

together

a national family magazine

**WARS
DISCRIMINATIONS
TRAUMA
RESISTANCE** OUR BODIES
ARCHIVE THEM ALL

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The Ambedkar
Moment

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War &
Aftermath

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Biennale
Voices

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 also an effort to uncover our shared humanity.

Your critical and relevant write-ups that promote goodness, inclusivity and shared humanity are welcome. Email your articles to editoroftogether@gmail.com before the 15th of every month.

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Cover image: An art installation from the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2025-26. This nameless art is left to audience interpretation. Some viewers suggest the pile represents symbolic ‘endless walking’, and others say that it portrays the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. It has also been described by visitors as ‘lost legs’ or a representation of collective movement, history, and loss.



◀ *Only the Earth Knows Their Labour* by Birender Kumar Yadav at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale

EDITORIAL

OUR BODIES ARCHIVE THEM ALL

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

We are in the midst of a lot of things: an Epic Fury—the Iran war which has eclipsed and jeopardised lives everywhere; remembering Ambedkar as we celebrate his birth; the grand completion of Kochi-Muziris Biennale—the greatest art encounter in Asia; other disturbing things like the Epstein files, the Transgender Persons Bill 2026, and of course, the holy season of the Ramadan, Good Friday and Easter. We may categorise these to political, social, cultural, religious, and so on; but look again, there is something that goes through all these without escape—our bodies.

The idea of ‘the body as archive’ asks us to think of flesh, blood, and nerve as a site where history is inscribed and held. Scholars, writers, and activists across traditions have come to understand that the experiences of war, caste discrimination, class violence, and trauma do not simply pass through us; they leave de-

posits; they become us. The body, as Diana Taylor has argued, holds memory in ways that text and institutions cannot; the body’s memory is living, transmitted person to person, and generation to generation.

When war with its human brutalities enters the bodies, be it of soldiers, civilians, refugees, and survivors, they carry the war in their nervous systems long after the bullets stop. I have known people who lived through the deprivations caused by World War II. Even amidst plenty they hide a couple of morsels of bread, thinking, what if the next meal does not arrive. They startle and flinch at a sudden sound; it is not dramatic exaggeration, but the body’s memory of a time when sounds meant danger. Civilians who survived the Partition of India, the genocide in Rwanda, the carpet bombing of Vietnamese villages, all carry the war in their bodies in ways they often cannot articulate. Survivors of Partition have reported that certain smells, burning, particular spices, the dampness of particu-

lar seasons, still bring on waves of panic or grief that cannot be connected to any clear thought. The body has kept its own record.

Bessel van der Kolk, one of the foremost researchers on trauma, makes a devastating observation in his landmark book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, “Trauma is not stored as a narrative, with a beginning, middle, and end. It is stored as sensation.” Van der Kolk goes on to describe Tom, a Vietnam War veteran who could no longer connect with his family. Tom himself said that after his experience, it had become “truly impossible for him to go home again in any meaningful way.”

If war writes itself on the body through shock and terror, caste writes itself more slowly; through repetition, through a thousand daily interactions that teach a person what their body is worth, what it is permitted to touch, where it is allowed to stand. Dr BR Ambedkar, the great Dalit advocate, understood that caste was not merely a social custom. It was a system of control of the body with a logic of purity and pollution inscribed on the skin, colour, and birth. Caste choreographs the body: who bows to whom, whose feet are touched and whose are not, whose body must move out of the way. The Dalit writer and activist Sharankumar Limbale, in *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, argues that Dalit writing must be understood as testimony that speaks from the wounded body; it is written from within a body that has been systematically told it is less than human.

This is not limited to India. Across the world, wherever racial or caste hierarchies have existed, they have operated through the body. American slavery, apartheid South Africa, colonial hierarchies in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere, all worked by classifying bodies, marking them as inferior, controlling their movement, their labour, and their reproduction.

The bodies of people who perform physical labour; in mines, in fields, in factories, in domestic spaces, carry the marks of that labour in ways that are hard to conceal. Bent spines from years of bending and in the works of Sebastião Salgado’s iconic photographs of the workers with bend over bodies in Serra Pelada gold mine in Brazil serve as one of the most profound visual documentation of the body as archive. They are the body keeping its account of what capitalism extracted from it.

At the Kochi-Muziris Biennale I saw an installation titled *Only the Earth Knows Their Labour* by artist Birender Kumar Yadav. The work invites viewers into a space that feels like entering a brick kiln and reflects on the lives of brick kiln workers. The workers themselves are absent, yet their presence lingers everywhere. In an interview, Yadav reflects: when someone performs intense physical labour over long periods, the body begins to adapt, movements become repetitive, and the person

almost merges with the tools they use. The half-figure tied to a wall captures what remains after burning—in brick kilns, workers endure such extreme heat that their bodies, too, feel burned or melted by the process.

Joining the global protest...

We Must Evolve to End Wars

The essence of KM Gaffoor’s Malayalam poem *Yudham* (War) could be translated this way: over small things, we lose our patience and cool, we grow in anger and revenge. When the food had a little less salt, we struck the table in frustration, and pushed the plate away violently. When someone gave a harsh feedback we banged the door so hard. When a glass slipped and shattered, we raised our hands in punishment. Over small things—a meal, a feedback, a mistake—we became storms. ‘This is us.’

And then we, seeing the horrors of war, ask, what is war? Why is there war? KM Gaffoor answers it plainly: ‘war is simply us, made larger.’ War is the ultimate regression; but it is not something that begins out there, between nations and armies and strangers on maps. War is something that begins in here—in the kitchen, at the dinner table, in the spaces between people who are supposed to live with each other.

War is not a disease, but the symptom of weak leadership. A weak leader cannot hold power through competence, so they reach for spectacle; war is the oldest spectacle there is. In modern world, strong countries do not go to war, but strong countries with weak leaders do. When a strong country ruled by a strong leader, they assume world leadership, they lead the world to the next phase of human evolution; weak leaders take us back to the dark ages.

Japan made one of the most remarkable political decisions of the 20th century. Following the devastation of World War II, Japan adopted a new constitution in 1947. Article 9 of this document famously states that the Japanese people “forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.” The United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France—all permanent members of the UN Security Council, all nominally committed to international peace—all maintain the explicit right to wage war and have the arsenals to prove it. Costa Rica, following the Japan way, in 1948 abolished its military entirely and enshrined no army-no war policy in its constitution. Today, Costa Rica remains one of the most stable, prosperous, and ecologically advanced nations in its region. Who else dares?



Religion must be judged by social standards. It must be tested by whether it has freed the slave, raised the status of women, and made men more humane.

BR AMBEDKAR

◀ Painting by Shivakumar R

Ambedkar: the Man Who Refused to Be Untouchable

He is someone who understood that the most durable forms of injustice are the ones that their victims have been persuaded to call natural, and even divine.

DR SATHISH PARIMALAM

There is a story Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar carried all his life. As a child, he and his siblings sat waiting at a railway station while the stationmaster refused to let them ride in a cart driven by a caste Hindu. Their father was a soldier in the British army. They had done nothing wrong. They were simply Mahar, an “untouchable” caste; and that, in the social logic of the time, was crime enough. Ambedkar never forgot the heat, the thirst, or the lesson: that no individual act of decency would protect you if the system itself was built to exclude you.

That boy went on to become one of the most educated men of his era, holding doctorates from Columbia University and the London School of Economics, fluent in law, economics, history, and philosophy. He became the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, the first Law Minister of independent India, and the most formidable intellectual opponent that the caste system ever faced. And yet, even in old age, he would say with characteristic bluntness: “I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved.”

Ambedkar and Caste

To understand Ambedkar, you must understand what caste actually is, not in the soft sociological sense of social stratification, but in the brutal lived sense he described. Caste is not merely inequality. Poverty can be overcome; discrimination can be challenged in court; prejudice can, in principle, be educated away. Caste, Ambedkar argued, is something more durable and more vicious: it is a graded hierarchy in which every group is simultaneously oppressor and oppressed, with the Brahmin at the top and the untouchable at the very bottom; not merely poor, not merely discriminated against, but ritually polluted, physically segregated, and spiritually condemned.

Ambedkar wrote in *Annihilation of Caste*, “Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind.” This distinction, between caste as a structure and caste as a state of mind, is the key to everything Ambedkar wrote. It explains why he was so impatient with reformers, so contemptuous of Gandhi’s Harijan project, so uncompromising in

Ambedkar said a country that practiced untouchability was not, in any meaningful sense, a civilisation.

his demand for annihilation rather than reform. You cannot fix an unjust system by making it kinder; you have to uproot it. Ambedkar never asked to be included in a system he had already diagnosed as the disease itself.

In 2014, Arundhati Roy wrote a long, controversial introduction to a new edition of Ambedkar's 1936 speech-turned-essay, *Annihilation of Caste*. The speech was one that Ambedkar had prepared for a Hindu reform conference that then uninvited him, because he had sent the text in advance and its radicalism alarmed the very people who claimed to want reform. He published it himself. It became a classic that was, for decades, quietly buried.

Roy's introduction, titled, *The Doctor and the Saint*, referring to Ambedkar and Gandhi, is itself a work of historical excavation. She traces how Gandhi and Ambedkar came to represent two completely different ideas of India: Gandhi, the nationalist who believed the spiritual renovation of Hinduism could cure caste while keeping the social order intact; Ambedkar, the constitutionalist who believed the only honest path was demolition. Gandhi wanted untouchables brought into the fold. Ambedkar wanted the fold itself examined, and done away with. Roy argues, persuasively, that Indian public life has chosen Gandhi's comfort over Ambedkar's clarity, and that we are living with the consequences.

Rights, not Charity

Ambedkar was not simply a social reformer. He was a systematic political thinker, and his thought had clarity. At its foundation was a deep suspicion of majoritarianism, the idea that democracy means whatever the majority decides. A democracy in which the majority belongs to a single dominant social group, he argued, is not democracy at all: it is tyranny with a ballot box. This is why he fought for reserved constituencies, for separate electorates, for proportional representation, not as concessions to injured pride, but as structural guarantees against the permanent exclusion of minorities from political power.

His drafting of the Indian Constitution was the fullest expression of this philosophy. The document he produced, often called the most ambitious attempt at social transformation through law in any country's founding text, guaranteed equality before the law, prohibited discrimination on grounds of religion, caste, sex or place of birth, and abolished untouchability entirely. It was, in the words of scholar Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "a constitution written in defiance of

Indian society." Ambedkar knew it. He also knew its limits. Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated.

Ambedkar was a man of extraordinary intellectual courage, who spent his life fighting a system that had tried, from the moment of his birth, to convince him that his subordination was the will of god. He refused the consolation. He built institutions to carry it forward after him. In a country still struggling with the distance between its constitutional promises and its daily social reality, that refusal, that insistence, remains the most necessary inheritance he left us. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was a philosophical statement: that you cannot annihilate caste while remaining within the religious framework that sanctifies it. He said a country that practiced untouchability was not, in any meaningful sense, a civilisation.

India has, in recent decades, made a kind of peace with Ambedkar, a peace of statues and currency notes and renamed universities. His face appears on walls across the country. His birthday is a national holiday. And yet the substance of what he said remains, in mainstream Indian discourse, quietly avoided. Ambedkar is someone who understood that the most durable forms of injustice are the ones that their victims have been persuaded to call natural, even divine.

IN STAMPS

14 April

Ambedkar Jayanti

TOM JOHN OFM

Equality is not a passive inheritance; it is a continuously fought-for masterpiece of human dignity. On Ambedkar Jayanti, we honour Dr BR Ambedkar not just as the architect of our Constitution, but as the chief architect of India's conscience. He taught us that true democracy is not merely a political framework, but the radical, everyday practice of inclusivity. He didn't just draft laws; he handed us the blueprint to dismantle centuries of inherited shadows. Today is a powerful reminder that the work of justice is never finished; it is an active commitment to ensuring that every voice, especially the most marginalised, is given the space and dignity to resonate.





WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO THINK OF AMBEDKAR?

ROSHAN

In school, it was important to remember Ambedkar for a one-mark question. Who would want to remember anything more about a man who always had a book in his hands and wore spectacles? All books were seen as textbooks that needed studying; this was a repulsion to us as children. We just wanted to know the answer and did not really worry about how we got there. The undercurrent was always to score the highest competitive marks, so reproducing data was key. The more data there was to memorise, the more pages there were to read; hence, anyone projected with books was a natural repulsion. However, Ambedkar saw education beyond securing the highest marks; it was a tool to understand our external and internal realities better and thus place our contribution in building the community.

In a time when education was significantly reserved for Savarnas, Ambedkar opened the door for a diverse classroom. He paved the way for meaningful competition—not only for securing marks but for cultivating deep friendships across castes, accommodating diversity, understanding differences, and, most importantly, promoting gender equality. Today, education as a fundamental right has resulted in the Right to Education Act, 2009. The number of girls admitted to schools and universities is far higher than what it was even 25 years ago.

Ambedkar himself was an exemplary student who excelled in a hostile learning environment that was nowhere near the ideals he later propagated. He was made to sit on the floor, away from his Savarna classmates, and had a separate glass to drink water from, even when he entered university. After being the only ‘untouchable’ student at Elphinstone High School in Bombay, he went on to become the first Indian to pursue a doctorate in Economics overseas. He returned to India as a promising lawyer and wasted no time in creating a long-lasting legacy that is impossible to overlook even today.

To Ambedkar, the individual was someone who deserved dignity and respect, regardless of caste, creed, gender, age, religion, or ideology. This is perhaps the magnetic field that drew any intentional and comprehensively driven change into reality. As much as Ambedkar is remembered for his work with the marginalised, he was also a cornerstone for the workforce. Carrying the baton of employee wellbeing, Ambedkar gave a competitive edge to Indian labour laws. Paid leave, employee benefits, and mandatory weekly days off were some of the several employment dimensions that Ambedkar proved were possible, and which continue to be in effect today.

Propagating gender equality, Ambedkar was a strong proponent of

the rights and dignity of women in the workforce. Equal pay, maternity leave, and compensation were vehemently upheld by him. He advocated for widow remarriage as a step towards self-determination and gender equality; he also propagated equal property rights for women using the same logic. Ambedkar believed that a strong social anchor would cultivate a robust community and nation—for that, meaningful societal liberation was central to his mission. Needless to say, alarm bells rang loudly for the small groups who benefited from a society based on the caste system.

Perhaps, could this be the reason why Ambedkar is reduced to a one-mark question? Is it still the right time to think of Ambedkar? A godsend for some and a troublemaker for others, Ambedkar’s personality is an inconvenient role model for anyone with a prejudiced and underprepared approach to development. While some build statues of Ambedkar, others intentionally behead them, which is why his statues are often secured by fences or metal enclosures, especially in Savarna localities. Even after his death, Ambedkar’s work remains a saving grace for thousands of people from the marginalised and depressed sections of society. This is why today, and every day, is the right time to think of Ambedkar.

So, what is the legacy that Ambedkar leaves for those who see him as a role model, those who embody his ideals, and those who never lose an opportunity to behead his statues? Unfortunately, no textbook answer can help. Those who try to decapitate his statues or his ideals feel eternally threatened despite their generational entitlements, while those who see him as a role model either ritualise his memory or find their own route to self-determination. Today, you can find Ambedkar almost everywhere—everyone wants a piece of him, even those he challenged (and won).

However, Ambedkar significantly subscribed to the legacy of Gautam Buddha, who led one of the earliest revolutions against caste oppression. Some statues of Buddha dating back over 2,000 years have been discovered buried intact, decapitated, or thoroughly destroyed. It seems as though neither Buddha nor Ambedkar minded losing their heads for their beliefs. Both have been the subject of intense scrutiny, critique, and even violence after their respective deaths, spanning 2,000 years of history in our subcontinent. Ambedkar did not reinvent the wheel; he found a way for the wheel to serve everyone well. Like him, there were many before and during his time who sought to leave the world better than how they found it.

Ambedkar, born into a Dalit household, experienced social, religious, cultural, economic, and political discrimination at all stages of his life. This led Ambedkar to empathise with those who experienced similar discrimination during his time, and even beyond it. He kept his head on his shoulders and did all he could to ensure nobody was left out. He died in his sleep after a prolonged illness, survived by his family and leaving behind a wealth of unpublished writings.

Ambedkar remembers us today, even without knowing our names or backgrounds. He remembers the working woman and man, the child who needs care and education, the widow, the daughter who is heir to a fair share of her parents’ inheritance, and the child who is the first in their generation to receive an education in an unequal society. Ambedkar opened the door to enriching the mainstream with a diversity that nurtures a united, compassionate, and liberated country. Whether today is the right time to think of Ambedkar or not, Ambedkar has always thought, and continues to think, about us every day.

*Happy Birthday Bhim Rao Ambedkar.
Jai Bhim!*

LOSS OF SCHEDULE CASTE STATUS AFTER CONVERSION

AN AMBEDKAR-CHRIST PERSPECTIVE

To approach conversion as a means of preserving compensatory claims rooted in a renounced system risks reducing faith to utility.

DR LOURDU AUGUSTINE OFM



In the March 2026 ruling of *Chinthada Anand vs State of Andhra Pradesh*, a pastor contested that he could not lose his schedule caste status after voluntary conversion to Christianity.

The Supreme Court of India reaffirmed that individuals who convert to Christianity (or other religions outside Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism) immediately and completely lose their Scheduled Caste (SC) status. The ruling of the Supreme Court Bench comprising Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra and Justice Manmohan is not merely correct—it is a forceful, principled, and unassailable affirmation of constitutional integrity. This judgment deserves not mild approval, but emphatic and unwavering support.

At its core, the decision recognises a fundamental truth: Scheduled Caste status, as defined under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, is not an abstract or transferable entitlement. It is rooted in a specific historical experience of oppression within a particular socio-religious framework. To detach it from that context is to empty it of meaning. The Court, with admirable clarity, has rejected such dilution. Universalizing it beyond its intended scope would undermine its core purpose. It would deprive those who continue to suffer caste-based discrimination within the recognised framework, while enabling claims from those who have consciously stepped outside it. Such an outcome is both unjust and unsustainable.

It is here that the towering vision of BR Ambedkar becomes indispensable. Dr Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Indian Constitution and one of the fiercest critics of caste oppression, understood better than anyone that social justice

must be precise, not vague; targeted, not indiscriminate. His lifelong struggle was not merely against inequality in the abstract, but against the specific, structural realities of caste discrimination embedded within certain social orders.

In his own words “I have, therefore, no hesitation in saying that such a religion must be destroyed, and I say, there is nothing irreligious in working for the destruction of such a religion.” His own life offers a profound lens through which to view this judgment. When he chose to embrace Buddhism, it was not a casual or opportunistic act—it was a radical, deliberate rejection of the caste system that had oppressed millions. His famous declaration, “I was born a Hindu, but I will not die a Hindu,” was not just a personal statement; it was a political and moral manifesto. Conversion, for Ambedkar, was an act of liberation—a complete break from a system of graded inequality.

Can one renounce a system yet continue to claim its compensatory benefits? Such a position would have been entirely inconsistent with his intellectual rigor and moral clarity. For him, rights and remedies were tied to lived realities. Once those realities changed, the framework of entitlement had to be reconsidered. The Supreme Court’s ruling reflects this very logic. It honours Ambedkar not by sentiment, but by substance.

From a Christian perspective, the Courts ruling finds a striking parallel in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christianity does not offer a mechanism for preserving old hierarchies under a new identity; it calls for their complete dismantling. The Scripture is not a strategy for negotiating privilege—it is a call to transformation.

Conversion, for Ambedkar, was an act of liberation—a complete break from a system of graded inequality.

Conversion, in the teaching of Jesus Christ, is not a strategy for social or material gain but a costly and decisive break from the past. As Luke 14:33 suggests, discipleship demands renunciation, not selective retention. It calls for surrendering former securities, identities, and advantages rather than repurposing them for benefit. To approach conversion as a means of preserving compensatory claims rooted in a renounced system risks reducing faith to utility. True conversion, therefore, entails a willingness to bear loss and embrace transformation, not to negotiate continuity with what has been consciously left behind.

Equally powerful is the declaration in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new is here!” The transformation described here is total. It does not permit selective retention of past identities when they serve material interests. Conversion, in the Christian sense, is not a superficial shift; it is a profound reconstitution of self. To treat it otherwise is to reduce it to a transactional convenience.

In this light, the Supreme Court’s judgment emerges as not only constitutionally sound but morally coherent. It refuses to allow the instrumentalisation of religion for material gain. It insists that choices—especially those as significant as religious conversion—carry consequences. This is not harshness; it is integrity. This judgment stands at the intersection of constitutional law, social justice, and moral philosophy. It echoes the precision of Ambedkar’s vision, the transformative radicalism of Christ’s teachings. The Court has not merely interpreted the law—it has defended its soul.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Editing together magazine for last five and half years was a humbling experience; it is a privilege I will carry quietly with me. In every page of last 62 issues, my only obsession was to maintain this magazine as an inclusive conversation platform, especially for people who have found themselves on the margins of life and society—their stories, ideas, and life must be told as a preferential option, even if everything else have to wait (apologies for articles I have put aside).

And so, with gratitude for every reader, every writer, and every conversation this space made possible, I pass the pen. It is my joy to introduce **Dr Lourdu Augustine OFM** as the new editor of together. He is a professor and a scholar in social work; and that tells you something important about how he sees the world—not from a distance, but from within it. He brings to this chair not just an academician’s rigour, but a practitioner’s understanding of people, of community, of what it means to live alongside others and make sense of that experience. I wholeheartedly thank Mathew Joseph OFM, the manager for his relentless support and efforts; he will be handing over his office to **Joseph Raj OFM**. I welcome them warmly, and I know you will too.

Signing off, Saji P Mathew OFM.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill 2026

“In section 4 of the Principal Act, sub-section (2) shall be omitted.” –Section 3.

ANIRUDH

A little over three months after Adolf Hitler came to power as the Chancellor of Germany, a horde of Nazi students stormed the Institute for Sexual Science, the leading institute for queer and trans research and care at the time. They ransacked the institute, stealing and later burning tens of thousands of books containing invaluable research on the history and healthcare of transgender people.

Trans erasure, whether legislatively through instruments like the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 or through literal persecution and murder, has always been central to any fascist regime’s MO. Fascism thrives by making people attach themselves to discrete, mutually exclusive, and strictly hierarchical ideas of society, a notion that queer and trans people belie through their very existence.

How do you control a woman’s reproductive labour, for example, without first defining a woman, and by extension, a non-woman? In its 2014 NALSA Judgement, the Supreme Court of India acknowledged that the right to self-determination is a crucial component of a dignified life, which is guaranteed to every Indian through Article 21 of the Constitution. For a population whose history is a saga of being told how to exist, and, indeed, whether to exist, the right to self-determination becomes the foundational ground for asserting our equality.

The BJP Government could not care less. This new Amendment Bill is the latest in a series of systemic attacks that this party and its government has perpetrated on the dignity of the people within its ambit. Over the past decade, this government has rendered second-class citizen status to whichever community they choose as their target du jour, with Muslims, Dalits, and informal workers seemingly being their favourite victims.



In the 2011 Census, the government claimed that the transgender population of the country stands at 5,00,000, an absurdly low number even from the perspective of the global average.

Having closely followed, and tried to resist, the impositional hegemony of Modi’s India, I find myself looking for the ulterior motives behind this government’s actions. The government is presenting the Bill as a necessity to prevent the misuse of schemes and benefits meant for transgender people, but this dressing of altruism is unconvincing for those who remember the protest surrounding the Trans Act of 2019. While the proposed Bill is much more detrimental to the rights of trans people than the Act, we must remember that the infantilisation and regulation of transgender people is woven into the Act as well.

Nazis persecuted queer and trans people in the name of maintaining racial purity, upholding family values, and eradicating “un-German” behaviours from the population. These articulations sound very familiar to anyone who has had the displeasure of hearing sitting MPs, government lawyers, and party members wax about queer issues. Unfortunately for the BJP, the long history of queer and trans persons in India means that we cannot be exterminated wholesale; the best they can do, for now, is to define the majority of us out of existence, thereby weakening the voice with which we demand our rights.

Just as we are keen to not be taken in by the benevolent wrapper surrounding this piece of extremely dehumanising legislation, we must be diligent in our investigation of the motivations behind this action. At this stage, I find myself asking: what do they really want? Attacks on transgender people, particularly on the right to self-determination, function as the proverbial canary in the coal mine: a herald of something much worse.

Here are some provisions in the proposed Bill whose greater purpose seems to be to lay the groundwork for expanding state control over individual bodies and lives:

- Reinstatement of a medical “authority” who certifies one’s transgender identity.
- Criminalisation of “forced conversion”.
- Removal of the right of post-op trans people to identify as transgender.

While the current target of these actions might be specifically the trans community, it is important to remember that the actions themselves are universal. Trans and queer people have always been the guinea pigs of totalitarian action: a little-cared for population on whom you can exercise the most vile atrocities as a way to push the acceptable boundaries of state control in the mind of the general population. Why should “normal” people object to actions taken against the trans community? What great systemic consequences could possibly result from the state patronising the handful of people who call themselves trans?

In the 2011 Census, the government claimed that the transgender population of the country stands at 5,00,000, an absurdly low number even from the perspective of the global average. This was the reported number before the NALSA Judgement legally recognised “transgender” as a third legal gender alongside “male” and “female”. The expectation was that this legal recognition would reflect an increased trans population in the next census, allowing us to finally escape the neglect we merit as a “miniscule minority”.

Not only does the census seem like a pipe dream, but the passing of this Bill into Act threatens a forced return to the closet for the millions of us engaged with the humiliation ritual of trying to find personhood as transgender people.

“A person recognised as transgender under sub-section (1) shall have a right to self-perceived gender identity” - Section 4 (2); The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

Bunny (Anirudh) is a transgender person and social worker. They have been working on issues of gender and sexuality, self-determination, fundamental rights, and human dignity for about a decade. They are interested in the use of language and progressive pedagogy for social change. Currently, Bunny is working on improving how the non-profit sector engages with the world, using dialogue-based and games-based methodology to make social participation more accessible. In their free time, Bunny enjoys cooking, solving puzzles, musing on the mundane, and envisioning the end of Brahmanical Patriarchy.

Epstein Files

Singing About the Dark Times

An absolute lack of conscience. Nothing, nothing guilt the ones drunk on power, wealth, and influence.

MS ANONYMOUS



Songs, paintings, art in general have served as a powerful human response to crisis, conflict and trouble. They are acts of protests, resistance and an undying demand for justice. A faint light that keeps alive even during heavy storms of darkness.

Literature is filled with lines we turn to for refuge, for courage, for strength to keep going. And yet, even the bravest of us shall shiver to offer words of comfort to those who survived Jeffrey Epstein's systematic and organised network of exploitation and abuse, panned over several decades.

This is not an attempt to write beautiful literature, or, to find refuge in it. Neither is this an effort to string together complex sounding words to appear intellectual. This is, at best a very naive effort at trying to bring into notice the darkness that was created, the lives that were damaged, the women who shall never live down the horror of their exploitation, their humiliation. "Epstein Files", is a grave crime against humanity

and civilisation. Every detail about this case brings to light only one truth – a collective moral rot, of the ones fluent in 'power', 'influence' and 'wealth'. An absolute lack of conscience collectively. Nothing, nothing guilt the ones drunk on power and wealth. The gory darkness that is Epstein files is a lot of networks working together to meet only one end – to exploit the vulnerable, to exploit the ones already exploited so that the "privileged" are "pleased".

As seen in the documents released, the news stories, the Netflix documentary series, the victims were mostly very young girls, girls who came from broken homes, girls who deeply struggled with finances, girls with

histories of previous sexual abuse. Around 3.5 million documents, released after a lot of fighting back, and yet we are only beginning to scratch the tip of the iceberg. The first case registered against Epstein was in 1996, yet the world has come to know about it after about 30 years.

This alone should speak to us regarding the ways in which the powerful walks away with anything that an average person can only begin to imagine. That is the nature of this elaborate network of crime – unimaginable.

Preying on vulnerable girls, who were trying to earn money only to sustain themselves, then manipulating them into finding a sense of comfort, support and understanding in the "saviour figures"; to use their helplessness against them and eventually to compel them in participating in criminal activity; has created the kind of trauma that shall haunt the survivors and the world for generations to come. If this was

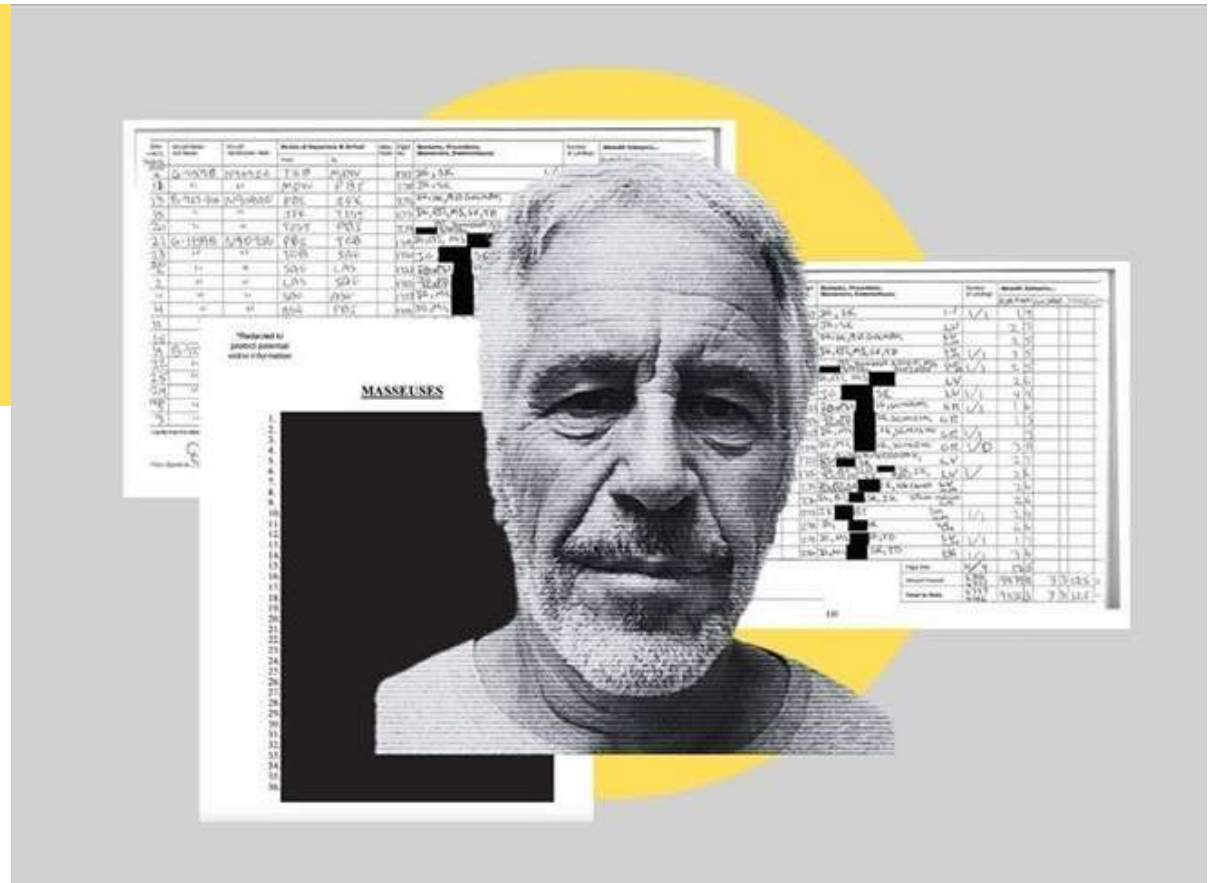


Image: Anadolu Agency (AA)

not enough, victims who managed to somehow escape were systematically intimidated and threatened.

The role played by the judiciary, the FBI, the ones playing devil's advocate; toying around with "diplomatic exchanges", earning "comfortable majority" in "comfortable meetings", the accused screaming their innocence with unmatched confidence, a professor of law in Harvard, brings to mind the following lines: "Education is not memorising that Hitler killed six million Jews," according to Chomsky, "education is understanding how millions of ordinary Germans were convinced that it was required. Education is learning how to spot the signs of history repeating itself."

Until a couple of months ago, I would have liked the thought behind these lines without a question to follow up. But, today, the proximity of Chomsky to Epstein, a grotesque figure of elite corruption, exposes a harsher truth, that of blindly worshipping our intellectual heroes.

There is nothing palatable about any of this, nothing is 'understandable' about the files. Only a very disturbing thought that we are left with – "where are our leaders leading us to?" When power goes unchecked, what does it lead us to, other than a Wasteland.

The conversations, the debates, that the news of Epstein files have ignited are not new. The patterns of abuse and exploitation, the world order designed

to work for, and protect the elite and privileged; every institution that dismisses the victims, the gravely hopeless truth that the rich escapes accountability, no matter what – these are well debated, well talked about areas of discussion. The concern here is not how elaborately we can discuss any of this seated comfortably at a seminar hall. The question rather is – Is it going to be different this time?





We are only beginning to learn the length and the breadth of this pyramid scheme of molestation. What has engulfed us is an ocean of sheer hopelessness, an inability to process or comprehend the magnitude of the devastation caused.

Strike Zone

WEST ASIA IN CONFLICT

A rapidly escalating Iran–Israel–US conflict reveals the human, economic, and environmental costs of modern, high-intensity, technology-driven warfare.

KAPIL ARAMBAM

Timeline of Escalation	Human Cost	Military Scale & Intensity	Weapons & Warfare Tech
<p>Feb 28, 2026</p> <p>US–Israel launch ~900 strikes in 12 hours on Iranian military targets. Initial strikes reportedly kill senior leadership and hit missile infrastructure. Conflict spreads across region (Gulf, Lebanon, Israel) within days. Continuous escalation: missile retaliation, airstrikes, proxy involvement.</p> 	<p>Total casualties (approximate ranges)</p> <p>Iran deaths 1,200 to 3,000+ (including 200+ children)</p> <p>20,000 injured</p> <p>Iranian military deaths ~4,400+</p> <p>OTHER REGIONS</p> <p>Israel ~20–27 deaths thousands injured</p> <p>US personnel ~13–15 deaths</p> 	<p>Targets hit 10,000–15,000 inside Iran</p> <p>Missile attacks on Israel Multiple waves; some penetrate defenses</p> 	<p>Iran</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballistic missiles Drones Cluster munitions (used in recent strikes) <p>US–Israel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stealth bombers Precision-guided munitions (JDAM, AGM series) Missile defense systems (Iron Dome-type systems) 

On 29 March, the US president Donald Trump said he wants to “take the oil” in Iran and even suggested the US could seize Kharg Island, a key export hub.

India in the Crosshairs of a Distant Conflict

55% of India's crude oil comes from West Asia

\$12.1–12.3 billion foreign investor outflows from Indian equities

~9 million Indians live in Gulf countries



\$50 billion in remittances at risk

Rupee depreciation: 4.2% drop since war began

90% of LPG imports sourced from West Asia

40%+ of fertiliser inputs sourced from region



Cost of War	Environmental Impact	Geographic Spread	The War Today
<p>United States Estimates \$1–2 billion per day</p> <p>Early estimate \$3.7 billion in first 100 hours</p> <p>Potential supplemental budget \$200 billion</p> <p>Equipment losses \$1.4–2.9 billion in damaged US assets</p> 	<p>5 million tonnes CO₂ in 14 days</p> <p>Equivalent to annual emissions of 80+ countries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bombing & fuel use Oil depot fires Infrastructure destruction 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iran (strike zones: Tehran, Bandar Abbas and others) Israel (missile impact zones: Tel Aviv, Haifa) Gulf bases (US military presence) Strait of Hormuz (strategic chokepoint) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct state-to-state warfare Proxy networks still relevant High risk of prolonged regional war 

THE FACTS AND FIGURES IN THIS REPORT ARE AS OF 1ST APRIL 2026. SOURCES: “Iran reviewing a U.S. proposal to end the Gulf war through mediators” REUTERS reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/israel-strikes-tehran-trump-says-us-negotiating-end-war-2026-03-25/ “More than 1900 dead in Iran since start of US-Israel strikes, IFRC says” REUTERS reuters.com/world/middle-east/more-than-1900-dead-iran-since-start-us-israel-strikes-ifrc-says-2026-03-27/ “US and Iran give conflicting messages on talks after Trump postpones threatened bombing of power grid – as it happened” REUTERS reuters.com/world/iran-war-live-trump-deadline-looms-iran-vows-hit-gulf-power-water-2026-03-23/ “Crude oil and LNG supply are at risk of the worst possible scenario” REUTERS reuters.com/markets/commodities/crude-oil-lng-supply-are-risk-worst-possible-

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America's Addiction to War

AND THE QUEST FOR GLOBAL SUPREMACY IN WEST ASIA

America seems to believe in democracy and wants to export democracy to other nation. But their idea of democracy is so oppressive that they impose leaders on the nation who would function as puppets of America.

ALEX TUSCANO

By the time this article gets printed the war might get over. But whether it is over or not it is important for the citizens of the world to know why this war took place and whether such wars can be stopped once and for all. At present we have three major conflicts in the world: the ongoing war between, Russia and Ukraine, war between Israel and Palestine (Hisbulla), war between the US and Israel on one side and Iran on the other.

The Cult of Militarisation and Global Impact

Our younger generation will need to know the cult of militarisation. We are living in a world where there are countries which are friends and those which are enemy countries. Our politicians tell us that Pakistan is our enemy. Another politician comes and says China is a greater enemy than Pakistan. If we analyse the trade relationship between India and other countries signed by Modi, almost all these are primarily focused on purchase of arms and missiles. Our country would like to buy better and ultra-modern war planes and weapons than the war machines our enemy countries have.

If you listen to the nonpartisan news, they will tell us that the present war will bring the world to a standstill. We have already begun to feel the impact of the war in West Asia; scarcity of cooking gas, not to speak about the price rise of cooking gas; crude oil prices going up to \$180 per barrel leading to high rise of petrol and diesel.

The war is not fought on American soil. The whole of West Asia is burning resulting in deaths of innumerable people, women, and children. We are told that Israel has killed 60,000 Palestinians. This should make us think what could have led these people to such an insanity. They have lost their power of thinking how their action holds the whole world to ransom.

America's Addiction to War

This led me to study the causes of such wars. If we analyze the history of world from 1960 till now, we will find that US has been involved in more wars than any other country. America is addicted to war. It takes on the most active, powerful, and destructive force in the world. We are not talking about the World War II.

As I have stated America has been always the main figure in all these wars.

It is not just Trump who is addicted to war. The history of America will tell us that even the great and respected leader such John Kennedy was a leader in the war. Starting from Cuban crisis to Vietnam war he had been the president of America. I would like to restrict to the war in west Asia, between America and Iran. I am aware that the present war was started by Israel. But the agenda was that of America.

Historical Roots: Foreign Interference in Iran

If you look into the history of Iran, we will know that there were many leaders who had great dreams for Iran. Before the "Shah" regime most people refer to (the Pahlavis), Iran was ruled by the Qajars (1796–1925). This era was marked by "The Great Game"; a struggle for influence between the British and Russian Empires. Iran lost significant territory in the Caucasus to Russia. Tired of royal corruption and foreign interference, Iranians forced the Shah to establish a parliament (Majles) and a constitution during the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911). It was the first movement of its kind in the Middle East.

After WWI, the country was in chaos. In 1921, a military officer named Reza Khan staged a coup, eventually deposing the last Qajar king in 1925. Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925–1941) aimed to turn Iran into a modern, secular state like Turkey. He built the Trans-Iranian Railway, founded the University of Tehran, and famously banned the hijab in 1936 to "Westernise" the public. He was forced to abdicate by the British and Soviets during WWII due to his perceived sympathies for Germany.

In 1953 Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh assume power in Iran. He nationalised Iranian oil, which had been controlled by the British. In response to this, the CIA and MI6, (foreign, secret intelligence service of UK), orchestrated a coup to reinstate the absolute power of Shah who could be a puppet ruler for America. This event became the foundation that shaped the hostile relationship between United States and Iran.

The 1979 Revolution: Choosing the Lesser Evil

During the period of Shah there was a presence of strong Marxist force in Iran. Iran shared boarder with the erstwhile Soviet Union and ideologically Iran ruler was much closer to the Soviet Union. The Marxist movement played a critical role in destabilizing the Shah's regime. While the revolution is often remembered as purely Islamic, it was actually, a "coalition of the unwillings" that included a massive secular and leftist presence.

There was a massive revolt against the America's stooge, the Shah of



The Present Conflict:

Nuclear Fears and Proxy Warfare

Coming to the present situation: The relationship between Israel, the United States, and Iran is one of the most complex geopolitical conflicts in the world. We can break down the reasons for these attacks into a few main categories:

A primary reason for the friction is Iran's nuclear programme. Israel and the U.S. have long expressed concern that Iran is working toward developing nuclear weapons, which they view as a major threat to global and regional stability. Israel sees a nuclear-armed Iran as an "existential threat" (a threat to its very existence). The US aims to prevent a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and protect its allies and interests in the region. America has massive investment in West Asian oil business, e.g., Aramco.

Iran supports several "proxy" groups, militant organisations that share its goals, across West Asia. These include Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen. Israel and the U.S. have targeted Iranian military infrastructure to disrupt the flow of weapons and funding to these groups. Often, an "attack" is actually a counter-attack. In October 2024, Israel launched strikes on Iranian military sites specifically in response to a massive ballistic missile barrage Iran had fired at Israel weeks earlier. In June 2025, joint operations (like Operation Midnight Hammer) targeted Iranian nuclear and military facilities following a breakdown in diplomatic negotiations and renewed regional hostilities.

The 2025–2026 Escalation and Operation Epic Fury

Israel was feeling very insecure because they had been attacking Palestine and Gaza. They had killed, according to some estimate, 60,000 Palestinians. Iran has been supplying arms and money to the Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen. They pressurised Donald Trump to joined Israel in attacking Iran.

June 2025 Trump had claimed that US had completely destroyed Iran's nuclear sites. Despite that Trump claimed Teheran was only weeks away from developing a nuclear bomb. Contradicting Donald Trump's justification for ongoing war US intelligence, Director of National intelligence Tulsi Gabbard testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on Capital Hill in Washington DC. Gabbard was a Congress woman. She had opposed war with Iran and resigned, stating there was no imminent nuclear threat from Iran. She stated Trump has been misled by Israel.

The most recent and significant military action by the United States against Iran occurred on February 28, 2026, as part of a joint campaign with Israel known as Operation Epic Fury. This operation marked a dramatic escalation, moving from years of proxy conflict to direct, large-scale combat operations. The decision to launch the February 2026 strikes was driven by three primary factors:

1. *Nuclear Persistence*: Despite the damage from the June 2025 strikes, intelligence indicated Iran was attempting to reconstitute its nuclear program and barred IAEA inspectors from verifying their progress.
2. *Internal Instability*: The Trump administration cited the Iranian regime's "harsh repression" of its own citizens during the January 2026 protests as a sign of the regime's

weakened legitimacy, viewing it as a strategic window for intervention.

3. *The "Decapitation" Strategy*: US and Israeli officials stated that the timing was specifically tied to intelligence regarding the location of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The goal was to eliminate the regime's leadership before they could move into more secure, hardened facilities.

The "God Father" Complex and the Failure of Regime Change

American functions as God Father. It pretends to be taking care of the world, particularly the weaker countries. But this is totally wrong. America at first wanted to protect the countries from being captured by the communist Soviet Union. They formed into North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. It made other countries believe that the communist countries are evil empire and the member countries should protect themselves from the communists. But NATO has functioned more for the interests of America.

America wants all the countries to become democratic. But it had turned democratic countries or functioning autocratic countries into Oppressive Dictatorial countries those serve American interests. The example is Marcom regime in Philippines. It wants to develop the middle east or east Asia into democratic countries. The path they have adopted is by changing the regimes in these countries.

In Afghanistan They wanted to put an end to Soviet Union guided government into democracy. They chose Saudi Arabian man, Osama bin Ladin. They funded him and supported his al-Qaeda and Taliban and succeeded into ousting the USSR back government. The result is that Osama bin and al-Qaeda became international terrorist regime and too their revenge on America by pulling down the twin tower in New York.

In Iran the Americans wants regime change. Since there were massive unrest and the regime handling this unrest with hard hand America thought it was an excellent opportunity to attempt to change the regime. They killed the supreme leader of Iran and trump told the agitating people to go and capture the state power. It is yours to take.

When there was a quick anointing of the new leader it dashed the hopes of regime change. On the contrary scores of people came on the streets in condemning the attack on their supreme leader and in support of their new leader. They attacked the new leader too. They killed another very powerful national security chief and de facto leader overseeing the country's decision making person. America is systematically decapitating the Iran's power structure to ensure regime change. But this does not seem to give desired results. The organisation of top power structure is very efficient. If the top official is eliminated then there a next equally competent person to take place of the previous.

America seems to believe in democracy and wants to export democracy to other nation. But their idea of democracy is so fraught that they impose leaders on the nation who would function as puppets of America. These puppets far from being democratic rule with iron hand to make sure that America finds it easy to plunder that country.

In all these great designs' ultimate interest is to gain total control on oil Energy and become supreme power in the world. On January 3, 2026, the US launched Operation Absolute Resolve, a military raid in Caracas that resulted in the capture of Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. The main intention is to capture the oil production, with the intention of invest billions of dollars to revitalize the oil production.

Is Vengeance a Virtue?

Renaming Our Species as *Homo Insipiens* rather than *Homo Sapiens*

If a militarily powerful "democratic" nation's policy is simply what its supreme leader feels when he wakes up every morning, then there is no more international law and no more hope for a just and peaceful world order.

FR DR KM GEORGE

One of the most alarming things about the present US-Israel versus Iran war is that there is absolutely no authoritative moral voice in our world that can persuade the powerful war mongers to end this totally unnecessary battle. It has unveiled the utter moral and spiritual emptiness of our world in the face of terrible human suffering and threat to all life on earth.

In the Second World War when Allied Powers including USA, Soviet Union, China, Britain and others fought the Axis powers, mainly the expansionist Nazi regime of Adolf Hitler, there was among other things a strong moral concern about the rise of Nazi ideology and the demonic way in which the Nazis destroyed six million human lives mostly of Jewish stock. The western powers learned a great moral lesson from two world wars and genuinely aspired for global peace. They inscribed at the newly formed UN headquarters in New York the celebrated biblical verse from the book of prophet Isaiah: "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (2:4).



What is happening now with the strange mixing up of aggressively confrontational and deceptively peace-fostering rhetoric of the leaders is something that no human observer with even a modicum of wisdom and knowledge of history can understand. If a militarily powerful “democratic” nation’s policy is simply what its supreme leader feels when he wakes up every morning, then there is no more international law and no more hope for a just and peaceful world order. This style of policy making may become trendy and a role model for other power lusty leaders. Where are the people who elected and enthroned them? The common people simply suffer without voice and without any trustworthy resort to turn to. The United Nations Organisation created by peace loving leaders of the nations to rescue the world from a chaotic and death-dealing situation has been rendered totally impotent. All sober voices about the moral fabric of a just world order are being ridiculed or brutally crushed by those who want to make their own country, rather themselves, great again, whatever happens to humanity at large.

Hannah Arendt, the political philosopher, introduced the phrase “banality of evil” in her 1963 book on the trial of Eichmann, the notorious Nazi criminal. She argued that very ordinary human beings could become deadly instruments of evil when they do not question the moral ground of what they blindly do in the name of obedience to higher authority, devotion to duty and ideological insensitivity to real human agony. Something of this sort of criminal insensitivity is pervading the contemporary political culture.

In English and other languages, we have the expression ‘to give one’s

Hannah Arendt argued that ordinary people become deadly instruments of evil when they fail to question authority, blindly obey duty, and ignore the human consequences of their actions.

word’. It implies that the word of a responsible human being is a firm and hopeful promise to be kept against all odds. But now it is rendered totally meaningless. When presidents and prime ministers, religious supremos and spiritual leaders unabashedly break that ancient human moral principle nothing is left in our world for people to trust and hope for an order of peace and justice. These leaders without any prick of conscience implement the massacre of innocent children, the bombing of refugee camps, hospices and hospitals and the eliminating of all that human beings painfully built up in the name of civilisation.

Some of us remember participating in anti-nuclear campaigns and gatherings in the 1970s and 80s with the projected goal of achieving world peace. Our wise mentors in such events used to say that a major risk of nuclear weapons was that they could

be mishandled by unscrupulous and insane political rulers with terrible consequences for humanity at a global level.

We have now begun to experience that tragedy even with our sophisticated non-nuclear weapons. We should suspect by all means that some of these decision makers who unleashed the devilish war on humanity are to a very serious degree mentally deranged. What do we then do with such power-wielding leaders who are not only unable to function and govern with sobriety and good sense, but also indulge in crazy acts of decision making that spell disaster on large chunks of humanity?

Incidentally one may remember that in the Christian canonical tradition, there are rules regarding the possible removal of patriarchs and other high-ranking clerics if they fall into a condition of insanity, or as they put it in Latin canons “Non compos mentis”, not of sound mind. In the Eastern Christian tradition when they are elected and ordained to high offices the believers have to approve it by publicly shouting *Axios*, he is worthy. It implies that in case those elected misbehave and misuse their office and violate the People’s trust in future, the same people can shout *Anaxios*, he is unworthy and remove them from office. Such is the People’s power.

In the present war situation and in similar circumstances the suffering people who had elected and enthroned their political leaders should be able to declare them insane and so unworthy of governing. The question is whether the present democratic system has any effective mechanism to remove them from office once they are elected with a considerable parliamentary majority.

We may also raise the question if vengeance is a virtue. Looking at the Hebrew Scriptures, we see that under certain conditions the following instruction is given by the Torah or the Law of Moses: “But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (*Book of Exodus* 21:23–25). This is sometimes called the Law of Talion, the law of retaliatory and reciprocal justice. Some religious-cultural traditions in our contemporary world literally follow this ancient notion of justice. What many in the Western world, and following them in other places, label as terrorism could be a phenomenon that probably assumes this law of vengeance as a foothold to restore justice. In that case, no counter terrorist initiative is likely to succeed eventually, but can simply sow the seeds of further violence and vendetta for many generations to come.

Jesus, a Jew, corrected and radically reinterpreted his own legacy of Torah, the Law of Moses, and replaced it for a completely new order of human life and society: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matthew 5: 38-39).

We should be very clear that in our modern situation of advanced technology, sophisticated weaponry and digital environment there is no winning or losing a battle in the literal sense. That belongs to an old paradigm. Now, the vengeance that is created between nations and between religions and ideologies can erupt in innumerable ways of massive violence. This century and the previous one have witnessed

Our present species is only one of the innumerably possible Homo species existing in one of the innumerably possible universes.

this fact. We call it terrorism, and governments are spending enormous money and energy to set up counter terrorist strategy and structures. But given the subtle nature of advanced cyber technology and the understanding of vengeance as retaliatory justice, no government will be able to counter act effectively calculated massive violence in unsuspecting spots in the air, land and sea at a global level.

Our vision, therefore, of a peaceful human society devoid of idealised vengeance and furious vendetta turns out to be an impossible dream. Governments may consider it a great technological advancement that some stealth planes, drones, and ballistic missiles are not piloted by human beings. But the irony is that they fall on real human beings, calculated to annihilate life, and all fruits of human civilisation so far.

Jesus radically challenged the Jewish scriptural concept of retaliatory justice, and asked us to turn the other cheek, and forgive one’s enemies. Some western Christian theologians would

consider it an impossible ideal of the kingdom of God. But in our times, Mahatma Gandhi a Sanatan Hindu brought it alive in actual effective practice in India’s independence struggle for freedom from the British colonial power. He combined it with the ancient Indian Jain and Buddhist tradition of Ahimsa, non-violence.

It is, therefore, good to remember that violence of any kind breeds violence of all kinds, now and for ages to come. Aware of the chain reaction of violence that could be engendered by his own religion’s imperative on retaliation, Jesus gave such staggering dimensions to the principle of forgiveness. It’s not simply seven times but seven into seventy times and more that we need to forgive. He literally practised it on the cross while being crucified by his enemies. Only forgiveness restores the world order created by God and as gifted to us.

As a species we call ourselves *Homo Sapiens*, that is, *wise humans*. (*Sapientia* in Latin is wisdom, discernment and right judgment). If we do not pay heed to this principle of forgiveness and reconciliation as the decisive key to the survival of life on earth, we will end up annihilating all life on this planet. If we stubbornly insist on a deliberate policy of bringing about such a tragic eventuality, we better call our race *Homo Insipiens*, that is, unwise or foolish human!

Still there may be some good news for people who wish to be more sanguine. Our present species is only one of the innumerably possible Homo species existing in one of the innumerably possible universes. The Creator can wisely deal with it if it is needed to create a much wiser Homo species than our own foolish species.

‘We’ Created ‘Them’—Our Lopsided Perception of Israel and Islam

DR SHAJI NICHOLAS VADACHERY OFM & SUSANNA MARIAN VAS

Who is my brother? Who is the other? Every story—the grand narratives of religion, fairytales, histories of nations and movements, even the stories we tell ourselves to sleep at night—has good actors and bad actors. More often than not, goodness is apprehended the way it is not because it is resplendent or outstanding on its own but because it is juxtaposed with badness, villainy, or some variant of evil, which accentuates the contrast between the two qualities. In other words, in order for one person or entity to be understood as good, another person or entity has to be understood as evil or lacking in goodness.

In real life, identity is formed through processes of differentiation. Infants developing self-consciousness realise that they are distinct from the mother and undergo individuation. In tandem with the individualistic “I” mentality, the collectivistic “we” mentality emerges. Now, the I is understood as being “not another”, while the we is understood as being “not certain others”. Difference at the individual and the group level contributes to variety, the proverbial spice of life, but what happens when it is used to create in-groups and out-groups? A we-they mentality foments that is weaponised to cast said groups into illusory camps of good and bad, ally and enemy.

This mentality heightens during

times of crisis, notably war and conflict. World War II saw the belligerents choosing their “we” and “they” through their coalition with either the Axis or the Allied powers; the Hundred Years’ War saw various duchies and factions choosing loyalty to the House of Valois or the House of Plantagenet; Mary I of England (Bloody Mary) riled up the Catholics against the Protestants. During the ongoing Middle Eastern crisis, Christian-majority western countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and France have identified with the cause of Israel, the biblical Jewish homeland, in opposition to Islamic-majority countries like Iran and Syria as well as Islamic nationalist groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq. What interests us is not the alliances of the belligerents but the sympathies of conservative Christians. How did the latter cultivate fraternal feelings towards the Jews and spiritual patriotism for Israel alongside equal-opposite feelings towards Muslims in the Middle Eastern Islamosphere?

What Is the Real Israel?

Christians feel an emotional connection to Israel because the sites where Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose lie within the 1949 Armistice border. Despite the longstanding conflict with Palestine, churches have felt no qualms about fattening Israel’s coffers through Holy Land tourism. However, when we allude to Israel, there is a nine-point-five out

of ten chance we are conflating two different things that share a name: the multifaceted covenantal community created by God and the geopolitical entity established by David Ben-Gurion in Palestine in 1948 with the support of the UK, the recognition of the US, and the authorisation of the UN.

From a sociological perspective, biblical Israel was a movement created in faith and also refers to the covenant people chosen by Yahweh to be a holy nation and a witness to His existence, united under the leadership of Moses and thereafter the judges and kings. The innate psychological needs for a sense of community, identity, and shared purpose and to connect with something

larger than oneself impel human beings to form groups. United by their monotheistic faith and their allegiance to the divine commandments, the Israelites became one nation under one God. Israel, like all nations, experienced infighting and external conflict. They tried to look at everything with eyes of faith and viewed their strife as a result of unfaithfulness. Among its people were deserters, defectors, and compromisers, in addition to those who remained faithful to God and staunchly adherent to Judaism, even radically so, like the Maccabees.

Judaism became insular, law-oriented, and fixated on sacrificial worship centred in the Jerusalem Temple during the intertestamental period, when the Pharisees and Sadducees usurped religious power and Hellenisation was sweeping across the land. The Israelites started to turn to themselves instead of God. They took pride in their religion and laws, which were, by then, overwritten with human interpretations. It was in this attitudinal climate that Jesus came and attempted to broaden their minds by preaching God as the Father of all, not

the Jews alone. He praised people of other denominations and groups, like the Samaritan woman, the parabolic Good Samaritan, the Syro-Phoenician woman, and the Roman centurion, to show that faith could be found even outside of Israel.

Wanting to put an end to sacrificial religion, Jesus showed that what is required is the sacrifice of oneself, which He made on the cross, giving Himself up out of love, not ritual obligation, for all humanity, not just a slice of it. Paul advocated an inclusive, egalitarian attitude; in Chapter 3 of his epistle to the Galatians he wrote: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”. Revelation prophesies that there will be a New Jerusalem within a new heaven and a new earth. What, then, is the point of attaching undue significance to 20,000 km² of land that will pass away with the rest of this corrupt world?

Confusion Over the ‘Chosen’

Israel was supposed to give the world a foretaste of Christ by being a “light for the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:6). God chose them as His missionaries for the sake of the world. That call was often misunderstood and not taken seriously. Being ‘chosen’ had nothing to do with specialness or superiority. Those of us who support the good, great nation of Israel invoke the epithet of ‘God’s chosen people’ in their defence, especially when they triumph against their big bad Muslim adversaries who beleaguer them. However, a close reading of the Bible will illuminate that being ‘chosen’ is not an entitlement to persecute neighbouring nations aided and abetted by political Goliaths or an automatic exoneration for hostilities.

The Dividing Wall of Hostility

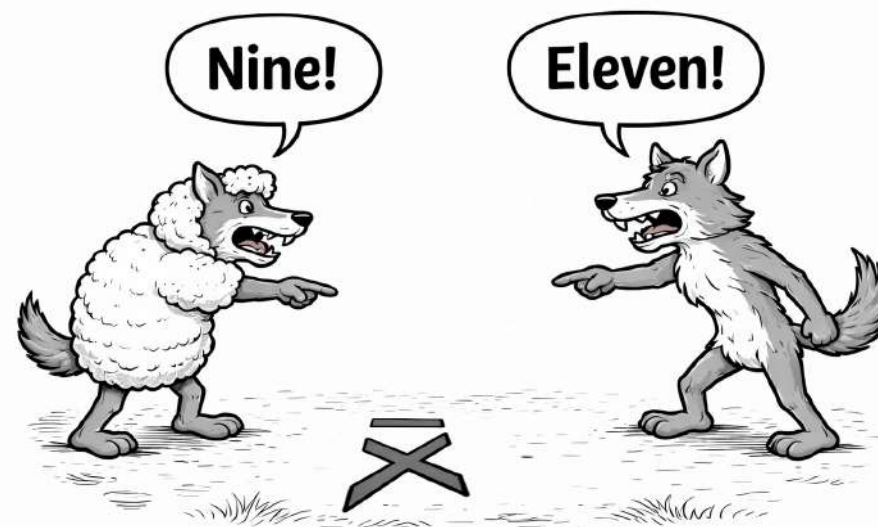
Jewish relations with Islam in the Middle East have been fraught with

political tension for decades. Time has entwined the religion of Israel (Judaism) and the politics of Israel (Zionism) in a gordian knot; putting the two asunder is no easy task, especially when our sources of information and truth are inadequate. An *Al Jazeera* article by Alma Milisic from 10 March 2026 titled “War on Iran fuelling Islamophobic social media surge in US” reported that the US Center for the Study of Organised Hate (CSOH) found that “on X alone from February 28, the first day of the war, to Thursday, users posted more than 25,300 Islamophobic remarks”.

Religious antipathy stems from a competition for influence, fear of the ‘other’, and the use of minorities as scapegoats for societal problems. Negative perceptions are fuelled through stereotypes and propaganda mediated by the religious and political powers that be. French philosopher and historian René Girard (1923–2015) demonstrated that the scapegoat mechanism is foundational for the formation of most social groups and cultures. We need another group to be against to form our group! ... We humans largely hate or blame almost anything else rather than recognize our own weaknesses and negativity. ‘She made me do it.’ ‘He is guilty.’ ‘He deserves it.’ ‘They are the problem.’ ‘They are evil.’ We seldom consciously know that we are scapegoating or projecting. It’s automatic, ingrained, and unconscious. As Jesus said, people literally ‘do not know what they are doing’ (Luke 23:34).

Between Christians & Jews

The Catholic Church practised antisemitism, having deemed the Jews collectively responsible for the death of Jesus. Paul IV ghettoised Jews and wrote in *Cum nimis absurdum* (1555) that they, “through their own fault, were condemned by God to eternal slavery”.



Pius VI's *Editto sopra gli ebrei* (1775) warned that overnight stays outside the ghetto were punishable by death. In an 1871 speech, Pius IX compared Jewish anticlericalists to "dogs... howling in the street". These lingering prejudices were gradually stanchied by John XXIII in 1959, who removed the Latin word *perfidis* (faithless/perfidious/treacherous) from the Good Friday Prayer for the Jews. Paul VI appealed to the "spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews" in *Nostra aetate* (1965). He clarified that "what happened in [Christ's] passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today" and declared that the Church "decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone". At a Wednesday General Audience in October 2025, Leo XIV affirmed that "the Church does not tolerate anti-Semitism and fights against it".

Such remedial actions have the potency to induce tectonic mentality shifts. The 'they' mentality wilts and a 'we' mentality blossoms in its place, but once the "other" has been absorbed into the in-group, there is a lacuna in the out-group. The shoes of the foe must be filled because there's nothing that bonds people together quite like a shared threat, something to fight against and diminish in order to feel superior.

How do we reach our verdict on who is the rightful bearer of the terrorist badge between Bush and Bin Laden, the IDF and Hamas, Trump and Khamenei?

Between Christians & Muslims Christian Islamophobia portrayed Muslims as rivals, heretics, or followers of a false prophet. Church fathers considered Islam a perversion of the true Gospel. John of Damascus called Islam "the superstition of the Ishmaelites which to this day prevails and keeps people in error, being a forerunner of the Antichrist" in his *Fount of Knowledge* (8th century). In a 12th-century text called 'Order followed on those who return from the faith of the Saracens to the pure and true faith of us Christians', Nicetas Choniates of Byzantine "anathematise[d] the God of Muhammad... even Muhammad himself". Thomas Aquinas wrote in the *Summa contra Gentiles* (13th century) that Muhammad "seduced the people by promises of carnal pleasure to which the concupiscence of the flesh goads us". Martin Luther denounced Muhammad as "a devil and first-born child of Satan".

There was a remarkable volte-face on Catholic clerical sentiment towards Islam during and after Vatican II. *Lumen gentium* (1964) acknowledges the inclusion of Muslims in the "plan of salvation", while *Nostra aetate* (1965) "regards [them] with esteem". The ecumenical amends of Paul VI were taken a leap further by John Paul II, who recurrently emphasised common ground between Christians and Muslims and became the first pope to visit a mosque in 2001. Benedict XVI opposed cartoon depictions of Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. Francis, in his 'Message to Muslims throughout the world for the end of Ramadan' (2013), expressed hope that "Christians and Muslims may be true promoters of mutual respect and friendship". In 2019, he established a partnership with Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar to cultivate interfaith dialogue, promote peace, and combat extremism. Both he and Leo XIV took a stand against Israel's aggressions

in Palestine and urged for peace. Despite the volume of ecclesiastical effort poured into the endeavour of Christian-Muslim cooperation, why is popular Islamophobia so resistant to eradication?

Separating the Sheep from the Wolves

A landmark event in the Indian struggle for independence was an uprising in 1857 sparked by religious grievances over greased cartridges. This event went down in British history as the 'Sepoy Mutiny' and in Indian history as the 'First War of Independence'. The difference in nomenclature speaks volumes about the perceptions and attitudes of two parties on different sides of the same event. The British portray it as a trifling defiance of low-ranking infantrymen against the rightful authorities, but the Indians regard it as a purposeful, powerful counterstroke against their oppressors and a precipitant of subsequent milestones that led to freedom. Bearing that in mind, how do we reach our verdict on who is the rightful bearer of the terrorist badge between Bush and Bin Laden, the IDF and Hamas, Trump and Khamenei?



It is easy to pigeonhole all Islamic groups and movements as terroristic. Some of these organisations start with sociopolitical or religious motivations but get lost along the way, others are insistently labelled as terrorists by politicians and the media when they are actually opposition or resistance groups responding to external interference, and yet others (al-Qaeda, ISIS, Taliban) are real terrorists. Hezbollah was formed in 1982 in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon but went on to conduct anti-US suicide bombings; Boko Haram was a proselytising group that turned militant and wanted to overthrow the Nigerian government; Al-Shabaab orchestrated a revolt against the tyrannical regime of Siad Barre before aligning with al-Qaeda and attacking Ethiopia and other neighbouring countries. Note that we are not lightening or excusing the repulsive perpetrations of any group, no matter how they describe themselves and their motivations. The intention is to persuade readers away from simplistic categorisations and evaluations of events and political actors.

The US Created Them

George W. Bush's war on terror in retaliation to the 9/11 attacks cemented the perception of Islam as an extremist religion of war, an ideological enemy, and an existential threat to Western civilisation. To justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration formally claimed that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and was actively developing them. However, history shows that the United States has, at various times, funded, armed, or supported Middle Eastern regimes like the Afghan Mujahideen, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Syrian Democratic Forces, and the Kurdish Peshmerga to advance its own interests, only for those relationships to later turn hostile. Even in 2020–24, the US supplied 50% of the MENA states' arms imports, according to SIPRI.

This is akin to the Pharaoh working the Israelites to the bone to build Egyptian infrastructure and then wanting to "deal shrewdly with them" out of fear that they would become "too many and too mighty" and, "in the event of war, join our enemies, and fight against us" (Exodus 1:8–14). Francis' *Fratelli tutti* (2020) also echoes that "War, terrorist attacks, racial or religious persecution, and many other affronts to human dignity are judged differently, depending on how convenient it proves for certain, primarily economic, interests. What is true as long as it is convenient for someone in power stops being true once it becomes inconvenient". Animosity due to economic interests started assuming religious overtones and slowly shifted towards Islam. The Americans and their allies created and inflated perceptions that the Middle East is a clump of rogue nations whose leaders are dangerous to the world. Trump disdainingly Khamenei when he himself was named and pictured in the Epstein files is an astonishing case of the pot calling the kettle black.

Treating the Righteous and the Wicked Alike

The notoriety of a few influences the perception of the whole; "dead flies give perfume a bad smell" (Ecclesiastes 10:1). Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi, and Hafez al-Assad were hardly practising Muslims, but they are automatically associated with Islam along with Ayatollah Khomeini, Osama bin Laden, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The unspeakable acts of a few ultra-conservative figures whose ideologies do not truthfully reflect Islam cannot be imputed to the whole commonwealth of believers. Extremist leaders and their coterie of power brokers do not represent Islam any more than Benjamin Netanyahu, the Pharisees, and Jeffrey Epstein represent Judaism or an assortment of crazed fanatics like Warren Jeffs, Joseph Kony, and Donald Trump represent Christianity.

Did Not He Who Made Me in the Womb Make Them?

Instinct settles the mind into a we-they mentality, but intelligence unsettles it when confronted with the state of the world. A prophetic response, as described by Richard Rohr OFM in *Tears of Things*, is necessary when we face evil in such massive proportions. Prophets are aware of the flaws of their society and point them out strongly, but they don't do it as outsiders watching a "video game" (Leo XIV). They weep over the suffering of humanity, feeling it as their own, as Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). They don't take sides (pro-this/anti-that) with the victors, demonise the losers, or evacuate agents of responsibility. Every religion, nation, and movement can benefit from an examination of conscience, not to condemn it, but to see itself truthfully without scales clouding the eyes, and go back to create a world that is not "broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls" (Rabindranath Tagore).

GROUNDED BY THE EPIC FURY

In addition to the outrageous ticket price, the chaotic flying experience was compounded by significant uncertainty, confusion, panic, and psychological stress.

A FRANCIS

“I am sending you a secure alternative route option, which I believe should work for you.” On 4th March, after my travel agent’s WhatsApp message, I was at a loss for words to express my gratitude. I thanked her sincerely, feeling profound gratitude and indebtedness.

I was scheduled to return home in Canada on March 5th after visiting my ailing father in Thiruvananthapuram, the renowned temple town famous for the gold in Padmanabhaswamy temple. However, the ‘Epic Fury’ of the warmongers, which caused global disruptions for air travellers and brought epic misery and destruction to those in West Asia, also disrupted my plans.

Amid the chaotic fanning out of the war, flights were cancelled across the globe, and airspace restrictions were imposed in the Middle East, which is considered a ‘global hub’ for international travellers, providing a ‘corridor of connectivity’ to the rest of the world. Rebooking a secure alternate route is not easy during wartime, but it is the only right option, second only to not travelling. So, after many panicked discussions with the travel agent over the preceding days and nights, I finally received a WhatsApp message

of hope! That was the context of my epic gratitude and indebtedness I was referring to.

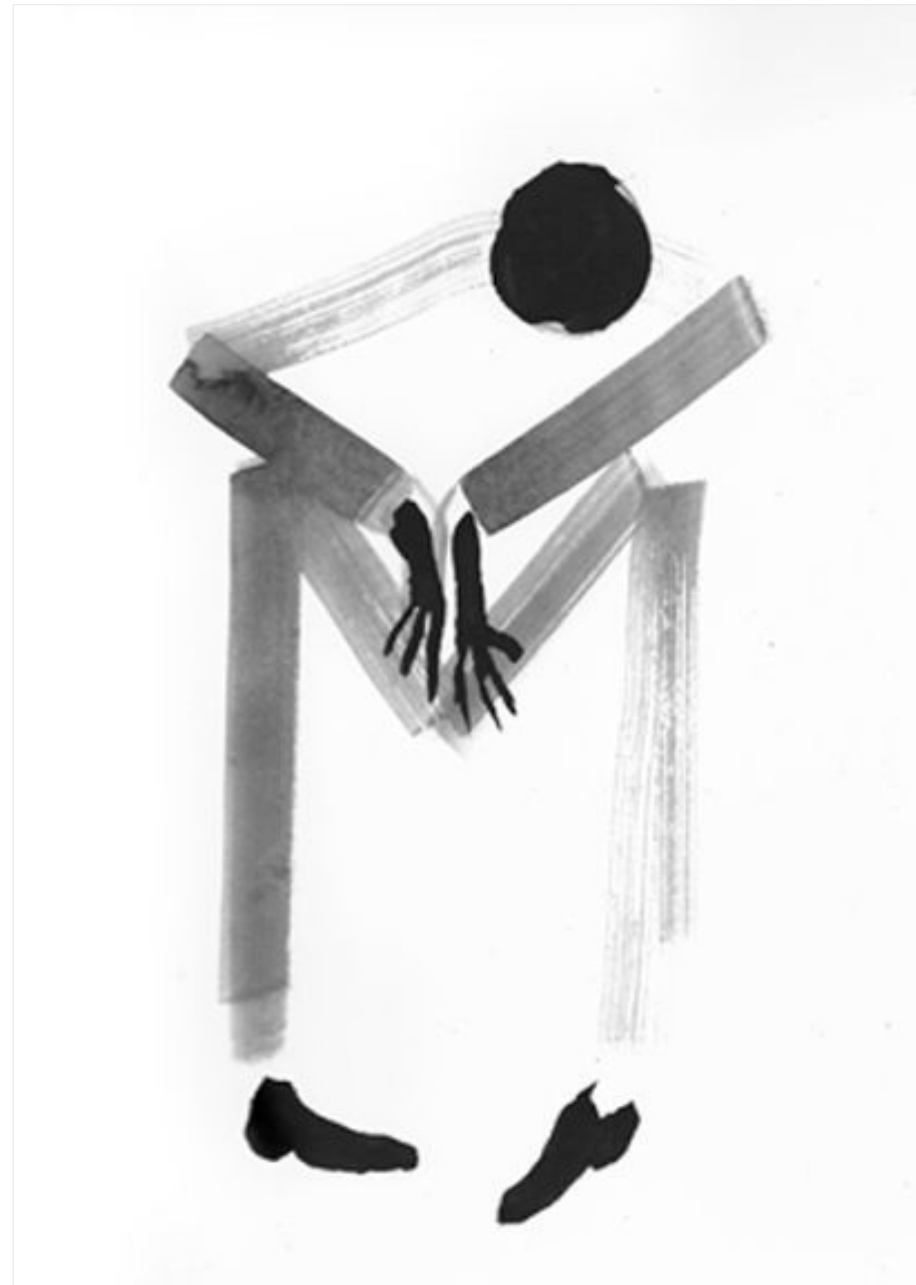
With an uncontrollable surge of eagerness and expectation, I opened the email attachment she had sent me. Oh gosh, I just could not believe what I saw there: six connections on one return journey! To my surprise, some of the airports, their names, and the countries where they were located were not even covered in my 10th-grade geography class!

My worst nightmare was not immediately apparent to me upon the first reading of the itinerary, which the travel agent diligently designed for me! It was only on my second reading that it hit me like a lightning bolt. The fare for the return ticket was twice what I had paid for the round trip, and that included the refund from the original return ticket I had booked in the pre-Epic Fury world!

What an Epic Cheating on Travellers!

Of course, airlines have many reasons to justify their prices: fewer routes, longer flights, a volatile geopolitical climate, etc. These are all valid arguments, too. But the price was simply way too high for any traveller to sympathise with them.

Instead of attempting to make six connections to return, I decided



to wait for a better itinerary, even if it meant risking unpaid leave from work. I recognised that my favourite airports and airlines might not be accessible for a while. The Middle East hub-and-spoke network, especially in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha, remains the top choice for many globetrotters who appreciate the world-class in-flight services and the comfy flying experience provided by Emirates, Qatar, Etihad, and others. The reality, however, is that, for now—possibly for the next few weeks or even months, depending on how long the conflict endures—these services won’t be available. It’s a harsh truth that no one could have foreseen this situation just a month ago!

I waited an additional nine days before starting my journey back home to the Northern Hemisphere, west of the Prime Meridian. This voyage entailed two connections—initially a short-haul flight followed by a long-haul flight of over seventeen hours straight. The ticket was ridiculously expensive. “Prices of jet fuel and crude have risen significantly,” was the sole explanation offered by the booking agent for the exorbitant fare. She has a point; the war involving Israel, the US and Iran has triggered the largest price spike in gas. But there is one other person in the world who has a point, too: Mr. Trump, who says, “When oil prices go up, we make a lot of money!” because the US is the top global crude producer. After all, it is a “dog-eat-dog world”. So, shamelessly make hay while the sun shines!

In addition to the outrageous ticket price, the chaotic flying experience was compounded by significant uncertainty, confusion, panic, and psychological stress, all of which were the common lot for most travellers these days. This includes waiting at the airline counters for information regarding check-in baggage, connecting flights, frequent gate changes, and flight departure times displayed on digital screens. Moreover, soaring food prices

at airports, overbooked flights, the lack of opportunities to negotiate for preferred seats such as aisle, window, or middle, limited meal options on board, and numerous other inconveniences contribute to the overall hardships encountered by travellers.

A common observation during the flight was passengers closely monitoring the flight map, as if everyone had suddenly developed an interest in global geography. However, it did not take a genius to recognize that the underlying emotion driving our newfound interest was nothing but fear! Consider the prospect of facing a barrage of missiles and drones navigating the turbulent skies across West Asia. Such fears are neither unfounded nor irrational; history has documented similar incidents on numerous occasions, the most recent being in 2020 when Iran erroneously shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet, resulting in the tragic loss of all 176 individuals on board.

Our flight certainly took a secure route, a safe aviation path, a trajectory away from the war zone of the region. Nevertheless, when fear clouds one’s judgment and holds it captive, reality does not make much sense! For our fear-coupled judgment knew that we were not scared just because we might encounter a war zone in the airspace between Israel, Iran, and the Gulf countries. We could also be hit hard by missiles or drones from anywhere else. Unfortunately, there are multiple war zones around the world today!

Thankfully, despite having overspent and feeling exhausted—like a zombie, jet-lagged and sleep-deprived—I am home now. Many individuals, however, still remain immersed in the turbulent waves of conflict instigated by the war. Regrettably, the ‘epic fury’ persists indefinitely, causing us fear and apprehension about an unpredictably expensive future that renders life increasingly challenging.

PERMANENCE OF THE TEMPORARY

This Biennale's theme is *For the Time Being*: you are a refugee 'for the time being', you wait for a ceasefire 'for the time being', you live on rations 'for the time being'. It is survival on hope for an outcome that may never come.

ANUHYA TALWAR

To walk the dust-laden streets of Fort Kochi is to enter into a landscape of resistance. As you approach the main venue of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, the air doesn't just feel hot and humid—it feels like an occupation of your senses. You feel the heavy layer of sweat building up on you, making your shirt feel like a wet uniform that you can't escape. It is heavy and restrictive, making it uncomfortable to move, much like how living under an occupation is. Much like a war-zone, there is no neutral ground; you can't just 'step out' of the Kochi heat. You are reminded of this when you look at the *Time Reclaiming Structures: Watchhouses* (2025) by Palestinian artist Dima Srouji, in collaboration with Piero Tomassoni, in the open grounds at Aspinwall House. It draws inspiration from shelters and guardhouses from different cultures, where citizens are kept under surveillance from hostile military in occupied Gaza, much like a panopticon.



The Quiet Weight of Shadows (2025) by Dhiraj Rabha is a deeply immersive. The unsettling installation of carnivorous plants excavates the tense history of the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom) insurgency in Assam. Rabha explores the jarring dissonance between dominant, and media narratives and the intimate, lived realities of those surviving on the margins of conflict. Small speakers hidden inside the flowers emit a disorienting, overlapping cacophony of mainstream news broadcasts from the 1990s and 2000s regarding the insurgency. Rabha forces viewers into an uneasy space between official history and personal truth.

KOCHI MUZIRIS
BIENNALE

6th Edition | 12 December 2025 - 31 March 2026

Titled, *For the Time Being*, it is less an exhibition and more a horizontal living, breathing ecosystem. It steps away from the idea of art as a static, finished spectacle to art as communal creation—a product of *friendship economies*.

The discussions challenge market-driven art systems by asking how art can foster genuine, inclusive solidarity, shared presence, and radical acts of resilience. *Its beauty lies in its vulnerability*. By inviting artists to create site-specific works that grow, decay, or evolve over the 110 days, the Biennale becomes a living organism. It forces the audience to engage with the making of art, rather than just consuming a final product.

PERFORMANCE ART AT THE BIENNALE

The performance art segment is a central focus of the entire exhibition. Art actively shifts away from traditional, static displays to embrace live, process-driven art. A major highlight of this segment is the participation of Marina Abramović, a global pioneer in performance art. Emphasising art as a living, bodily experience rather than just a finished product. Abramović presented *At the Waterfall* (2003) (see right), which is a monumental video installation featuring a large curved screen that plays recordings of the faces and voices of Tibetan monks and nuns. The overlapping chants of the monks and nuns—numbering over a hundred—create a cascading sonic landscape that Abramović noted sounds like a huge waterfall. Her involvement, alongside other leading endurance/durational artists like Tino Sehgal, perfectly captures the Biennale's goal of exploring physical endurance, active audience participation, and the power of performance as a shared, unfolding experience.

Another piece by the duo at 111 Markaz & Café welcomes you with glimmers of light on the solid concrete floor, as glass suspended from the ceiling catches the afternoon sun. With Srouji's grandfather personally affected by the Nakba in 1948, *Air of Firozabad / Air of Palestine* (2025) represents the culture of glass-blowing in Palestine she has been engaged with for a decade. Of the 451 glass forms on view, 450 were handcrafted in the furnaces of Firozabad, the Glass City of India, while a single, solitary piece was produced in Jaba', Palestine.

In Palestine, many of these kilns have been forced to go cold due to the structural violence of occupation and the lack of resources. Thus, this collaboration serves as a cultural link and form of resistance, where the burning kiln of India serves as a medium for Srouji's peoples' voices to be told to the world and represents a tradition that is literally and figuratively—hanging on by a thread.

The curatorial theme *For the Time Being* by Nikhil Chopra for the biennale, has the meaning of a temporary fix for an ordinary person but under the



state of conflict, oppression and war, it is how life is led. It is an indefinite state of waiting and anxiety about what happens next—where the temporary is a permanent cage. In such places, you are a refugee 'for the time being', you wait for a ceasefire 'for the time being', you live on rations 'for the time being'. It is survival on hope for an outcome that may never come.

At Kochi, these under-represented voices are given a platform, to occupy the mind of the public "for the time being" until they are inevitably pushed aside for the next issue. This creates a deep irony; the very platform for their voice is itself temporary. These voices are fragile, much like the glass bubbles in Dima Srouji's earlier mentioned work, and demand to be heard urgently before they are packed up and the biennale returns to being a silent historical landmark.

However, amplifying these voices can also be difficult for the journalists and media persons. Apart from the constant persecution of media-writers who stand up for the truth, news sites also twist and misrepresent realities. With Dhiraj Rabha's *The Quiet Weight of Shadows* (2025), we are brought back to the

***For the Time Being* reframes the "temporary" as permanent while capturing life under conflict as an endless state of waiting, anxiety, and constrained existence.**

Rinascimento by Adrián Villar Rojas is one of the most visually arresting and conceptually rich installations at the Biennale. It acts as a startling, modern-day *vanitas*—a still life that reminds the viewer of the inevitability of death and decay. Visitors entering the gallery encounter refrigerators with their freezer compartments wide open. Inside these freezers are striking, diorama-like compositions of matter in various stages of decay. You will find natural, organic items (frozen meat, fish, sliced papaya, roots, leaves) sitting right alongside processed, human-made items (beer bottles, plastic wrappers, pre-packaged foods). The ruin is quite literally built into the design of toxic hybridity of our current age, global supply chains, industrial farming, and the environmental cost of mass production.

(Above) A photograph of *Rinascimento* by Sakshi Bhat.

watchtowers seen outside the venue. With deceptive serenity, a garden is lit up with blue ultraviolet light. However, the garden consists of the carnivorous Venus flytrap plants encircling these watchtowers, inside which are clips of interviews playing, not visible unless you choose to look. It is all a metaphor on how predatory media can be, making disturbing headlines into easily digestible packages for the viewers' consumption. It is only possible to see the real stories of people affected by conflict—in this case, the ULFA insurgency in Assam—by peering into these confined spaces. As an observer, you are forced to make a choice: do you stay in the comfort of the outside space and consume what you are fed while staying outside the system or become an observer and thus a part of this surveillance system to see the truth? It is a spatial trap where there is no escape, and everyone is forced to become a part of this web where gaze is inherently part of the world.

At the Coir Godown in Aspinwall House, we are made to be observers of Adrián Villar Rojas's *Rinascimento*. The sight of rotting meat, fish and produce highlights the sad reality of loss of traditional food cultures during wartime. When land and sea

farming becomes difficult, countries involved in conflict are often forced to step aside from the status of being self-sufficient in favour of mass produced and artificial rations in the form of formal aid. The involvement of excessive amounts of plastic in the exhibit also points at the disturbance in the food chain due to pollution and the heavy pollution of affected countries by nations with greater political and decisive power. The *Rinascimento* changes every day, with the refrigerators not able to win against the inevitable. It can only delay the process, but the mold and decay will eventually consume the food items in the conditions it is kept in.

Stepping away from these art displays, the weather of Kochi no longer feels like a burden on you, but as a reminder of the perseverance shown by somebody who is desperate for their voice to be heard. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale gives you the feeling that even the act of being present and bearing witness to art is, in itself, a form of resistance—where the choice to understand keeps their culture alive and does not let the greed of the ones who are hungry for power erase and make the world forget the existence of the ones suffering.

A HOME NO LONGER EXISTS—WAR, MEMORY, AND THE LIVES WE SCROLL PAST

Some scars are not visible. And some scars never disappear.

AREEJ DURRANI



This artwork is part of a series titled *All of Us* (2025) by Nityan Unnikrishnan, presented at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2026. Unnikrishnan's work is known for teeming with "micro-stories" that overlap, often blurring the lines between reality and fantasy. The series reflects on human existence amidst breakdown and chaos. His paintings frequently explore urban landscapes, domestic interiors filled with minutiae, and the tension between being "together" and "alone". This painting depicts a scene of internal and external fragmentation—showing figures in a cluttered, partially destroyed living space that looks out onto a dense, possibly war-torn or decaying cityscape.

War will end, the leaders will shake hands, but the old woman will keep waiting for her martyred son.

Mahmoud Darwish

Every morning begins the same. The phone is unlocked. Notifications appear. Headlines flash:

"Children killed in Gaza."

"Israel strikes Iran."

"Missiles hit cities overnight."

The thumb scrolls. One image after another, graves, starving children, broken homes, people running, people crying. For a moment, the eyes pause... and then scroll again. It has become routine now, to wake up to death counts. There seems to be no end to it. And yet, everything continues. Lives move forward. Days go on.

But somewhere, a home no longer exists. A child becomes an orphan. A woman becomes a widow. A family is left incomplete, carrying a loss that cannot be replaced. The world has grown insensitive. People feel helpless. Leaders seem to have lost their humanity. In the race for recognition and power, the world has shattered the very idea of humanity. We often speak of brotherhood, of progress, of morals and ethics, as if they define the world we live in. But what meaning do these words hold when such realities continue to exist? What we believe and what we witness feel like two very different realities. It is deeply unsettling to think

how someone can order the deaths of thousands, even millions, of innocent lives. Does the voice not tremble before giving such a command? How is power achieved through bloodshed? How can victory be celebrated, anthems sung, flags saluted, soldiers praised, when innocence is buried beneath it? Babies who never saw the world. Children who once dreamed of becoming doctors, pilots, now wrapped in white shrouds. The sight of parents holding the lifeless bodies of their children is unbearable. It does not just bring tears, it burns from within. A kind of pain that words fail to contain.

A painting by Nityan Unnikrishnan, that was exhibited at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, captures this unsettling reality. The artwork presents a cluttered domestic space where figures stand by a window, looking out at a desolate cityscape. Everything outside is destroyed, silent, empty, broken. The painting becomes symbolic of this contradiction, a world that speaks of humanity, yet reflects destruction. The figures appear trapped between two realities, one of claimed progress, and the other of visible devastation. These artworks are not just visual representations, they act as a reminder,

forcing us to confront realities we have slowly become numb to.

Imagine living in a place where every second is uncertain. Where one does not know if loved ones will be seen again, or if survival itself is possible. Even imagining it creates a sense of unease. Then what must it feel like for those living through it, in Iran, in Palestine?

War is not just fought on battlefields. It lives on, in fear, in loss, in memories that refuse to fade. As Mahmoud Darwish wrote, "War will end, the leaders will shake hands, but the old woman will keep waiting for her martyred son." Some scars are not visible. And some scars never disappear.

WHY MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS FOR STUDENTS

Mental health awareness must translate into daily action. It starts with checking in on friends and really listening, reducing judgement, challenging harmful stereotypes, and taking the courage to attend a first therapy session.

SHENELL MARIA DSOUZA

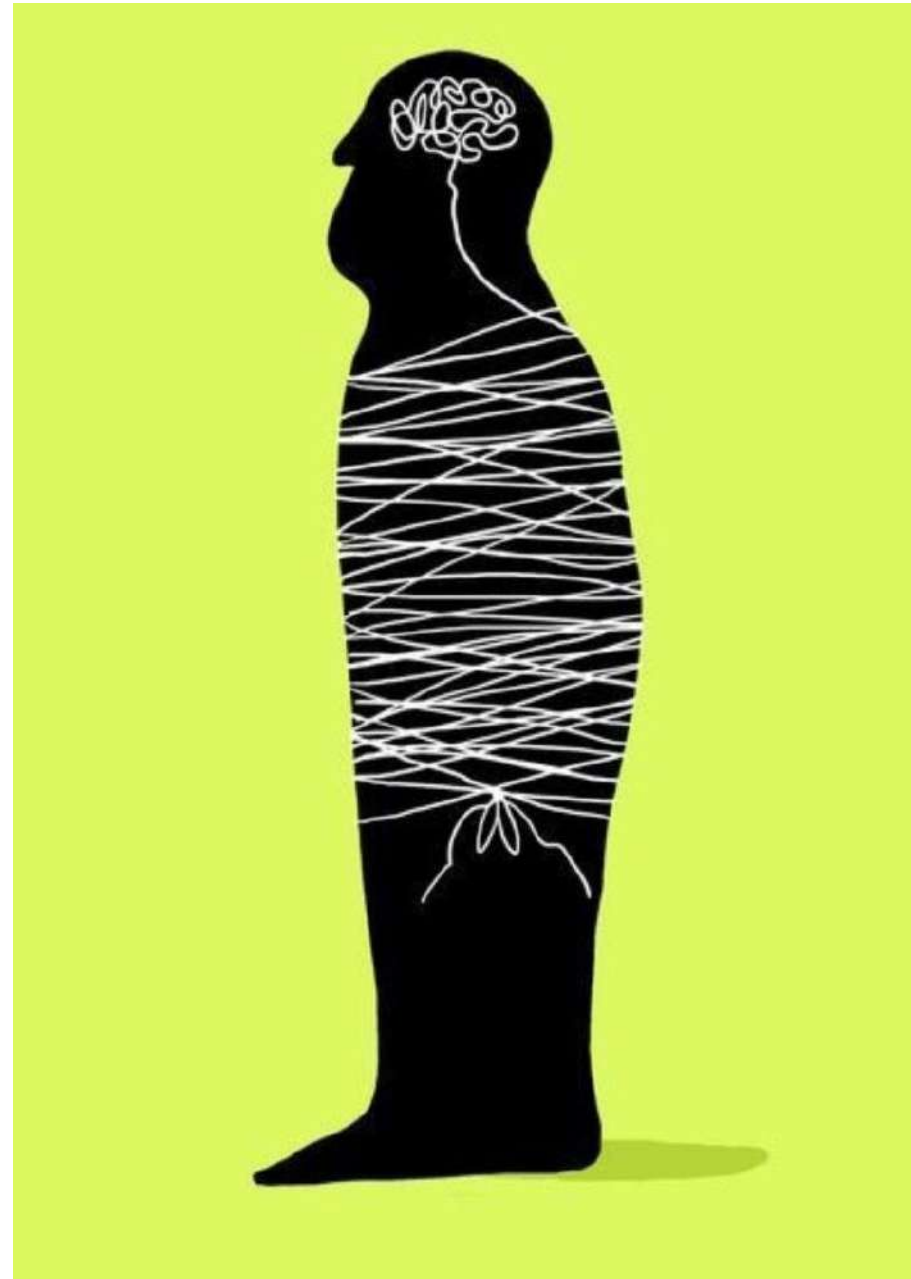
Every year on 7 April, the World Health Organisation celebrates World Health Day, drawing attention to pressing global health concerns. While physical health has traditionally dominated such discussions, recent years have marked an important shift: mental health is now recognised as equally vital to overall well-being. For students in particular, this shift could not be more necessary. The image of the “carefree student” is increasingly being replaced by a more complex reality, where the pursuit of academic excellence often comes at a high psychological cost.

The university years are often described as the best years of life. Yet, for many students, they are also years marked by academic pressure, uncertainty about the future, financial stress, social comparison, and emotional transitions. Balancing coursework, internships, relationships, and family expectations can create chronic stress. We often celebrate the “grind culture” that keeps library lights on until dawn, but we rarely discuss the biological toll this takes. When left unaddressed, this persistent tension may contribute to anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms, burnout, and sleep disturbances.

The transition to higher education represents a perfect storm of stressors. For many, it is the first time they are truly responsible for their own schedules, finances, and health. This sudden independence, while exciting, can lead to a sense of profound isolation. The digital age adds another layer of complexity; social media creates a relentless “highlight reel” of other people’s successes, making students feel as though they are falling behind in a race that has no finish line.

Psychologically, young adulthood is a crucial developmental stage. It is a period of identity formation, career decision-making, and increasing independence. The brain is still undergoing significant structural changes, particularly in areas responsible for executive function and emotional regulation. When mental health challenges arise during this phase, they do not just affect a single semester; they can alter a student’s entire trajectory, impacting academic performance, self-esteem, and long-term professional confidence.

Unfortunately, stigma remains a formidable barrier. In competitive academic environments, there is a pervasive fear of being judged as weak or incapable. Students often feel they must maintain a façade of “having it all together”



to secure recommendations or future employment. This silence is dangerous because it prevents early intervention, which is often the key to recovery.

In recent years, there has been encouraging progress in mental health awareness. Colleges are establishing counselling centres, peer support groups, and mental health campaigns. Social media conversations around therapy, self-care, and emotional boundaries have become more normalised. One of the most vital shifts has been the growing visibility of men’s mental health.

Traditionally, social norms around masculinity have discouraged men from expressing vulnerability. Phrases such as “be strong” or “man up” have reinforced emotional suppression for generations.

Research consistently shows that this reluctance to seek support contributes to underdiagnosis and untreated conditions among male students. The growing awareness that true strength includes emotional honesty is a significant cultural shift. When men feel empowered to acknowledge their struggles, it creates a ripple effect that benefits the entire campus community, dismantling the toxic idea that suffering in silence is a badge of honour.

World Health Day reminds us that health is not merely the absence of illness, but a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. For students, prioritising mental health does not mean eliminating stress. In fact, a certain level of stress can be a healthy motivator that drives growth and learning. The goal is not a stress-free life, but a resilient one. Building resilience involves developing tangible coping strategies:

- **Time Management:** Moving from reactive panic to proactive planning to reduce “deadline dread”.
- **Sleep Hygiene:** Recognising that a rested brain processes information more efficiently than an exhausted one.

- **Physical Activity:** Utilising movement as a natural regulator for the nervous system.
- **Social Connection:** Investing in real-world relationships that provide a safety net during difficult times.
- **Professional Help:** Understanding that seeking a therapist is no different from seeing a doctor for a physical injury.

While individual habits matter, institutions also carry a heavy responsibility. Academic systems must recognise the psychological impact of unrealistic workloads and rigid evaluation methods that value memorisation over well-being.

True change requires structural support. This means flexible attendance policies for those dealing with health crises, easily accessible and well-funded counselling services, and safe spaces where students can speak openly without fear of academic reprisal. When an institution prioritises the mental health of its students, it creates an environment where intellectual curiosity can flourish rather than being stifled by fear.

Ultimately, mental health awareness must translate into daily action. It starts with checking in on friends and really listening to the answer. It involves reducing judgement towards those who take a break or a gap year. It requires us to challenge harmful stereotypes and to celebrate the courage it takes to attend a first therapy session.

As we observe World Health Day, it is essential to remember that a healthy society begins with healthy individuals. For students navigating one of the most formative and volatile periods of their lives, mental well-being is not a luxury or a secondary concern; it is a fundamental necessity. True progress will occur when seeking help is viewed not as a sign of weakness, but as a mark of wisdom, and when we finally treat the health of the mind with the same urgency and seriousness as the health of the body.



POETRY AS BREATHING

Dr Perugu Ramakrishna is a celebrated bilingual writer in Telugu and English. Having published over 25 works—ranging from original poetry and translations to editorial compilations—he is deeply recognised for works like *Echoes of Nellore* and the environmentally themed syllabus-staple *Flamingo*. In this insightful interview, Dr Sushri Sangita Mishra speaks with Dr Ramakrishna about his navigation of life, administration, and the profound phenomenology of poetic creation.

Dr Sushri Sangita Mishra:

Poets frequently face a deceptively simple yet profound question: why do you write poetry? How do you articulate the inner impulse that draws you toward this form? Please share your reflections on the phenomenology of poetic creation—how does a poem take shape in your consciousness, from initial intuition to linguistic articulation?

Dr Perugu Ramakrishna: Perhaps it's the inability to not write that compels me. Poetry has become like breathing; it is a journey with my soul. The world around me is a constant source of inspiration. Being a poet requires being a visionary, so I have developed the habit of viewing life from new perspectives. Frequently, my poetry has awakened consciousness in others. Choosing novel subjects has ultimately helped me establish a unique poetic voice.

SSM: *Your poetry seems to negotiate the space between regional cultural ethos and modern or post-modern expressions. Do you see your work in this light? What themes recur most persistently, and what impulses give rise to your poems?*

PR: I stepped into life and poetry with a foundation of social awareness. My writings stem from a humanitarian perspective, as a poet must deeply

respond to societal sorrow with a worldly outlook. I stand with the oppressed, journeying forward with progressive ideals. *Echoes of Nellore* is a tribute to my birthplace, deeply rooted in its cultural essence. Another important experiment is my long poem, *Flamingo*. It is an environmental work based on research about migratory birds in the Pulicat region. Selecting such an unconventional subject accounted for much of the poem's success, leading to its inclusion in the 9th-grade school syllabus.

SSM: *How hard has it been to navigate your dual roles as a poet and an officer in the Commercial Taxes Department? Taxation is about compliance, while poetry is about crossing boundaries. Have you ever felt a conflict between these domains, and if so, which usually wins?*

PR: My childhood was marked by hardship; my father passed away when I was nine, and my mother raised us with great difficulty in my aunt and uncle's home. During that period in the 10th grade, my first poem was published in a reputed weekly magazine. My mother mentioned that my father wrote metrical poetry, and I watched my elder brother write modern free verse in Telugu

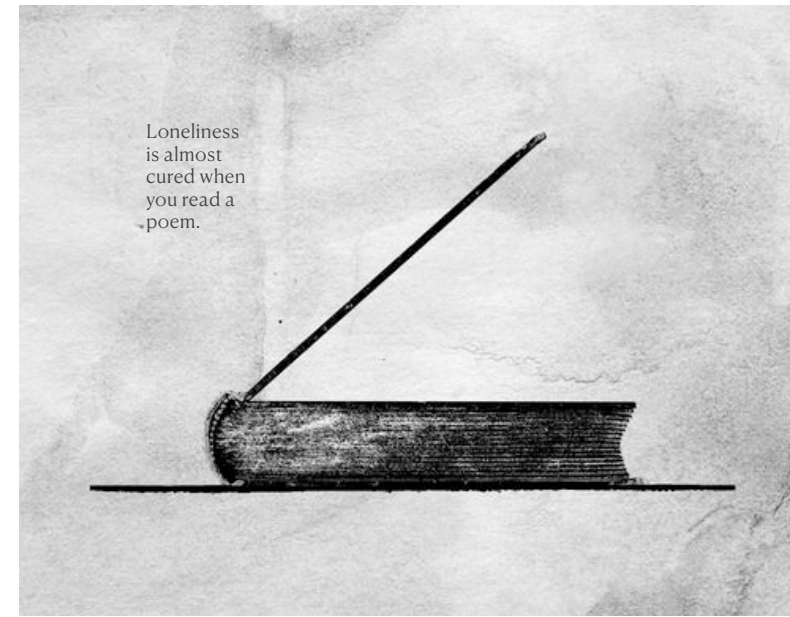
and English. Thus, poetry came to me naturally. After completing my degree in English literature, I joined the Commercial Taxes Department. Holding firmly onto Vani (Goddess Saraswathi) alongside Vanijyam (Commerce), I embarked on a 50-year poetic journey. My profession and passion have run as parallel lines, aided by unending support from superiors, colleagues, and family. Whenever a conflict arose, I diplomatically let poetry win. I have always felt proud when my words transcended boundaries.

SSM: *When did you officially start writing and publishing?*

PR: I began writing and getting published at the age of 15. I have never looked back, continuing to write non-stop across continents. That is my joy.

SSM: *How would you trace your poetic journey since then regarding milestones and turning points?*

PR: Wherever I traveled, I met rivers and poets alike. Since my first poetry collection in 1996, I have published over 25 works, including original poetry, translations, and editorial compilations. I have participated on prestigious international platforms, receiving numerous awards and honors. It has been a privilege to make the Telugu language heard on global stages and to learn from poets worldwide.



SSM: *How do life and poetry influence each other in your daily existence?*

PR: Honestly, I believe I have given more importance to my passion than my profession. Poetry and life continuously influence each other; I have learned to harmonize them. The people and places I encountered through poetry expanded my thoughts and added new dimensions to my values. Reading and listening to others spurred my mental growth and self-discovery. I observe everyday life through the lens of poetry and record it accordingly.

SSM: *In your view, what is the purpose of poetry? What does it offer to both the poet and the reader?*

PR: Through poetry, I have seen forests carrying oceans and oceans carrying forests. It provides aesthetic pleasure while awakening society and conveying vital messages. Personally, it has taught me how to live artistically. Because of poetry, I have met people with the highest ideals, including Nobel laureates, Sahitya Akademi recipients, and nearly 10 Jnanpith awardees. Witnessing their deep-rooted human values has been unforgettable.

SSM: *Who are your favorite poets and authors? Did any specific works influence you growing up?*

PR: My favorite Telugu poet is Seshendra Sharma. Among Hindi poets, I admire Kunwar Narayan, Kedarnath Singh, and Gulzar, whose works constantly inspire me. A cherished memory is when the SAARC countries' poetry anthology—which I edited—was launched by three Jnanpith awardees at a literary event in Bhubaneswar.

SSM: *Are there any younger poets or recent poems that have caught your attention?*

PR: I have read outstanding works by many young poets. I often call them to offer appreciation and introduce them to international platforms to recite their work. They are producing truly distinctive poetry.

SSM: *Finally, do you believe poetry carries a responsibility towards society? What message would you like to convey to your readers?*

PR: Readers receive messages from our writing, and society is awakened by our creativity. The world preserves our creations as signatures on time. What more can a poet give?

WHOSE BODY DOES THIS HEART BELONG TO..?

Dr PERUGU RAMAKRISHNA

I offer you a handful of ash
can you tell
which city's heart has been burned to dust?

A broken toy
that fell in silence—
can your science
peer into its fragments
and measure how much childhood it has lost?

Amid the thunderous roar
of metal birds tearing through the sky,
what song of peace
can a flock of doves possibly sing?

For the lines drawn on maps,
how much blood has this earth swallowed?
How many cries has the wind carried?
How many tears have rivers overflowed with?

When, in the furnaces of power,
humanity is charred into ash
who claims victory?
Who bears defeat?

Nations may be built with walls,
but no one can build wall in hearts.
No one can stamp borders
upon the endless blue sky.

A single tear
from a mother's eye
does it belong to any flag?
When it falls into the heart of the earth,
it becomes the wound of all humanity.

So, offer not bullets,
but a handful of compassion.
Ignite not the flames of bombs,
but the light of humanity.

The truth is
no human has ever won a war;
it is only peace
that wins the world.

Not upon histories written in blood,
but with the letters of love,
shall tomorrow's earth
be sketched
with the face of a new human being.

Absurd Reasons Behind Absurd Wars

SUMIT DASGUPTA

I have observed that humanity possesses a peculiar talent for turning the grave business of warfare into a comedy of errors. Some conflicts were settled by a bowl of soup or a very fast bird. If you believe international relations are conducted with dignity, the following list may prove a necessary corrective to that optimistic delusion.

10 The Football War (1969)

A World Cup qualifier ignited deep-seated resentment between El Salvador and Honduras over land reform and migration. The “100-Hour War” left roughly 3,000 dead, proving national pride is a volatile substance when mixed with sporting results. India has seen that become a common thing, unfortunately.

9 The Emu War (1932)

Australia deployed Lewis machine guns against 20,000 crop-devastating emus. The birds split into small bands, rendering the heavy weapons useless. After thousands of rounds for a negligible casualty count, the army withdrew. Feathers proved more resilient than the government’s best-laid plans.

8 The Pastry War (1838)

France invaded Mexico because of a ruined tart. Chef Monsieur Remontel demanded 600,000 pesos after Mexican officers looted his shop. King Louis-Philippe duly sent a fleet to bombard San Juan de Ulua. A rare example of a colonial power using high explosives to settle a bakery bill.



Image: Episode of the Mexican expedition in 1838. Horace Vernet, 1841 / Wikimedia Commons

7 The War of Jenkins’ Ear (1739)

Robert Jenkins had his ear sliced off by Spanish coastguards in 1731, preserved it in a jar for seven years, then presented it to the House of Commons. Do not confuse him with internet legend Leroy Jenkins. The pickled ear ignited patriotic fervour sufficient to drag Britain into the far larger War of the Austrian Succession.

6 The War of the Golden Stool (1900)

Governor Hodgson demanded to sit upon the sacred Golden Stool of the Ashanti Empire, an object containing the soul of the nation, never meant to be sat upon by anyone. Queen Mother Yaa Asantewaa led a fierce rebellion. The British annexed the territory but never did get to sit on the stool.

5 The Kettle War (1784)

The Dutch fired a single shot at an Austrian fleet on the Scheldt River. It struck a soup kettle on the flagship’s deck. Horrified by the loss of their lunch, the crew surrendered immediately. Food will start wars or end them. In this case, it ended one before dinner.

4 The Aroostook War (1838)

American and Canadian lumberjacks brawled over timber on the Maine-New Brunswick border. Both nations mobilised thousands of troops. Zero combat fatalities resulted. The soldiers built fortifications and waited for orders that never came. One remembers Woodstock being more violent.



Image: HMS Scylla and Odinn collision during the Cod Wars / Issac Newton / Wikimedia Commons

3 The Cod Wars (1958–1976)

Iceland expanded its fishing zones and deployed net-cutters to slice British trawling gear. Despite a colossal disparity in naval power, Iceland threatened to leave NATO and Britain backed down, proving a well-placed threat more effective than a destroyer.

2 The Anglo-Zanzibar War (1896)

Sultan Khalid bin Barghash refused a British ultimatum. War commenced at 09:02. By 09:40 the palace was rubble — thirty-eight minutes, just enough time to win a campaign before mid-morning tea had gone cold.

1 The Lijar War (1883–1883)

The village of Lijar, Spain, declared war on France in 1883 over their king’s mistreatment in Paris. Not a single shot was fired for a century. A new mayor discovered the decree in 1983 and organised a peace ceremony. The most successful wars are those where everyone forgets to show up.

The common thread is wounded pride and a lack of perspective. Whether fighting over a pastry or a soup pot, the combatants found themselves on the wrong side of history and the right side of a punchline. History will repeat itself. The list will write itself anew.



LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR AT THE SERVICE OF THE ELDERLY POOR!



In 1839 in cold winter, Jeanne Jugan met and found God in the face of a poor elderly woman, blind and paralysed. She gave her bed to the poor woman, opened her home and her heart to her. Since then, many elderly people were welcomed by Jeanne Jugan and her daughters who are called “Little Sisters of the Poor” present all over the world in 32 countries. Jeanne said, “It is so good to be poor, to have nothing and to count on God for everything.” She literally lived her saying and taught her daughters to trust in God’s divine Providence.

“Whatever you do to the least of my brothers you do unto me.”
Would you like to take care of Jesus in the elderly poor?



If you hear the call to follow Jesus in the footsteps of Saint Jeanne Jugan,
COME AND SEE!

Little Sisters of the Poor

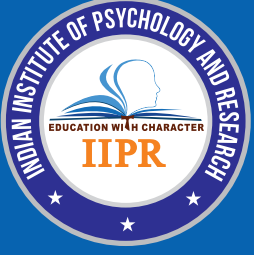
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