for something to be performative means it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or woman. For Butler, everything we do, from getting dressed, to going to work, to brushing our teeth, is all part of the performative process of constructing our gender identity.” (Judith Butler in *Undoing Gender*, 2004).

The problem arises when one gender acts superior to others and appropriate power and authority it wants and pressurise the others to adhere to and submit to. As long as this is not challenged, the abuse of power and entitlement of certain gender will continue to plague the society. The realization of this will eventually allow people to drop their masks (Performance) and then could take their rightful space in the society. The painting tries to open a window or insight into gender as fluid and ever evolving, like a cloud.



Short Films on Gender Justice Make Waves at Film Festivals



Nidra

MegaCities-ShortDocs Film Festival, Paris

I always wanted to tell this story. *Nidra* (Sleep) is the unspoken story of gender discrimination even in sleep. 'She' is a model of every woman. She desires to sleep to her heart's content. Like a corpse. It's her long time desire. But not able.

I always wondered how my mother gets up every day before the sun. I thought she had super powers. Before I realised why, I was already in the same position.

When she was younger and could sleep without trouble, her mother would wake her up with a noisy splash of water asking her to study. Even on Sundays, there was no respite because she had to clean her house and do laundry. After she hit puberty, her mother would say that young women should not sleep for too long. She thought the only way to get a good night's sleep would be after getting married. After marriage, a husband comes in the way of a wife's sleep. After a tiring long day and late night sleep, the milkman knocks on the door even before it day.



The landlady shouts out to fill water. She has to fulfil her responsibility to prepare breakfast and send her husband to the office.

Just as sleep kept eluding her, the kids came along. When they were awake, they wouldn't let her sleep. Whenever she wants to sleep, they are awake. When they grew up she stayed up for their studies. When they were away, she'd wait till they came home safely. And when grandchildren come along, the same cycle repeats.

I dare to say, 'There is gender inequality even in sleep.' I want to thank Abhuri Chaya Devi for the inspiration.

Valigiri Sreenija, Filmmaker, *Nidra*



Mira

Prize-winning film at Jyoti Filmato National Film Festival, Bangalore

Mira is a short film that showcases a thought-provoking clash between individual freedom and a tyrannical institution. Well, that sounds elementary enough to effortlessly side with the former. But how about putting it this way: a thought-provoking situation where a menstruating girl wishes to perform an Indian, patriarchal, sacred ritual? Ooh, it's intense now, isn't it?

This thought always creates a spine-chilling effect in me. Despite being inspired by pantheism and freedom of choice, the thought still creates that effect in me. After all, that's how I was brought up all these years: to never question my religious practices lest I should sin.

But come on! It's my youth. They say it's the age to be, rebel, and become. So, here I am with my dear friends, Sanjana, Elina and Kodhai, and our almost five-month old hard work and passion (if you don't count the seven-month break we had to take in between owing to COVID lockdown and graduation hehe). *Mira*. I'm still proud to say, "She's our baby."

The conflicting thoughts, twitchy frustration and hushed loneliness that *Mira* go through in the film were what I had gone through in Jan, 2020. When my Ammama had passed away then, I just wanted to spend time with my fam-

ily to share our grief and move on from the loss. But when my womanhood had showed up that day, my family moved away from me. It was just me and the empty bedroom for the next seven days. And of course, by the time I was allowed downstairs again, everything had been over.

I liked my Ammama a lot, yeah. But I had a compliant heart. Hence, I was okay to sacrifice my days for the sake of my family's religious sentiments. However, then I began to wonder. What would the case have been if I had been closely attached to my Ammama? What would the case have been if I had disputed these sentiments? So many questions, left unanswered. Coupled with the opportunity to make a film, we began working – the result is *Mira*.

Gatha Durgadas, Scriptwriter, *Mira*

I'm glad that we made this film. It discussed a topic otherwise we never spoke of. Those watched it said that it's a much needed topic to be spoken about and it was a bold move from our side to make a film on such a taboo topic as menstruation. This film will open doors to more discussions and spread awareness, especially supporting all the women out there. I hope that more students will explore such grey areas and make many films. I am glad to hear that it has motivated other students to make a short films of their own.

Sanjana Thomas, Cinematographer and Editor, *Mira*

A Day in the Life of an Aravani

ALEX TUSCANO

Noori got up very early today. She knew that today was her birthday. All these years she had not cared to remember her birthday, leave alone celebrate. Most aravani (transgender persons) would curse the day they were born. But some unknown feeling had dawned on her, which made her remember that it was her birthday.



Though she was not very enthusiastic about her birthday she got up early and started singing. The other companions who were still sleeping started shouting at her, asking her to shut up, as they wanted to sleep a little longer. Noori retorted, "Hey today is my birthday and I should be glad". "How can an *aravani* be happy on her birth day, have you gone mad, Noori?" fast came the reply from the others.

But Noori was feeling something special that day. She felt as if some special person was coming to visit her. She had a bath and got dressed up and applied some colour on her face. She went to the dining room. Nobody was there. She went to the kitchen and made tea for herself and after drinking it she stepped out of the residence. After coming out she realized that there was nothing special about the day. Every thing on the road was as usual and nobody took notice of her special dress and make up on the face. Noori was feeling disoriented. "Why did I get up early, got ready and stepped out of the hostel?" she thought.

Since there was no other option, she walked towards the traffic junction to ask for donation from the 'honourable' citizens. But she could hardly stand there asking the vehicle drivers and owner for the normal *dakshina*. "Why is the money we get called *dakshana*. We are not pujaries. But when we get some money, we have to make a religious gesture and pray for the wellbeing of the one who gives them a mighty little coin from their abundant wealth." She was not in the mood to stretch out her hand and beg. She was feeling depressed. After standing for some time, she went to the side of the road and sat on the road divider. She wished some vehicle should come and knock her down and put an end to Noori.

As she was sitting an elderly person came to her. She got up and moved away. She was in no mood to entertain any one and definitely not an elderly man. As she was moving away the man called her name, "Noori, don't move away. I

came to meet you. I want to speak to you." Noori was shocked to hear some unknown person calling her by her name. But she had no time to think more about it. She retorted, "I have nothing to give you, man. Go away."

"I am your father, child. Don't run away!" Noori had not seen her father for ages. He had changed. She had not recognised her father. The age had made him look very strange. Noori stood still, but she was not in a great mood to see her father. Her father and mother were the last persons that she would like to see on her birthday. Noori was undecided. "Should I run away or should I speak to the man, called 'my father'". As she was standing the gentleman came near her. He was full of smile. But Noori had no emotions.

Noori had no desire to talk to her father. She wanted to run away from the scene. She had never seen her father, mother or two brothers for a very long time. She was not even aware if they were alive or dead. Emotionally the very concept of Mother, Father, Brother and sister had become alien to her. She lived in a group controlled by a *shetani*. *Shetani* was the mistress or owner of the group of *aravani*s. The *aravani*s go to the traffic junction and beg. By evening they had to hand over the money to the *shetani*. The *shetani* would give five or ten rupees each for their personal expenses. In each group there is a team leader who would monitor the movements of the team members. If there was anything inappropriate report used to go to the *shetani* and the person concerned would get punished. She would be locked in a small room for a day or even for a week with just bread and water.

Noori felt her sitting and talking with her father would invite her the punishment. Nobody will accept that the man concerned was her father. But something told her that she should sit and talk to her father, very briefly; and get back to her routine. She asked her father to sit on the road divider away from her. Her father sat down

a little away. He tried to control his emotions so that others would not take notice of it. Noori sat one her place looking at her father. She was not moved at first, but later she came close to him and wiped his tears.

Noori asked him how he remembered her and why did he feel the need to come and see her. "I have been roaming around, going from one traffic junction to another with the hope of meeting you," he started.

"Where is the need to search for me? What can I do for you; what can I give you; I get just rupees five per day. It is not enough to have one cup of tea. What can I give? You go away. What happened to your sons? They should be earning a lot. Where is the need for you to come to me?" complained Noori.

Her father taking a little pause replied, "Yes, they are alright. They don't need me anymore. But since long I have been thinking about you. I was missing you very badly. I wanted to see you. I searched for you and now I finally found you."

Noori had become hard hearted. There were no emotions on her face. She began walking away. But her father went after her and caught her hand. He started crying again.

"Noori, we have done injustice to you. We have committed a great crime. You have done

nothing wrong. God made you like this. It is not the result of your wrongdoing. You were not capable of doing any wrong. It is we—we have done wrong to you. We did not accept you. We pushed you out of the house. I have come to ask your pardon. Please forgive me. I have made another house; you will stay with me in that house. Your mother has passed away. She died crying out your name. She had a strong desire to see you. But the destiny has its way. We will stay together. You do not need to beg or get into any other business. I have retired and I get enough pensions to live a very comfortable life. You will not need to see your brothers. But they also feel for you. I have made arrangements so that your future is secure even after my death."

Noori looked hard at her father. She could see the pain on the face of her father. Noori stretched her hands and wiped the tears of her father. She embraced him. She agreed to go with her father. But she was doubtful about the story of a new house her father had purchased. He had come equipped with the papers of the house. She could not understand what those papers meant. Nor could she read those papers. But the new avatar of her father was enough to convince her that things have changed. She also had to change.



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

On 15 August 1843, God gave six young peasant girls of Cantauas, 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.

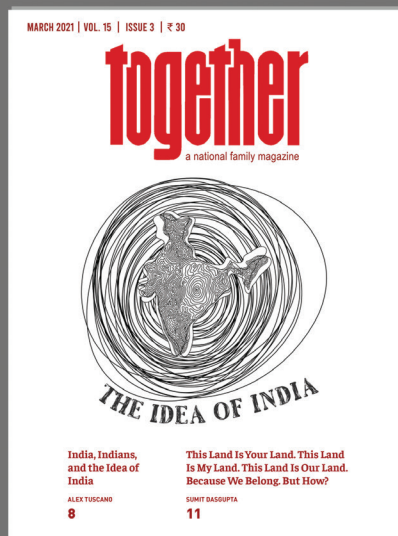
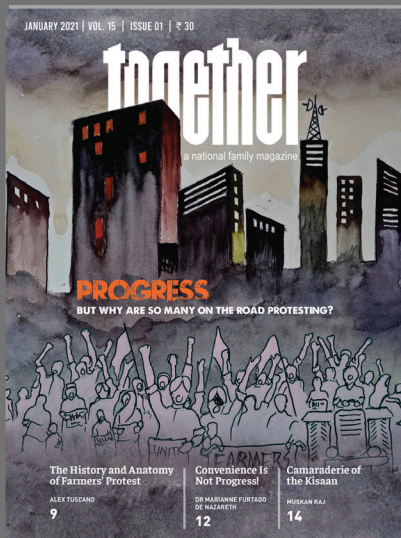
JOHN 17:21



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