

# together

a national family magazine



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Literally Hear  
Nothing

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

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

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

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

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# LEISURE MATTERS

**In comparison to the past, with the help of modern machines and automation we do eight hours of work in four hours' time; but, where have the other four hours gone?**

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

I love sitting idle. At times a tea break runs into a couple of hours. It is not uncommon that my colleagues, seeing me sitting idle at the table after meals, out of courtesy, ask me, if you are done you may proceed. But I feel no hurry.

Engaging in work perhaps was the first sign of civilisation. People early on had already realised that work leads the world to progress; and makes them rich. Their just wealth was proportionate to the work that they had done. Work, of course, is the most tangible agent, of transformation. Perhaps, we also need other forces like, sound thinking and just practices. Consider any civilisation, community, society, family or individual who have transformed themselves; it's undeniably through work—hard work. A lazy society or individual reaches nowhere.

The speed of work has increased with industrial development, mechanisation and automation. Comparing to the past, we do eight hours of work in four hours' time with the help of machines; but where have the other four hours gone? Capitalism has robbed it away. Humans' thirst for wealth has kept us slave to work. With the industrial development, mechanisation and automation one need not work so long as earlier. Every person working for four hours would be enough for the entire world to live contented.

People must have more time for leisure, thinking, reflection, and examining one's life. People must have enough time to enjoy aesthetics. Aesthetics comes from the opposite word of anaesthesia (putting one's senses to sleep). Aesthsia means to keep one's senses open.

Institutions -religious, political and social-

keep people busy with one activity after another, lest the followers begin to think by themselves. Proverbs like, Idle mind is the workshop of the devil, are the inventions of the ruling class. Thou shall not remain idle is a rule for the machines; and not for humans. Dignity of labour is a ploy by the privileged who have enough time to stare at the sky, sea, and contemplate. Capitalism and glorified institutions rob people of their leisure.

French post-Impressionist artist Georges Seurat, with his pointillism art technique, has many works highlighting people in leisure. The most important of them all is, A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, a 10-foot-wide canvas full of people by a water-front staring at the sky and water; and engaging in various leisure activities. His works of art lays stress on humans' right to leisure.

## What Is Leisure?

The line between work and leisure is fuzzy and problematic. Don't some works provide leisure, and aren't some leisure work? We may need more categories to figure out what leisure truly is. There is work which may be remunerated or non-remunerated and are laborious and tiring. There are non-laborious activities like, social gatherings, visits, spending time with one's family, etc. though not laborious, are social obligations to fulfill, and therefore place stress on individuals. Leisure is beyond working for a living or fulfilling social obligations to fit into a social fabric. Leisure is a non-obligatory activity or non-activity. It is to maintain or stabilize in some way the physical or psychological state of the individual. Leisure has to be something that



**A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte**, by Georges Seurat

the individual chooses to do, without the burden of getting a result or fulfilling a societal obligation. Some do it by cutting themselves off from the outer world and withdraw to the solitude of one's house. Others do it by leaving their houses and wandering away to distant places.

We are afraid of the idea of leisure because we only teach our young how to work and not how to practice leisure. Leisure is a personal thing, it is beyond the authoritarian laws and regulations. Leisure takes one away from the scrutiny of the task-masters and leaders. That perhaps makes the ruling class afraid.

As individuals, we are often happy to masquerade ourselves with works that we do, make a show of the long hours of work we do, and prove ourselves socially adequate and acceptable. We make people value us high by our public activities. In fact what shapes us is not what we do when we are in a social group at a work place

or worship place, but what we do when we are alone. It is not so much what we do when we are at work that makes us what we are, but what we do when we are at leisure.

## Traveling Perhaps Is a Good Leisure

Humanity's impulse to move, wander, travel out, kept them guessing and inventing ways; and the result was the wheel. Discovery of wheel has given wheels to the human dream to travel.

Move around from where we are, wander about from our ghettos: moving or wandering need not only be geographical, though that is important too, move, and wander away from our spiritual, intellectual stagnation points. That is where we meet the other. As Rosa Luxemburg, Polish activist and philosopher says, "Those who do not move do not notice their chains." For the kind attention of the non-passengers, you are missing out on life.



# Arunachal Pradesh:

## There Are Times Where I Could Literally Hear Nothing

Having lived in Bangalore for most of my life, to be able to hear nothing is a privilege one doesn't take for granted.

CHARLES DOMINIC

### Northeast India Is an Exotic Land

It is unique and full of surprises. The unbeatable hospitality of the people, jaw-dropping natural beauty, cloud laden landscapes, Eco-friendly lifestyles, and enriching history of the land will surely make you wander in the distant land at least once. Though north-eastern states have been getting a fair share of the spotlight in the tourist map of India lately, it is still considered as a remote part of India by many. Apart from the famous festivals like Hornbill, Ziro, NH7 Weekender, Tawang, Orange, Sangai, Bihu, etc., people are not aware of the social fabric and the rich cultural heritage of Northeast India.

Only well-traveled nomads and hard-core travelers have explored the remote parts of this region. States like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland have become popular due to their famous music festivals, which draw hundreds of music lovers and tourists to this part of India each year during that season. But, Northeast India tourism

is not all about jazz and music festivals. This is a fascinating region, known for its rustic beauty, deep-rooted history, age-old traditions, and tribal communities.

The way of life of each tribal community is way different from others. The beauty of this far land is that you will get to see diversity at its best. Whether it is the language, attire, rituals, beliefs, or food, every tribal community has its own lifestyle and it is way too different from the rest of them. It is quite intriguing and overwhelming for people who travel to this region for the very first time.

### Heaven Is a Myth and Arunachal Is Real

Curled beneath the eastern ramparts of the Himalayas broods a wild land of unnamed peaks and unexplored forests: the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The largest and least populous of the Seven Sisters – the septet of states that make up India's turbulent, tribal Northeast – it lies folded between the Tibetan plateau, the steaming jungles of Burma, the mountains of Bhutan and the flood-prone plains of the Brahmaputra Valley.

Remote, mountainous and forbidding, here shamans still fly through the night, hidden valleys conceal portals to other worlds, yetis leave footprints in the snow, spirits and demons abound, and the gods are appeased by the blood of sacrificed beasts. More tribes live here, and more languages are spoken, than anywhere else in South Asia. A goldmine of flora and fauna, its unparalleled altitudinal range provides sanctuary to a fabulous array of exotic and alarming creatures.

Snow leopards prowl along frozen ridges. Royal Bengal tigers pad through the jungle. Burmese rock pythons slither through the loam. Only heaven would have the greenest grass, the tallest snow-capped mountains, the crystal clear flowing rivers and the freshest air. But heaven is a myth and Arunachal is real. When I got down in Bomdilla, I noticed just how clean everything was. It was so pristine and very different in many ways compared to the rest of India. There was hardly any rubbish, pollution, or towns that were built up and crowded. There weren't many cars or horns that would make your ears bleed.

Just silence so I could enjoy some of the most jaw-dropping views I've ever seen.

Arunachal Pradesh is the very definition of serenity. Have you been anywhere in India where you could hear a pin drop? No? Well, now you can. Arunachal Pradesh is as serene as you can get. There are times where I could literally hear, nothing.

Having lived in Bangalore for most of my life in India, to be able to hear nothing is a privilege one doesn't take lightly. Arunachal Pradesh is one of India's largest states with the smallest population, so you can relish in the space and the room to just relax and breathe. Whether it's talking to one of the locals, watching the light shine through a monastery at just the right moment, feeling the peaceful vibes at a Buddhist temple, these place makes your problems feel small.

I would find hidden waterfalls, bridges, and little farm towns out in the middle of nowhere! It's rare to find a place in the world that has so many surprises and secrets waiting for you. Along the route to Tawang, there were so many yaks just taking a nap or grazing and some just sheltering from the cold. It is a haven for beautiful mountain puppies. They would run up to me in temples; and mountain dogs would walk alongside for the entire trek and I wanted to take them all home.

Being bordered with Assam, Nagaland, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Tibet produces a wonderful mix of culture and, even better, the yummiest food, which I still miss. When I was travelling I tried Momos, Thukpa, Then Tuk, steamed bread, yak cheese curry, Himalayan spinach and yak butter tea. Thukpa is my all-time favourite dish from the Himalayas. Noodles in soup has never tasted so good anywhere else.

Here the people were so peaceful. Never heard anyone raise their voice anytime, here life slowed down, one thing I noticed different was that no one hurried or was in a rush to do anything, unlike cities where life is fast and everyone is always in a hurry.

I like the fact that it is untouched by the 21st century. You won't find buildings stacked on top of each other, a mass of twisted telephone wires, or TV signals here. It's completely unspoiled.





Many times during my tour, I kept thinking that a lot of it looked like it was just set up to give you an experience of going back in time or being at a living history museum.

The best part is you won't mind being disconnected from technology. You won't have many phone signals in Arunachal, but you won't care. There's too much to inspire and excite you to be looking at your phone when you are here. You'd see women weaving dresses, farmers cultivating land, shepherds herding, steam from the houses that were burning fires or cooking.

It was such a breath of fresh air to see that traditional values and ways of living were still thriving. You'll be indulging in the sunrise, or watching the monks praying in the monasteries, marveling at the mountains, or making friends around the campfires and the heater in the middle of the kitchen with chai.

Arunachal will open your mind to a different world and way of thinking. Do we really need or depend on modern technology to survive in the 21st century? Should we go back to traditional ways of living? Is a more simple life a happier one? These are all the thoughts that went through my head when traveling through Arunachal Pradesh. It will open your mind to a different way of living your life. It is a place where people trust each other, are curious about one another, and care about people. The only irony is that you can see monks and people praying for and living in peace everywhere while

Military convoys zip past your vehicles to the border and back.

In my opinion, there is nothing better than taking a walk in nature. It's so refreshing for the soul and is something that you can easily take for granted (especially as I used to live in an overly populated and polluted city). Dirang and Tawang were picture-perfect villages. It provided easy strolls and they would all blow anyone away with their beauty. My personal favourite is the one towards the old monastery, Khastung Gompa. I call it "the stairway to heaven". From here you can get stunning panoramic views of the whole place after which I took some time to cool down and dip my feet in the Dirang Chu River. Here the water is still as fresh and clear as it was from the source. Here you could easily spend hours listening to the water and enjoy the mountain views sitting in the same spot.

Exploring this place on foot is easily the most exciting. You will come across ancient houses, bridges laced with colourful Himalayan Buddhist prayer flags, wildlife, and prayer wheels and there's a surprise around every corner.

India was always known for its hospitality but this was on another level. My favourite was being invited in for some of the local spirits at 11 am. It's heated up to keep you warm. Also, being invited in for chai with a kind lady where I met two of her beautiful dogs who would do nothing but bark at people as they walked past.

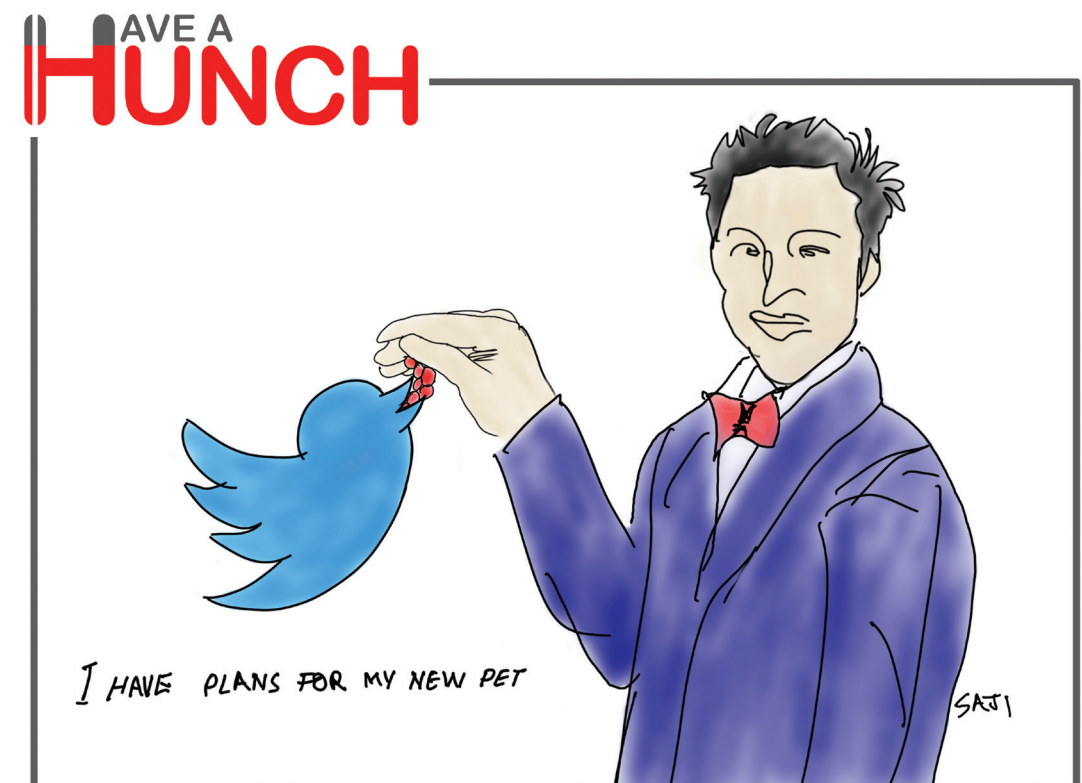
You could also visit the Thubtsung Dhar-gyeling Monastery at sunrise its the best time to visit this monastery. This is when the monks perform their morning prayers. The sound of the Buddhist instruments and the monks chanting prayers really creates an ambience of relaxation and peace. During my travels I met lots of people, made a lot of friends and social media has really helped us stay in touch after all this while.

One of the significant benefits of traveling is finding and keeping your inner balance. Too often, people get wrapped up in their lives, their daily routine of working, sleeping, eating, and living. They become self-absorbed to the point when their fatigue affects their health, their happiness, and their future.

Traveling is a humbling experience. It is merely a superior feeling: to go to another place, and to see people live differently, speak differently, and look differently. This is how one comes to understand how big and crazy our world is.

It is an incredibly vital part of life. It is the best way to break your monotonous routine and experience life in different ways. Moreover, it is also a good remedy for stress, anxiety and depression. Travelling makes it easier to understand people. You will learn how other people eat, speak, live and more. When you get out of your comfort zone, you will become more sensitive towards other cultures and the people. Sometimes I think traveling, is the best teacher to help us understand the world.

Arunachal is the most beautiful place in India I have visited to date. I'm already thinking of when I'm going to be able to go back. Although it's the least visited state in India, I think this needs to change. I'm also torn between unleashing this awesome little secret of paradise and keeping it to myself. If there is one thing I know, it won't be the last time that I set foot in Arunachal Pradesh.





# Auroville: The City that Earth Needs

The concept of currency does not exist here.  
The taste lingers on and people go back to it.

JIMY POTHEN

Ever been to the City of Dawn? If that's a yes, ever got fascinated by the ideals?

A break from work and the quest for quietness took me to Auroville, a city in Viluppuram district of Tamil Nadu. The small town has all the charm and peace a spiritual seeker could ask for. Auroville is an experimental township conceptualized by Mirra Alfassa, fondly called as the Mother by her followers. She was a disciple of Sri Aurobindo who believed in the power of human harmony and love. Mother cut her off from the concept of religion, race or cast. The township follows the vision of human unity she envisioned in 1965. In 1968 the community invited people to join them. Men and women, hippies and C-suite leaders from across the globe joined the progressive township. They work together and live together in harmony.

On a fun note, don't be surprised if you see our friends from the west in lungi, riding a Luna or hero splendor with an LPG cylinder tied behind the bike. Auroville is quite an experience and a sight to behold.

## The City That Earth Needs

The city that earth needs is Auroville's purpose. A 10 - 12 kms drive from beach town Pondicherry takes people to Auroville. Do not expect the alluring beauty of the French town or the

swankiness of Promenade or Goubert Avenue. What you could expect is red earthy roads, miniature jungles and homes built in sync with the untamed nature.

Most tourists arrive here to visit the golden dome structure - the Matrimandir - that they may have seen on Google or on social media. It is the soul of the city. The structure has a meditation center or the inner chamber where people can spend some time in silence (currently closed for visitors). Auroville is beyond all what you see from the tourist lens.

When mother laid the foundation for the dream city, it was 3930 acres of barren, forsaken land. The community transformed it into a tropical forest and today the green cover is spread across 2,780 acres. The rest is for residential complexes and organic farming. Everything that is produced from Auroville is cultivated here. There are multiple organic farms looked after by the residents. No wonder the food in eateries run by the community tastes pure and authentic. The taste lingers on and people go back for it. The concept of currency does not exist here. Residents have a membership card and that's how they make purchases and payments.

Auroville is where I saw the real women empowerment. Most Auroville outlets employ women (and men) from nearby villages. They

are trained in communication, accounts, store management, cooking, baking and are employed at restaurants and retail stores run by the community. They are confident, graceful and exceptional at their work.

While there has been aggressive environmental conservation activities, organic farming and youth development programmes in the Micropolis, not everything has been going well as the mother had envisioned. Some say, material and elite interest has crept into the minds of few members. The crown corridor project that will tear the forest area has created a division among members.

## Living the Utopian Dream

After having experienced what Auroville is like, as an outsider, I feel the need to build similar cities and communities across the globe. But will I leave everything and join the utopian ideal? Will I be able to survive there for long? I do not have an answer.

I want to build an Auroville in my heart where I treat my fellow beings equally and with respect. Where I train my mind to experience the tranquility and peace amidst the chaos of urban civilization. And where I humble myself and embrace truth, light, love and harmony. That's mother's vision too.



# A Family That Travels Together, Stays Together

As the waves hit our world-weary faces, the tensions seemed to melt away; there was laughter and there was warmth.

RUPA PETER

**I**t is said that a family that prays together stays together. True that. But as a travel enthusiast, I would also say that a family that travels together, stays together.

Travel provides an amazing bonding experience to families. Traveling offers a chance to move away from the mundane dance of the routine. It's a change from the daily drama of work, school, finances and relational entanglements. It provides families with an opportunity to forget the cares of the world; to unload the burdens of everyday life and to escape into the magic of faraway lands and idyllic retreats.

In today's fast-paced world of technology, families do not have the time to have one meal together in a day. In fact, children and parents communicate with each other more through Whatsapp messages rather than through face-to-face conversations. Such is the reality of city life. In situations like this, travel offers the much-needed respite from the humdrum of everyday life and gives families a chance to unwind, relax and engage in fun activities in an unfamiliar setting. In fact, travel provides parents and children a chance to engage and connect with each other; something that is a rarity otherwise. Some of the best conversations that I have personally had with my children have been while we were on vacation in distant lands. It's almost like we stop being mechanical

faces and voices and start being human again.

Travelling not just involves leaving home for a while and moving to a new location. It involves a major shift in the mindset. Everyday worries that seem like insurmountable mountains appear to become insignificant molehills as the body and mind travels further from home. I remember once when my extended family was in the throngs of a relationship power struggle, the elders in the family suggested that we take a trip to the sea shore. As the waves hit our world-weary faces, the tensions seemed to melt away; there was laughter and there was warmth. The entire family returned home in a spirit of camaraderie and bonhomie. I think this is because traveling connects us to the larger universe. We become a speck in the larger framework of life. We become a part of the family called humanity and in this we are one.

## Travelling with Children

Traveling with children is personally my favourite kind of travel. Kids look at the world with a sense of curiosity and wonder that is really missing in us adults. The excitement in their eyes as we set forth on our journey, however big or small; nearby or distant is palpable. You can hear them screaming and jumping around in delight while we adults sort out the logistical nuances of a trip. Kids



Kids are very inquisitive and aware of the world around them at this age. Through their eyes, we learn to see the world a whole lot differently.

are awake and running in the early hours of the morning on days when trips are planned; much before us adults. While adults grumble about the dingy ride on potholed roads in rundown buses, children look out through the window and wonder at the shapes of the clouds in the sky. Once on a trip to Ooty, the adults in my family kept complaining about the huge Botanical gardens and how much they have to walk; while the kids spent their time counting the number of roses and figuring out their myriad colours. Talk about stopping and smelling the roses, right?

However, traveling with kids has its own set of challenges. With very small children, there are countless food and bathroom breaks that need to be taken into account. If you are visiting a theme park, there are a lot of rides that are off-limits for really small children and so it is better to go with a large group; then adults can take turns on the rides and watch over the little ones simultaneously. Also, air travel can be quite challenging with babies due to issues related to air pressure. Be sure to carry some candy for them to suck on. Similarly, extreme cold weather can be off-putting to

little children. Be sure to cover them up. It's actually fun and interesting to travel with kids when they are aged between six and twelve. Kids are very inquisitive and aware of the world around them at this age. Through their eyes, we learn to see the world a whole lot differently. Of course, with teenagers, traveling is a whole different ball game. They are hooked on to their smartphones and parents have to spend quality time convincing them to look at the world around them. Of course, teenagers love food and adventure sports and those are great ways to bond with them.

Finally, traveling creates cherished memories. Memories are what hold families and communities together. And when parents and children travel together, bond with each other and experience the world together; they create unforgettable memories that are carried forward through adulthood and old age. Be it sitting around a bonfire in Kodaikanal crooning Bollywood songs or rushing towards gushing waves in Kanyakumari or cooling off in sunny Goa, traveling with family creates wonderful memories that last a lifetime.



# The Open Spiritedness of Pondicherry

**As a Pondicherian it is the open spiritedness that I would like to pass on to people who ask me what is special about Pondicherry.**

SANJIVY RAJA

When someone says we are going to Pondicherry, I always tell them, you should visit Pondicherry during rainy season or when there is cyclone and I feel more Pondicherian in saying it. I still remember my cyclone days in Pondicherry, it is when the complete beauty of rock beach is seen, it is bright and gloomy, with sea breeze and rain, it's the perfect time to go for a black coffee in Le Café watching the waves changing colours. I have also witnessed the black beauty of the rock beach during late nights, the midnight walk on the beach always reveals the belle vision of "Nôtre Dame des Anges" church facing the fishing boats on the beach. The same Bay of Bengal can be seen from a lighthouse located in Dubrayapet, it is one of the best locations for a bird's eye view of serene Pondicherry, just a few kilometres from the lighthouse is a great place, a pleasing white desert connecting the beach, some go for sand run, some bring their dogs to give them a bath there, it's a pleasant place to practice swimming in the sea and it's a place of togetherness.

The other side of Bay of Bengal stretch takes us to Bodhi Beach or Serenity Beach. This beach altogether gives a different feel from the rest because I used to challenge the waves here, and there is a long walk path which starts from the shore—the path grows long enough with huge rocks holding the walk path on both sides, while one can easily get to the edge of the path and can walk on the supporting rocks to witness the ferociousness and the velocity of the waves. One may even feel a heartfelt connection with the

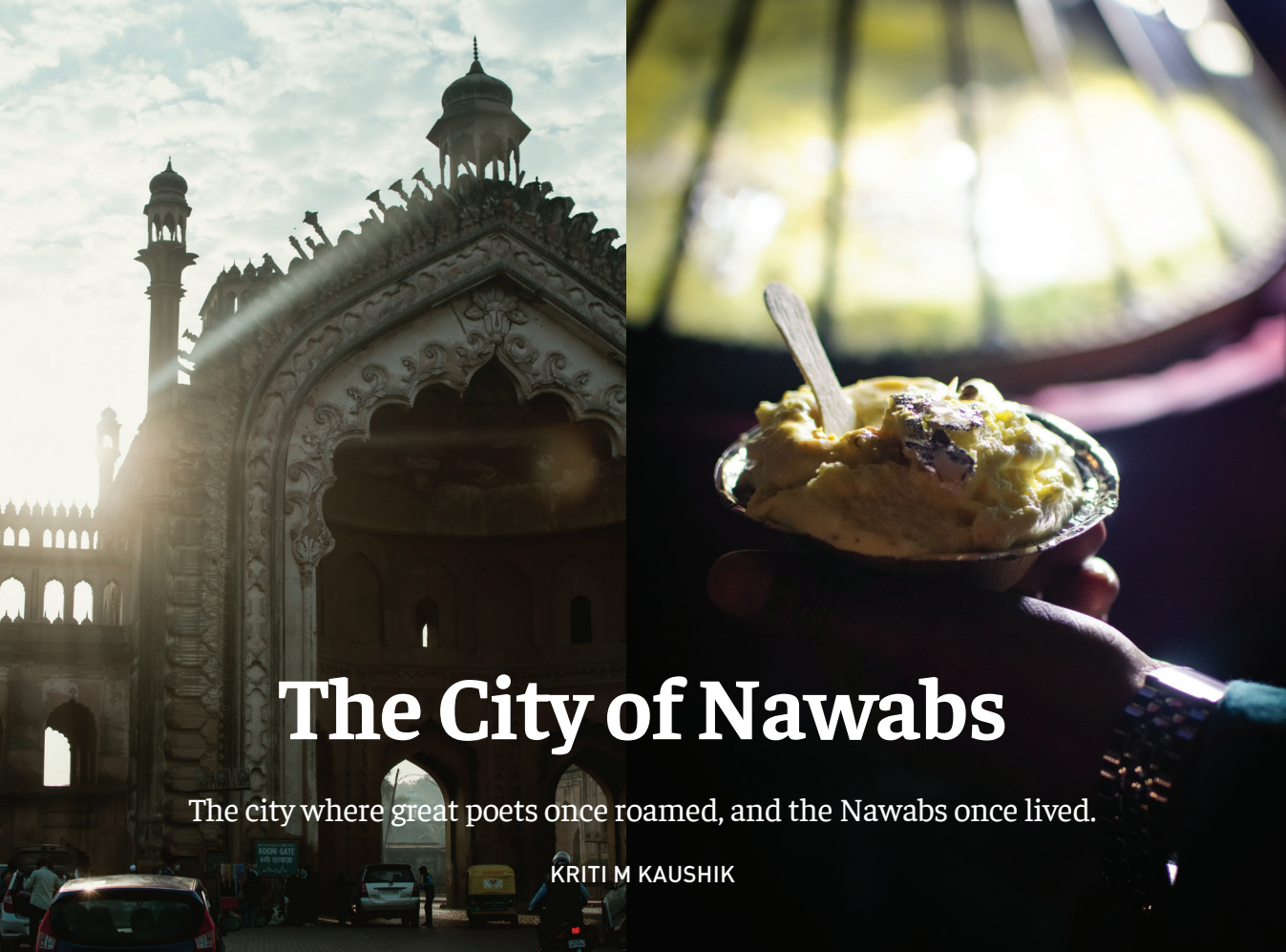
ferocious waves. The other reason I visit Bodhi Beach is that I can see surfers trying to persuade the waves with their surf boards, sometimes Bodhi Beach also feels like Miami because you can see a lot of foreigners having a great time out there on the beach. I always feel that going to Bodhi beach can lead to a mini trip, though auroville is just about 10 minutes from there, but when I take that long road with trees on both sides, especially cashew trees, it sure does feel like a mini trip, it will always lead us to Dinesh café, it is usually not known to the outsiders. Its again a place where you sit and reflect to feel the freedom in open space but if it is not Dinesh Café we would end up in visitor centre (Commercial centre) for it's brownies; and for Aurovillians, they prefer solar kitchen (a community restaurant specifically for Aurovillians). I would say Auroville is the place of open spiritedness because there is something for everyone. The tourists who visit auroville, they usually come to visitor centre and visit mantri mandir there but they don't get to experience its silent beauty in late darkness because it's a place with minimum artificial lights in late evenings, sometimes it is pitch dark and the moon is hidden, and still the calmness of the place can be felt.

As a Pondicherian I have been to almost all the places in Pondicherry, in all these places I have always felt that open spiritedness; and this open spiritedness is the connection I would like to pass on to people who ask me what is special about Pondicherry.

The path grows long enough with huge rocks holding the walk path on both sides, while one can easily get to the edge of the path and can walk on the supporting rocks to witness the ferociousness and the velocity of the waves.







# The City of Nawabs

The city where great poets once roamed, and the Nawabs once lived.

KRITI M KAUSHIK

Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh is a fascinating place for those interested in history and architecture, not to mention, a haven for gastronomes. Visiting Lucknow, for me, was a dream come true.

Lucknow's architecture is an amalgamation of modern structures and Mid-Western style of markets and squares. Few of the many popular places of tourist attraction include Bara Imambara, Rumi Darwaza, Ambedkar Memorial Park and Chota Imambara.

When in Lucknow, besides visiting places, one must definitely have the shopping experience, of buying the very famous Chikankari Embroidered material and dresses. Alongside which, one must not miss out on the array of mouthwatering foods Lucknow has to offer, like chole bathure, poori subzi, basket

chaat, varieties of kebabs and chaats, most titillating of all being the sweet dish, makkhan malai.

I am glad I could tick everything off my checklist. Right from eating samosa jalebi for breakfast, to walking through the chaos of the streets of Chowk in amazement over the number of stores selling Chikankari, while I was relishing the Makkhan Malai in my hands.

I was a mere tourist left in awe over the aesthetics of the place, and for the fact that somewhere in the city streets great poets once roamed, and the Nawabs once lived. I went around in my world of fantasy wherein Ghazals were playing in the background, or someone, somewhere was performing Kathak. However, it left me wondering what it must be like for those who can call it their home.

# Life Is As You Take It

SEEMA DINESH

Moments, whether good, bad, happy or sad, make up our lives! It is neither always a 'bed of roses' nor a 'bed of thorns'. We come across people who have gone through much in their lives. I happened to meet wonderful person, who with her liveliness and simplicity had turned all her sad moments into moments to cherish.

Being a sweeper by profession, though not voluntarily, didn't deter her from being a cheerful human being. As a matter of fact, I learned quite a few life-lessons from her in a span of a few hours. I who always had complaints about life, started viewing things in a different perspective. That woman, who had gone through a lot, showed me, how to be cheerful no matter whatever situations life throws at you.

When she started narrating incidents from her life, without being prompted, I knew that it was coming from her heart. Her way of putting complexities of life into an 'easy-go-lucky' way perplexed all of us. How can someone who has gone through such bitter life experiences, put across things, in such a casual way? This is what attracted all of us towards her personality. It kept me thinking about my own experiences and reactions. She reminded me that 'life is as you take it'. She shared with us dozens of upheavals she went through, but never really wallowed in self-pity. No, sympathy was the last thing she was looking out for! I felt as if she was

telling things to us in order to lighten some of those burdens she carried in her heart! At one point of time her eyes did brim with tears, but she didn't allow it to trickle down, as if she had a strong determination that no matter what, I can hold on to it without letting it fall'. She turned every moment into a humorous one through her gestures! Hats off to the woman!!

The meeting made me ask myself, 'why do we complain about things that we don't have?', why not count our blessings instead, like that woman who had absolutely no remorse about her life? That woman, who earned a paltry sum a month, had no complaints whatsoever and we, who earned more than enough in thousands were just disgruntled with life. She had nothing much with her but still had a lot to give. She had a smile on her face, that sparkled in her eyes and touched our hearts!

Her words ringing in my ears are now etched in my mind forever. She although had a petite and frail physical appearance was one who possessed a gigantic personality. I don't know whether, I would ever meet her again but one thing I am sure of, is that she had already made a mark in my heart. who very casually ended her talk by singing the famous lines from an old Hindi movie.

*Rahi manwa, dukh ki chinta kyun satati hai  
Dukh toh apna saathi hai*





# Internet For All?

**We must not forget that over 600 million people in India lack access to the internet.**

PRANAV C MADHUKAR

In the last few years, technology has become an integral part of our lives. Every day during the pandemic – with online meetings/classes, instant messaging and frequent zoom calls – exposes the stark contrast in which millions of people live in India. As we become increasingly reliant on technology to attend school, pay bills, entertain ourselves, read the news etc., we forget that over 600 million people in India lack access to the internet.

The internet is rapidly growing with numerous opportunities and innovations that can help underprivileged people – information about their legal rights, government programs, employment options, skills training programs, etc. Yet, the very people who will be most benefited by access to technology are the ones that are being left out. According to the GSMA report, affordability and literacy accounted for around 60% of the barrier to internet access in India. That is why recent ventures such as Digital Empowerment Foundation, Internet Saathi and Pratham Infotech are all working towards increasing access to the internet and technology in disadvantaged regions.

During COVID, Digital Empowerment Foundation has been working to redistribute excess, unused electronic devices such as phones and computers from urban areas to rural India in order to help businesses,

education and interaction during the pandemic. This effort has been one part of their 20 year journey that has impacted nearly 30 million people from marginalised regions. Internet Saathi is an effort by Tata Trust and Google to improve accessibility to technology by training women in rural areas on digital literacy so that they can spread the knowledge they learn in their own communities. According to surveys, basic digital knowledge has enabled them to access the benefits of technology in the form of better education, healthcare and employment outcomes overall. Similarly, Pratham Infotech is an organisation working to promote digital literacy in secondary school students across India. They utilise Computer Aided Learning methods in which students in government schools play interactive games which makes digital education more entertaining for students.

The government has also been working towards the goal of a 'Digital India' by increasing accessibility to technology. Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan is a policy implemented by the government which aims to bring digital training to six crore households—particularly those of marginalised communities and women—by April 2022. As of August 2021, approximately 5 crore people have been enrolled. Under the BharatNet project, the

government is working to provide optical fibres for internet connectivity to all six lakh villages in India in collaboration with Bharat Broadband Network Limited. In addition, the Ministry of Education is implementing various programs and policies to try and increase access to technology, digital literacy and virtual education.

Despite the persistent efforts of the Government, and several NGOs to work on improving access to technology in India, the results are slower than anticipated. Even today, over half of India lacks access to the internet. Perhaps, looking to other countries could help direct India's policy.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) between the government and private sector companies can help unlock tremendous value for citizens when it comes to internet access. For example, in São Tomé & Príncipe, the government partnered with an existing private telecom company, and invested in the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) submarine fibre optic cable, resulting in significantly higher speed connectivity. The PPP created a win-win situation, where the government reduced the risk of investment and infrastructure for the private company, and in exchange, the government provided licences to other private players resulting in high speed connectivity, good private sector competition and low costs for consumers. Numerous other countries around the world have also poured hundreds of millions of dollars in PPPs to improve connectivity – Superfast Cornwall in UK (130 million pounds), Metroweb in Italy (300 million

euros) and Metropolitan Networks Project ("MAN") in Ireland (170 million euros). Even India has invested hundreds of crores in very successful public-private partnerships in the electricity and road infrastructure sectors.

Subsidising high speed connectivity is another possible policy to improve internet access. Many developed countries implement subsidies to improve internet connectivity and connectivity speed in lower income and rural areas. With the vast array of opportunities and benefits offered by the internet rapidly increasing, the cost of subsidies is quickly becoming outweighed by the benefits. Just in November 2021, the Affordable Connectivity Program, a 14 billion dollar investment into improving internet speed and connection, was implemented in the US. Even in India, in September 2021, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recommended subsidising the internet for the poor.

As the world becomes increasingly digital, India's ability to develop and grow will be hindered by the lack of access to the digital world. It is imperative that the government looks to other sectors and countries and implement policies to improve technology access.

**Pranav C Madhukar** was selected to represent India at international debating competitions such as the Oxford World Schools Debating Competition, Hong Kong Debate Open, etc. It was through his debating journey across the country that he uncovered the extent of the lack of Internet access across India.

# Human Security

**Human persons are made insecure by violence, wars, poverty, disease, and natural calamities.**

GERRY LOBO OFM

An inalienable right of every person, such as the 'human security,' has come under threat. This is starkly disclosed by the ongoing pandemic, but sadly only a few have acknowledged it. On the face of the earth today vulnerability, fragility and deep sense of apprehension loom large beneath the dark clouds of deadly virus sky. Fears, uncertainty, anxiety about the next hour, emotional and psychological discomfort have all been gripping the weak creature that is here to stay but only for a few moments! No one willingly desires to succumb to the jaws of death, but death has disclosed its mighty power to devour within seconds, the insecure human being. One keeps wondering, as the pandemic is ravaging humans relentlessly, whether the human pilgrimage on earth is worth the salt at all! If at the end of the day death is the only reality awaiting humans, why on earth people with flesh and blood, will and intellect come into being? Human insecurity, at every step of the way, is the only air one breathes and the food one consumes on this pilgrimage of life.

## Human Right

'Human security,' according to the understanding of Amartya Sen, is concerned about what primarily do people want when sudden deprivations that strike society, such as insecurities and uncertainties arising from the threat of human survival or the safety of the daily life. Unannounced spread of diseases or the pandemic often subject people to penury and economic tragedies – reality we all have observed, if not participated in during these dark days.

Human persons are made insecure by violence, wars, poverty, disease, and natural calamities. How fragile or vulnerable humans are is tested when any of these maladies affect them. One cannot leave to nature to heal, support and fill the void within the human heart when insecurity overpowers them due to adverse events, deficient means at hand or any sort of mishaps appearing at their door. Corrupt and discriminatory socio-economic and political structures are constantly threatening human security which all desire. Therefore, eminent economists such as Amartya Sen hold the view that human security is larger than national security.

Love, friendship, understanding and all kind of moral and psychological elements essentially provide human security, without any doubt. However, what is often underplayed is the human security provided by many faceted external factors, as simple as, money in ones hands to attend to physical needs. Therefore, human security tends to be misconstrued and misinterpreted by spiritualists who coat it with scriptural platitudes and place it in opposition to insecurity considered as a divine virtue to be emulated. Religious teachings at times opt for passivity in the face of human need, offering the assurance of salvation from the earthly predicaments. No one can relegate human security to the last bench as long as the human stays human.

## Greed and Apathy

"Man is a wolf to man," stated philosopher Hobbes. How true! Human greed devours the neighbour and his or her goods; aggressive

competitive strategies employed in various human activities scare every hour a contenting existence; ever increasing desire to hoard for establishing one's own kingdom in a human society destabilizes people who are fending for their living by a dint of hard sweat. Human security, thus, is threatened by human persons posing as opposites to one another in the ring of life, one never realizing that being human implies that all humans are in need of security.

In a Republic such as ours, policy paralysis on the government level in different areas of economy, health and education, and their lopsided priorities have let down citizens, pushing them to death knell. The ulterior motives of the political rulers delayed vaccination of millions who were on the verge of being succumbed to the second wave of the pandemic. What an insecurity of uncertainty was created for a while; and the insecurity still being instilled in the hearts of millions. Also, sky-rocketing unemployment is increasingly bringing human security to a deleting point bringing desperation on the faces of the young. It is utterly disgraceful to see wrangling among political leaders for positions instead of being involved in procuring human security by way of food, clothing, shelter, health, employment and education. Many human rights activists in our country who sacrifice their life for providing human security to the displaced are criminalized falsely by the national regimes. They are languishing in the prisons today. Government of a Republic is elected by the graciousness of its citizens so that every man and woman rightfully possesses human security. National security, though essential, one must know that it is the human security of every human person that must be the priority.

Human security had been brutally harmed and destroyed by totalitarian regimes not only in the past but also today in a country like Myanmar where the democratically elected legitimate government is destabilized by the powerful junta. The security which the citizens enjoyed for a while provided by the government of the people there is erased. What we observe on the entire bodies of the people of Myanmar

is their deepest longing for security as their demonstrations against the army go on. Refugee crisis in various countries is another glaring example of humans living each day without security for even an hour. Rohingyas in our neighbourhood; are they not human beings like anyone else who need to live on human security? Why is it that governments of the world pass by 'on the other side'?

## "No One Is Saved Alone"

Televised speeches by national leaders, promising golden days, or doling out gifts during calamities, do not secure human life with what is essential to sustain one's self. Occasional gifts only bring greater insecurity. Placing the national resources in the hands of the economically marginalized could be a way of providing human security to millions, as economic experts understand. However, unwilling governments keep passing by on the other side, and make themselves secure in every way possible by looking at their own coffers and on their belly.

Society is a family of servants. All are servants of each other providing human security with all that belongs to it. One does not live for oneself, or die for oneself. Being existentially related to each other, all live and die for one another. Bringing human security is the responsibility of every citizen. Thomas Merton rightly says: "... when a man is lost in the wheels of a social machine he is no longer aware of human needs as a matter of personal responsibility. One can escape from men by plunging into the midst of a crowd!" This rings true in the Indian society disturbed by politics of egotist absorption.

Listen to Pope Francis:

*True, a worldwide tragedy like the Covid-19 pandemic momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person's problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together. ... the storm has exposed our vulnerability. ... revealing once more the ineluctable and blessed awareness that we are part of one another, that we are brothers and sisters of one another.*

(Fratelli Tutti, 32)



# Loktak Lake: The Mirror of Manipur

JESCIYA THINGOM

**L**oktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India. Imphal, the capital city of Manipur is 48 kms from the lake and is well linked by road and air. It is a huge lake with a land area differing from 250 square kilometres to 500 square kilometres during the rainy month with a typical area of 287 square km. The lake is one-of-a-kind tourist attraction.

Loktak Lake is not only India's largest freshwater lake, but it also has distinctive floating islands known as "phumdis." These solidified circular landmasses are made up of plants, soil, and organic debris (at various states of decomposition). Resembling miniature islands, these phumdis are found in various forms, floating on the lake. It serves as a source of water for hydropower generation, irrigation and drinking water supply in the region, other than being the source of income for many fishermen who largely depend on it. Children of the fishermen can even be seen playing and running around on these phumdis.

The Keibul Lamjao National Park, which is located on the lake's southwestern shore, adds to the lake's uniqueness. It is home to the endangered Manipuri brow-antlered deer, Sangai, and is the world's only floating national park.







# Body Dysmorphia Disorder

It is an obsessive preoccupation with a perceived flaw in one's appearance.

MONICA FERNANDES

The Cambridge Dictionary defines Dysmorphia as “A condition in which part of the body is a different shape from normal.” It is a deformity or abnormality in the body. But it is often used to indicate an obsessive preoccupation with a perceived flaw in one's appearance. In reality the flaw, for instance a few pimples, may seem minor or non-existent to others but the person with the obsession. Such a person is suffering from Body Dysmorphia Disorder or BDD. It is estimated that around one million people suffer from BDD in India.

Sufferers from BDD tend to go into a shell and avoid social contact. They are constantly checking themselves in the mirror and trying to hide the perceived defect. Another symptom is repetitive behavior such as constantly rubbing a perceived flaw. He longs for positive affirmations and needs to be reassured by others that he looks good. He fears ridicule. Sleep patterns are adversely affected. Muscular dysmorphia occurs when he perceives his body to be too thin and is obsessed with weights to build up muscles. She thinks she is too fat and goes into extremes of fasting. She follows diet fads and may land up being anorexic. The sufferer constantly checks herself in the mirror. She goes out of her way to hide her non-existent defect by wearing loose clothing, constantly picks into her pimples thus causing lesions and infections.

Plastic surgery is a necessity in cases such as acid, burn or accident victims. We all resort to some sort of creams and make up to hide skin blemishes. We may need to wear braces to correct our protruding teeth and dental caps. What makes BDD sufferers different is excessive use of plastic surgery for nose jobs, thinner lips, hair transplants, reduction in the size of the jaw and so on. The person is

obsessed with creams and cosmetics in order to hide blemishes. BDD is a mental disorder that needs to be treated as otherwise it could lead to serious consequences starting with anxiety, depression and, in some cases, even suicide.

Psychologists state that this disorder is likely to start during the teen years. Cultural, psychological and biological factors influence adolescents. Advertisements promoting the face and body beautiful, influencers, social media and peer group opinion aggravate insecurities among the young. The self verification theory states that adolescents use selfies in order to obtain more 'likes'. This is because we suffer from a misconception that physical looks are very important. Many adolescents hero worship film stars and their seemingly perfect looks. The entertainment industry thrives on illusions. Actors must look attractive. In order to survive they are constantly under the plastic surgeon's knife. Don't get fooled by those wrinkle pimple free faces and pouting lips. Similarly models strutting the ramp need to have a slim body so that they can influence those with deep pockets to buy what are sometimes outrageous clothes. Beauty, it would appear, is in the eyes of the influenced beholder.

Maya's mother Surekha works hard as a help in several homes in order to give Maya a college education. Much to Surekha's disappointment, Maya quit college because of 'body shaming' as she did not fit the norms of being super slim. This is unfortunate. Ironically not being fair skinned is a cultural cause of BDD in a nation where most of us are brown skinned.

What is the way forward to get out of these obsessions? Experts have put forth many suggestions.

It is important to make an effort to mix with others. My friend recalls how insecure she felt about her dusky complexion which was

considered a flaw by elders in her family. She would force herself to strike up a conversation with her batch mates in college.

Experts suggest focusing on goals such as learning more about a given subject. This will divert one's mind from obsessing about looks. External appearances, after all, are not the be-all and end-all of life.

Psychologists suggest relaxation techniques and stress management. They suggest that we should not make any major decisions when we get into a fixation about our appearance. In extreme cases they recommend cognitive and behavioral therapies in order to correct false beliefs. Anti-depressants may be prescribed. All these techniques and therapies enable the individual to develop resilience. The support of family and close friends is of paramount importance to give a sense of belonging to a person who is unfortunately going through this disorder.

It may be necessary to accept certain shortcomings and move forward. Linda would never leave her home without her super high pair of stilettos in order to make up for her short stature. Her pals would joke, “So Linda you are flaunting a new pair of stilts today.” “Hey Linda! Better not try to climb Mt Everest with your stilts.” This overuse of high heels could adversely impact Linda's health but she was not confident enough to change her ways. When amputees accept their challenges and move on, why can't others?

The world offers a plethora of areas to explore. There are new books to read, places to explore, adventure sports to get a thrill from, ever expanding horizons of learning – all catering to our uniqueness as individuals. Our lives could be multi-dimensional. However, in order to weave a rich tapestry of our lives, we should not allow ourselves to focus only on our outward physical appearances.

# The Ebb and Flow of Our Eco-centrism

The full impact of the war on nature is yet to be assessed, which will only be possible if the wicked man and his cronies do not resort to the use of nuclear weapons!

A FRANCIS OFM

On the 22nd of last month we celebrated the 'International Mother Earth Day', reiterating our commitment to preserving the health, life and well-being of our dear planet. 'There is only one 'earth, the only haven for our survival; destroy it, and we destroy our own existence', an internalized strapline which constantly motivates us to honour this day. Unprecedentedly, the commemoration this year, seemed to provoke heightened emotional arousals in most, given the challenging realities around the world that ebb and flow their commitment to eco-centrism.

## The Rainbows

In the life-shattering days of the first wave of the pandemic we witnessed an array of glowing rainbows in the sky of our hope, in favour of the conservation of the planet! During this time, the mounting accumulation of greenhouse gases generated by mindless human activity ended up in a temporary slowdown.

Lock-downs seized us home-bound, preventing us from engaging in unnecessary travels. Our cars were taken off the roads and our flights out of the skies! The resultant impact was that our ill-reputably polluted metropolises, skies and waters were rendered a refreshing lease of life. The air, water and noise pollutions dropped

considerably, reinvigorating the planet with a hopeful symbol of new life. The wildlife too was revived with a rejuvenating spirit of mobility as they freely reclaimed their way back to our neighbourhood, as close as to our backyards.

Disconnecting with the complacency of the global leadership that shrugs off its responsibility of protecting the planet, and carries on with malevolent plundering of it in the name of development, the pandemic played itself out to be a checkmate. Helpless it may sound that against the dictates of our will, we were forced to pause and reflect on the precariousness of our actions that adds to the fragility the planet!

This unplanned natural revival of the flora and the fauna of the planet, could as best be considered as a blessing in disguise, an overdue, which no doubt, the planet was long-awaiting.

## Mushroom Clouds and Smoke

Currently, we are at the crossroads of our civilization as there is no 'rainbow effect of hope' anywhere on the skies for the conservation of the planet! It has been replaced with toxic mushroom clouds and poisonous smoke caused by the nefarious warring imaginations of a wicked man whose country has the (ill) reputation for possessing the highest number of destructive weapons. The latest in these

lethal, nuclear collection is the intercontinental ballistic missile.

Russia's war on Ukraine, from the perspective of a needed ecological consciousness, can not be brushed aside as a war between two countries in a far away continent. It definitely, is causing pernicious impacts on the survival of the planet.

On the 24th of February Russia started the war on Ukraine, and on the same day it took control of the site of the defunct Chernobyl nuclear-power plant. It was reported that the movement of the military forces near the site newly stirred up the dormant radioactive dust. The European Space Agency released seven satellite images of fire burning within the exclusion zone of the plant. The potential risk of similar nature could also be applicable in the case of the dozen other nuclear reactors that Ukraine operates, says Ken Conga, a scholar and the author of the book "Environmental Peacemaking". Reports also highlight that throwing all international standards of war, Russia has been bombarding ammunitions on the industrialized regions of Ukraine, setting oil and gas reservoirs on fire, bombing fuel tanks and depots and other energy infrastructures. These incessant burning of industrial goods and chemicals is generating obnoxious gases, oil spills, and toxic contamination that jeopardise not only the life of the species on the planet but also the very life of the planet itself. Winning the war, grabbing the land of another sovereign nation, seems to be the only goal of Russia; it is neither concerned about life of the planet nor the cries of thousands of youths and children at the COP26 held last year, for safeguarding the planet with a promise of long life for them and their subsequent generations.

## Two Reports of Concerns

We are living through tough times, more than ever, as we are left to trust our instinct, speculate conclusions on the course and end of this nasty, ugly and unjustifiable war. Many have been killed, mutilated, raped and driven away as refugees. The full impact of the war on nature is yet to be assessed, which will only be possible if

the wicked man and his cronies do not resort to the use of nuclear weapons! Incidentally, at this time there are two harrowing reports that capture our attention in relation to the threatened existence of the planet.

## Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) Report

Just four days after Russia started the invasion of Ukraine, the UN IPCC presented a report, stating that climate change is happening more rapidly than previously predicted. Half of the world will be uninhabitable in a span of a few decades, if we don't adapt drastic steps now for the protection of the planet. "Delay means death", says UN Secretary General, who vehemently criticized the complacency of the global leadership, terming it as 'criminal'.

## American Psychological Association (APA) Report

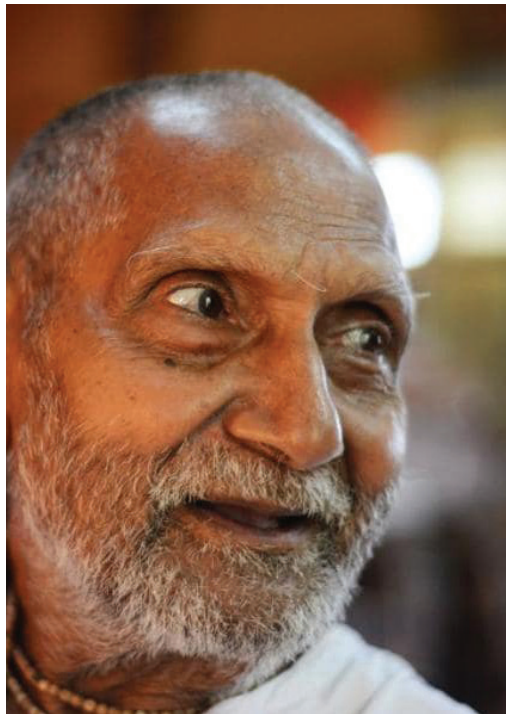
On the same day, the APA released another report indicating that climate change is posing risks on people's mental health and well-being. Individuals are expected to suffer from climate change anxiety, trauma of displacement and issues of grief. The report cautions clinicians in psychological professions to be prepared to serve the affected individuals and communities with better care informed of the psychological dimensions of climate change, climate justice and climate policy.

## Emotions Are Legitimate, but More Is Needed

The writing on the wall regarding the threatened existence of our planet is loud and clear: if we don't act upon it now, we will be digging our own graves and the grave of the planet. Emotional arousals on the thought of the egregious human actions that contribute to global warming, destruction of ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity are valid and legitimate; but what is badly needed is our adaptation and adherence to earth-centered human behaviours that ensure the survival of the planet. Let it not ebb and flow!



# The Champion of a Long, Happy, Healthy, Peaceful & Simple Life



He had lost his entire family in his early childhood, slept many days on an empty stomach.

ALWED EKKA

It was truly the most captivating moment to watch: Yoga Guru, Swami Sivananda, 125 years old, walking energetically & steadily without anybody's support in Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi. After prostrating himself before the Prime Minister Shree Narendra Modi and the President of India Ram Nath Kovind, received the highest award, Padma Shri, with respect, dignity, gratitude, simplicity, and honor.

Just like me, many were left spellbound by the simple yet disciplined lifestyle of Swami Sivananda. I am proud, happy as well as grateful that such a great soul is still alive today. He has become an incredible source of inspiration for all walks of people. He is remarkably the champion of a long, happy, healthy, peaceful



& simple life. He has proved to the world that such a disciplined and simple life is attainable.

Why do I admire him? Why does he inspire me? And why do I call him the champion of human life? What life changing insights can we imbibe from him?

Seeing him perfectly healthy, whole, strong, agile, graceful, and calm, I am humbled as well as wonder whether I would be able to maintain such physical flexibility, and at the same time keep my mind sharp like him in old age. I find Swami Sivananda so fascinating because he has transcended to the highest spiritual pinnacle which I can only dream about.

It saddens me to know that not only he lost his entire family in his early childhood but also slept many days on an empty stomach. As I ponder over his prowess, I can imagine, how much hardship, struggle, uncomfortable & challenging circumstances, World Wars I & II, famine, epidemic and violence, he would have witnessed. Yet, today, despite all that challenging times, he is standing tall, strong and whole.

I hope and pray that young boys and girls should draw some valuable inspiration from him. It is true, we have made a tremendous advancement in science, technology, medicine and education, but none in comparison to what Swami Sivananda has accomplished.

Swami Sivananda has led an exemplary life and has rightly provided the whole world a purpose to choose simplicity, discipline, and good virtues over endless desires. He is an extraordinary master of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual disciplines. He has embodied the truth. It is a compelling testimony for leading a happy, healthy and peaceful life with such dexterity in abstemiousness. It was possible for him because his reverent Guru instilled in him that wisdom. Since he was able to cultivate strict disciplines such as self-control, he didn't get swayed by greed, malice, lust, gluttony etc. Instead, he gained mastery over such vices.

In various world religious traditions, men & women take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to lead a noble as well as spiritual life.



I am not sure how many truly understand the real purpose of such committed way of life. And here is a highly evolved soul, who has demonstrated to the world, that such austere practice is important to live a healthy & happy life.

Of course, we are living in a technologically enabled advanced world, yet we are ill-informed about the secret of a happy life. We understand why Swami Sivananda is not that enthused by new technological progress. He is right, technology cannot overcome our temptation and passions. Individually, we have to learn the disciplines and gain a mastery over them.

He was born in colonial era- India without electricity, cars, telephones, running water, yet he has managed to lead an enriching as well as inspiringly healthy life. Technology didn't enable him to gain such a mastery over his passions but rather his strict rudimentary disciplines.

Instead of developing self-control, we are easily giving in to unbridled earthly desires. To cite an example, even many health experts do not recommend a life of continence as a sound practice, instead encourage people directly or indirectly to release their stress by mere jerking off. Today, we have a living Yoga Guru, who considers temperance, discipline and celibacy keys to leading a healthy, happy, long, and simple life.

Another important aspect of his life is this: he is the happiest and healthiest living man on earth. He leads a simple, disciplined life, and owns practically nothing—no fancy house, no fast cars, no spices, or milk, and shuns sexual indulgence. How can that be? He is healthy and strong because he hasn't clogged his arteries with oil, nor has he corrupted his soul with sophistication, nor has he abused his body, or succumbed to addictive habits such as alcohol, smoking, drugs or evil association. With confidence I can say, he will be remembered and admired for ages.

In my spiritual pursuit, I was personally in search of such great living souls to validate the truth I had come across through my self-discovery. I am glad such a man is still alive. If young people learn from his simple and disciplined lifestyle, we will have a greatly evolved civilization.

In a nutshell, what are the key life insights we can incorporate in our every day life? First, practice self-control; second, live simply and avoid fancy diets; aspire for spiritual awakening; deepen your experiences with God through daily prayer, meditation, yoga/exercises, forgiveness, reflection, reading various scriptures and listening to life elevating messages.



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## SLEEPING TREES

FR KM GEORGE

Do plants and trees sleep? Yes, they do, according to the experts. Large varieties of them droop and close their leaves at sunset to take a night's rest. Some years ago, I once returned home hungry around 7 pm and wanted to fix a simple supper with rice kanji and some green leaves as usual. I thought of cooking the medicinal Thazhuthama (Red Spiderlings, Boerhavia) that grows abundantly just outside my kitchen. Turning the backyard light on I went out and, to my surprise, found the creeper's delicate branches all shut down with folded leaves as if they are in prayer. It naturally occurred to me that the plant was profoundly asleep! Imagination soared wild in my tired mind. If the plant is sleeping would it probably be dreaming too? If so what kind of dream would a humble plant have?

Looking beyond the boundary wall I saw the mighty rain tree (Samanea) in my neighbor's compound in the same condition. Tens of thousands of its leaves are all closed down as if in a state of deep meditation in the moonlit night. It flashed across my mind that in between the tiny Thazhuthama and the sprawling rain tree all

vegetation is sleeping. They might be recollecting and retracing in deep silence the story of their species back to millions of years. Has anyone got the right to disturb their contemplation? Awed by the sight and silence I simply refrained from picking any leaf, and returned to my rice soup and ready stock of pickles. Ever since that moving experience I stopped picking vegetables for cooking after sunset. Much later I learned from a wise elderly friend that there is a traditional ban on picking legumes at night for understandable reasons.

Plants follow the circadian rhythm of night and day. What the botanists call nyctinastic movement (from Greek nyx=night) is an amazing phenomenon that tells us a lot about the extreme sensitivity of all vegetation to light. Their metabolism changes depending on the bright and dark environment. We human beings seem to be the least sensitive to the environment. We recognize it in some minor degree only when a major catastrophe strikes us, like the present climate change and the global outbreak of a deadly virus.



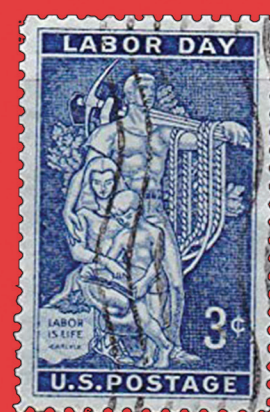
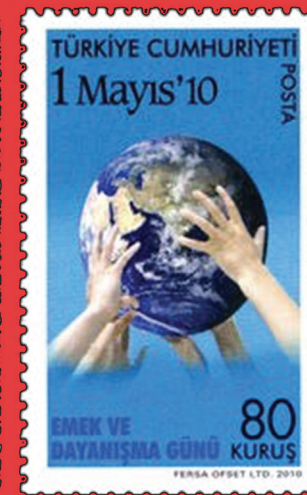
1 MAY

## International Workers' Day

On this day, people in many countries around the world celebrate workers' achievements and march in the streets demanding fair pay and better working conditions.

International Workers' Day is a celebration of working people and a day when people campaign for decent work and fair pay. Thanks to action taken by workers over many years, millions of people have won fundamental rights and protections. Minimum wages have been established, there are limits on working hours, and people have the right to paid holidays and sick leave. Solidarity with other workers is as important as ever.

TOM JOHN OFM



A worker is a creator and a great asset to every nation.



# The Human Encounters of Sleepy from Enchanted Forest – Fabric

SONU FAKIHA



The sharp sunbeams unlid my eyes and my palms shielded them instantly. I am in the process of waking up after decades of sleep. You must be wondering, how can someone sleep for decades? Well, do you remember Sleepy from *Snowwhite and the Seven Dwarves*? Yes, I am your very own Sleepy. If you ever want to find me, pay a visit to the Enchanted Forest. Now now, before wasting any precious time of yours let me tell you what I do when I wake up.

Every time I wake up, I go out into the world where humans do nothing but unleash their madness.

Now, I am awake and you are with me, let me take you into their world. Of course, I can't talk to you and simultaneously engage with the human world, so I will give this narrative to a third party so she could be Watson to my Sherlock. I will talk to you later, Readers.

"Come on my Watson, let us see what these humans are up to," said Sleepy. Sleepy walks quite quickly, it is hard to keep pace with them. Sleepy prefers to be addressed as they/them. They say "we should be conscious of pronouns these days and it is kind to ask the other entity what pronouns they prefer". Sleepy looks around for folks. The road they walk on is not quite smooth, it has so many potholes. They spot a group of women holding placards in front of a building. It was red in colour. Some women wore a scarf, covering their heads while some

wore it around their neck. They were filled with rage and were upset. Sleepy was a bit sceptical of approaching them because they were feisty women but Sleepy gathered courage and went up to them.

"Hello folks, I am Sleepy, may I know where I am?"

The group of women who were chanting slogans and holding placards that said Hijab is our right were startled by Sleepy's interference and also his appearance for a minute.

"Who are you?" asked a woman wearing a floral printed Hijab. "It doesn't matter who one is, if someone is here they might as well join us and support us in questioning the unfair judgement the authorities have given," said another woman before Sleepy would even respond.

"This constant meddling of men in power with what women should wear and not wear according to situations which suit them is violating our rights as humans and is quite jarring," said another girl, who wore a pastel pink scarf around her neck.

Sleepy stood there trying to comprehend the situation. The group of women didn't pay heed to an unknown entity who was among them out of nowhere and they also completely overlooked or might have forgotten what Sleepy had asked them.

Sleepy made his way deeper into the group and was able to hold the attention of a woman who had no scarf around her neck or head but was there to support other women facing such indiscrimination. After all, a woman should support another woman. There is nothing worse than a woman being an enemy to another woman in a patriarchal society but seems like there are plenty of women out there who are an ally to the patriarchal society. I must say they have been conditioned that way but this woman, not an ally to the patriarchal, misogynistic lot but a believer of sisterhood was there to support her folks.

"How can I help you, Sir? You seem to be lost" asked the girl.

"I am, can you help with the geography of

the place and where I am?" enquired Sleepy.

The woman smiled and said, "It is France, Quebec, or India, I guess. A place where, how a woman wears a fabric can trigger anxiety in misogynists". The group of women didn't seem to notice the anomalies in Sleepy. He made his way out of the group. "Wow, the women here are quite feisty and nothing makes me happy than someone who fights for their rights. Looks like they know their way around the world unlike the poor Snow White, that lass didn't even make an effort to fight her stepmother. I only wish Snow White was as aware as these women out here, but she was a damsel in distress, she needed saving from a so-called prince with who she wasn't properly acquainted. The thought of Snow White annoys me, though she was sweet to me I was quite unhappy with her choices" uttered Sleepy.

Sleepy picked up a dried leaf from ground, dusted it and gobbled it up. "Delights like these, I would die for, mate" they said to me. I wasn't startled I was used to Sleepy's anomalies. Don't worry, you will too.

There was satisfaction on Sleepy's face after their encounter with the group of women. He knew that women like Snow White can no longer be found in this era. They are not damsels in distress, they do not need a man to save them or patronise them. Unlike Snow White, they would be furious if a man touches them without consent.

"I have heard there is a crisis somewhere here. Of course, humans are calling it a war. Little do they understand, war has never been off in the human world but when there is a tiff among white folks, they just call it a war. Ugh, I can never understand the complex hierarchies and prejudices these humans follow. Let us go and find where this huge tiff is happening" stated Sleepy and started walking ahead of me.

Yes, I know Sleepy gave a word to talk to y'all directly by the end but our journey has just begun. Sleepy will definitely give you first-hand gossip before he retires back to the enchanted forest. Oh, his pace is accelerating as the days pass by, I need to rush.

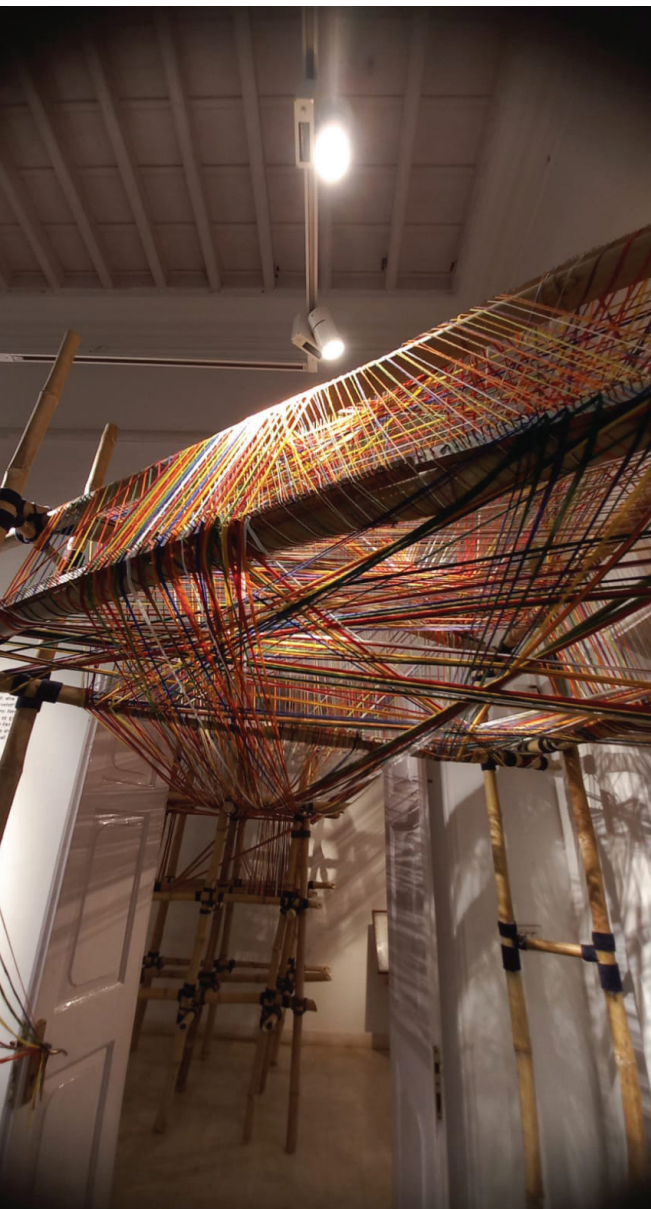


# The Nation and the Native

## NGMA Bangalore Exhibits Upendra Maharathi

**In Maharathi's sketches and paintings, Gandhi's persona assumes a larger than life image, capturing him in different segments of public and personal moments.**

SUPARNA SENGUPTA



The National Gallery of Modern Art has been observing the 75th year of Indian Independence through a series of exhibitions and art installations. As part of this series, the Gallery put up a superbly curated exhibition on Upendra Maharathi, entitled 'The Eternal Seeker'. Maharathi, a modernist from Bihar, was trained at the Government Art College, Calcutta and was heavily influenced by the Bengal Movement of Art, centred around Santiniketan. Between the late 19th and early 20th century, the Bengal Art Movement shaped the aesthetic sensibility of many a contemporary artist. Spearheaded by the Tagore scion Abanindranath, and the legendary Nandalal Bose, this school moulded Maharathi's attitude towards art and design. The 'swadeshi' and the 'videshi' blended in his unique expressions. In his multi-faceted career, Upendra Maharathi was a polymath. He worked as an artist, craftsman, architect, designer, Gandhian activist and a later day ambassador of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

As early as in the 1940s, Maharathi worked towards textile and crafts revival within rural communities of Bihar. Government of India's much touted Cottage Industry business was founded upon the passionate labour of people like Maharathi and their commitment towards reviving indigenous arts and crafts. Of course, the doyen in this field is Kamaladebi Chittopadhyay. The 'bavanbuti' thread weaving (fabric with 52 rounds) emerges from the weavers of the Nalanda heirlooms. These weavers were singularly responsible for massive



The tumultuous years of the 1940s had a deep impression on Maharathi's canvas. Not only did he shift his focus to exploring the 'native', but the political and the personal also merged in his philosophy.

revenue generation for the coffers of the colonial administration. Heavy taxation, famines and poor infrastructure took this legacy to a point of extinction. Maharathi's love and labour revived the fortunes of the weaver community. He set up training schools, provided necessary infrastructure and formulated an intellectual framework for the style of weaving by writing books on them. Word must be reserved for the innovative curation- fabrics and looms juxtapose paintings and crafts from Maharathi's personal collections. Both of these categories showcase the very best of Mithila and Nalanda Schools of art. The Gallery's spaces have been re-configured to Maharathi's laboratory, displaying his sketches, blueprints, designs, books, desks and the lot. What comes out in this curation, is Maharathi's attempt to make his art a part of his community. Whether these are his own creations or his collectibles, every piece of art speaks about a 'gharana', a sense of belonging to an indigenous solidarity.

The tumultuous years of the 1940s had a deep impression on Maharathi's canvas. Not only did he shift his focus to exploring the 'native', but

the political and the personal also merged in his philosophy. His response to the dehumanizing scenes of Bengal Famine and the Partition is captured through his abstract portrayals, swirls of colours depicting the horrors of the events. These paintings raise questions about colonial and post-colonial India's 'national' identity.

The exhibition had a stunning range of his creations—Orientalist paintings inspired by his visits to Japan, as also furnitures and architectures of the Mauryan style. But it was the Gandhi segment that stole the show. A factor that galvanized Maharathi's work and vision is his interaction with Gandhi. He affixes on Gandhi a spiritualist mission, positioning his persona, next only to the Buddha and the Christ. In Maharathi's sketches and paintings, Gandhi's persona assumes a larger than life image, capturing him in different segments of public and personal moments. He observed Gandhi during the Ramgarh Congress of 1940, and found in him a Muse for his canvas. There is no doubt that in Maharathi's early nationalist imaginings, we find a tradition of the Gandhi brand-making, to emerge in later years.





## The Final Countdown and Tears

JOSEPH JOYSON OFM CAP

On one hand, a lion's share of the populace turn a deaf ear to human catastrophe now-a-days, thanks to the defiance resulted in the post-truth era.

"We must weep more. We have forgotten to weep. Let us ask Peter to teach us to weep like he did"; the Pontiff on the Peter's throne exhorts. The words of Pope Francis were not sheer out of the blues. He was addressing the gravest outcome of the war in Ukraine. An illustrious but deeply grieved and vexed Lorena Bianchetti of Italian Raiuno, asked the Pope, "Your Holiness, ...there are many people who do not want war, but who are suffering from it... What is happening to humanity...?"

On the morning of Good Friday, my meditation on the passion of Lord Jesus in the backdrop of the presence of the Ukrainian war-victims under our roof, helped me draw an image of Jesus in tears. The image was later used at the Good Friday-Liturgy in the afternoon. Carolina, close associate of the Capuchin Franciscans here in the village along the Belgian-Netherlands border, sent me a message, "Tears of joy, tears of hope...because after the Cross comes the Salvation. Thank you for your gift of putting the image (in the church) ...what the heart wants to say."

The drawing, *The Final Countdown* is the fruit of inspiration from the sketches I did for the devotion of the Way of the Cross this year. Those sketches were used for the devotion in several countries. They were also used for a visual representation of Pope Francis' *Prayer for Peace* in Ukraine. We must weep more.



↔ "The Final Countdown" (2022), water colour and ink on Canson 300 gsm card, 29.7×42 cm.



# Maid, Mystic, Messenger, Maniac: Joan of Arc in Two Movies

SUSANNA VAS

On 30 May, 1431, a 19-year-old girl was bound to a stake and burned alive in Rouen's marketplace. The same church that dispatched her to her cruel death in 1431 would go on to number her among the saints in 1920. The same country that abandoned her to her fate would go on to revere her as their patron. This military wunderkind who went from heretic to heroine, from sorceress to saint, has inspired countless cultural depictions. Analyzing them all would require a serialization or a multivolume, so let's just look at two movies.

Luc Besson's 1999 film is as heavy as its title is wordy. *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* unsettles Fleming's hagiographic depiction, trading the romantic, saccharine maiden for a crazed, vindictive woman. Although Joan's motivations are based on invented premises, the movie offers a compelling portrait of a psyche that is progressively traumatized by the depravities of war.

After finding a sword in a field and experiencing a symbolically charged vision, Joan (Milla Jovovich) witnesses the devastation of her village, and the assault and murder of her fictional older sister at the hands of English soldiers. The voices and visions—a coping mechanism for survivor's guilt stemming from trauma, an overactive imagination, and a religious upbringing—evolve from an innocent distraction to a serious preoccupation.

The veneer of the mystical messenger flakes over the course of the movie to reveal a mentally struggling woman prone to angry outbursts, impulsivity, and sadness. Perhaps she was an unexposed intellectual who thrust her ideas upon a religious scaffolding for lack of a better one, who turned frustrated upon not being taken seriously.

Alone in prison, she is confronted by her conscience (Dustin Hoffman) in the shape of a hooded old man she fails to recognize as

she had visualized a vaguely Christlike youth, showcasing the discrepancy between who she thinks she is and who she actually is. Instead of comforting her, her conscience terrifies her by questioning her assumptions and unearthing her true intentions.

When Joan desperately attempts to tidy up her narrative by ascribing religious significance to random signs (bells ringing, winds whispering, the sword in the field), her conscience delivers what is arguably the most powerful line in the movie, "You never saw what was, Jeanne. You saw what you wanted to see." This leaves us wondering and pondering whether there is a via media between literalism and inference.

Although critically panned for its casting of Jovovich in the lead, sloppy editing, anachronistic cusswords, and motley bunch of accents, Besson's movie earns its credit for its treatment of looking and seeing. In addition to being a central theme in the movie, it is inherent

← A still from the movie *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* (Courtesy: The Movie Database [www.themoviedb.org](http://www.themoviedb.org))

in the artistic vision that uses plot, casting, characterization, dialog, setting, and background score to achieve a desired perception of a figure or an event.

The supporting French characters fall into two camps: supportive (Fleming's) and unsupportive (Besson's). The 1999 movie offers a secular and divisive opinion of Joan. Yolande of Aragon (Faye Dunaway) uses her as a propaganda tool because she fits the bill of a prophesied savior from Lorraine, Charles VII (John Malkovich) is a desperado with an ulterior motive, his courtiers are skeptical, Joan's companions-at-arms fluctuate between inspired, impressed, and irritated. The 1948 movie depicts a level-headed, unimpeachably endearing Joan who is respected by Charles VII (José Ferrer) without much ado, and embraced by the French army. The supporting characters are surrogates for the viewers because we see Joan through their eyes.

The various possibilities of perception become apparent when you line up the historical biopics on Joan of Arc. Consider this: Fleming's opening credits identify the English and the Burgundians as "The Enemy". His movie opens with a voiceover of her canonization in an exquisite church illuminated by a host of candles, but Besson presents the info about her canonization as a sober postscript on a black screen. For Fleming, the movie is a tribute and a celebration of Joan's saintliness in life and sainthood after death. For Besson, her canonization is either a neutral fact or a heavy irony, given that his movie does not tie up any loose ends with regard to the source of her visions.

Of all the ways we can look at our heroes, our countries, ourselves, how do we choose to look, and what do we choose to see?

**Susanna Vas** has been an ardent admirer of Joan of Arc since she was seven. She has a soft spot for cats, churches, and Catholic statues.







# Woman

SIVARANJANI GANESHAN

*Of all the creatures made by God,  
She is the most beautiful of all.  
A rebirth of the flower of nature,  
She is a woman, the bearer of the future.*

This is where the irony lies for our Indian society, which still continues to look down upon the girl child. A shiver runs down our spine, as we recall the many atrocities inflicted on her.

The birth of a baby girl is considered inauspicious before she could even open her angelic eyes. She is made to shoulder manifold responsibilities at a tender age, when she should have been matching her steps to the sweet whisperings of the wind or building sand castles. Her childhood dreams and joys are literally and figuratively snatched away from her. What had she done to deserve this fate? When would she be treated with respect? When would the world allow her to spread her wings and fly?

Today however this woman, the epitome of kindness, patience and love and the very embodiment of hope and sacrifice has broken almost all the shackles that fettered her and is ready to face the world with courage and determination. Who can ever forget Mother Teresa, the woman who taught us the meaning of service towards

humankind. Indira Gandhi, the first woman to lead our Democracy with exuding grace and elegance coupled with impeccable organizational skills. She led our nation to great heights and raised the image of the Indian Women in the eyes of the world. Women today have become assertive and are able to handle difficult situations, sometimes even more efficiently. Not only is the woman a bread winner, but also juggles the home front and her work place with utmost ease. Today be it sports or beauty pageants, politics or space, our women have proven their mettle in almost every sphere of life.

There are however miles to go before we can consider our women to be truly emancipated. We as parents and educators, must put in all our efforts to make this dream a reality. Parents must educate their daughters and give them all the encouragement they need to bloom into fine women of substance. As educators, we play a crucial role in instilling values that are required in our students. Education is the harvest that cost the most, but yields fruits to nourish one's whole life. Woman is a ray of God, though not loved by many on earth. She is creative through her life.



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

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

**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



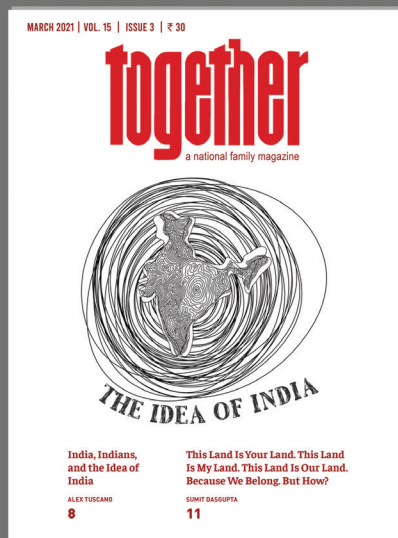
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