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together

a national family magazine

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

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

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

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

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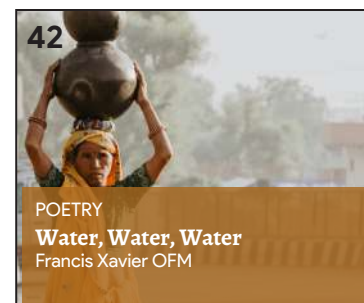
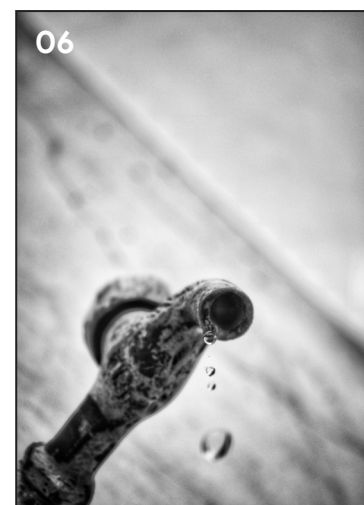
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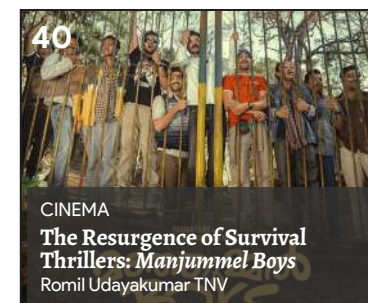
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WATER RESILIENCE: WHAT ARE WE NOT GETTING RIGHT?

We are at a crisis, and the crisis is not lack of water but the mismanagement of the water that is available to us.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

We have grown up hearing the ancient wisdom, “Water is life, and clean water is health.” The recent water stress that cities all over the country, and very palpably Bengaluru, is facing indicates that our life and our health are at risk. At any time, in want of water, our electrocardiogram graph can go flat into a straight line. The demand for water has exceeded the available amount of water. Around 1.2 billion people, one in every seven persons, across the globe spend their day searching or waiting for water. Can we bounce back? The answer is in building and maintaining a blue-green infrastructure.

In a region, if the amount of renewable water per person is below 1,700m³, the country is said to be experiencing water stress. If it is below 1,000m³, it is said to be experiencing water scarcity. And if it is below 500 m³, it is experiencing absolute water scarcity. We are not yet at absolute water scarcity level; but indications are that our negligence, indifference and lack of initiative will reach us there very soon.

This year, the first city in India to hit the panic button is Bengaluru. But it hasn't come as a surprise. The city has experienced a sharp 1,055% rise in built-up areas in last five decades. This population increase is primarily driven by migration driven factors such as

job opportunities, resource availability and an improved quality of life. As early as 2014, warnings were issued about rising temperatures, the disappearance of green cover and constant water scarcity in Bengaluru due to the expanding built-up areas, but there was no action about it. Similar may be the state of affairs of most cities. In India, 256 of 700 districts have reported critical or overexploited groundwater levels according to the most recent study of the Central Ground Water Board. Wells, ponds, and tanks are drying up as groundwater resources come under increasing pressure due to over-reliance and unsustainable consumption.

Blue-Green Infrastructure Is the Key

Growing populations, mindless real estate activities, irresponsible use of water, and added rapid urbanisation and rapid expansion of cities, there is a large influx of migrants from rural areas to cities. It has caused an increase in the per capita use of water in cities; the per capita use is steadily increasing every year; thus cities are on catch up mode constantly. City authorities most often manage it by transferring water from rural reservoirs to urban areas to meet the deficit. Considering the downward trend of water level in urban areas, it is likely that cities will rely heavily on rural areas for water supply in the future, which may spark a rural-urban conflict.

Dr Veena Sreenivasan, the Executive Director of WELL (Water, Environment, Land and Livelihoods) Labs, Bengaluru in a podcast with *The Hindu*, categorically upheld the need for building up blue green infrastructure.

Blue infrastructure refers to identifying, building, protecting, and recharging our lakes, rivers, canals,

ponds, wetlands, and other water bodies. As of now most of our lakes and water bodies are either encroached or are filled with sewage waste and muck. Thus even the normal and default harvesting and catchment of storm water is not taking place.

Green infrastructure refers to building and defending, green patches, gardens with trees, water harvesting pits, etc. from where water can infiltrate into the earth. In other words, increase the porosity of our earth; that is to make it capable to absorb every measure of water that falls on it. When out of necessity we are forced to pave a place, be it for parking or for people to gather, use friendly materials, pavers with pores in them, create green unpaved spaces in regular intervals and direct rain water there.

There are many ways to tackle water scarcity in the cities. Some are tried and did have reparations. Building huge dams was one of them. Connecting rivers is another way. These both invariably serve the rich and capitalists at the expense of the less fortunate people who get displaced, their farmland being submerged, etc. water becomes a commodity to be enjoyed by the rich.

It is time we must open our eyes to other ways to increase availability and harnessing of water. It may be shocking to know that of the 100 litres of water that is available for us to use about 80% go waste; only 20% is actually put to use. The rest just runs down the drain. That 80 litres are

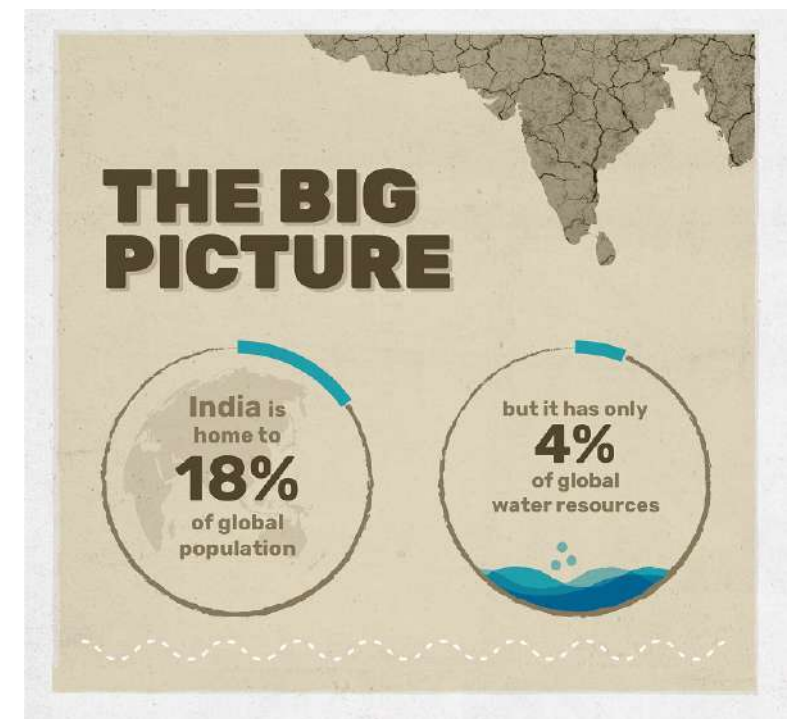


Image: data.worldbank.org

available to be treated and used for agriculture and gardening. It would even be cheaper than buying tanker water. Another is to capture storm water before they escape to the sea and become useless for humans. Dig rainwater harvesting pits, direct it to rejuvenate lakes, ponds, and wells around us.

Water of course is a basic need for the survival of human beings and is part of the fundamental right to life as enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution of India, but large dams should be the last recourse, try out all other possibilities, because huge dams submerge wildlife, villages, they displace people and their farmlands, and the poor often do not get their fair share of benefits. We are at a crisis, and the crisis is not lack of water but the mismanagement of the water that is available to us. Let us fix that first. Remember that only 30 percent of India's wastewater is recycled.

In conclusion, we must become adults in matters of water too. One becomes an adult when you know you have no one else to depend on; you got to fend for yourself, or will go thirsty and hungry, or even die. Being an adult is a survival mechanism. As an adult you begin to think, plan, believe, work, and most often succeed. Do not look out to others to solve our water crisis. We must look within. Rumi beautifully says, if everything around seems dark, look again, you may be the light.

India's Looming Water Crisis: A Call for Sustainable Action

By 2050, India is projected to experience a staggering 50% decline in per capita water availability, raising existential concerns about the nation's ability to sustain its people and progress.

LIYA THOMAS

Water is one of the most precious natural resources and a key element in the socio-economic development of a country.

About 71% of earth's surface is covered by water; but it is distributed in such a way that only a small fraction of the total water available on the earth is useful for human consumption. To put it in perspective, three-fourths of the Earth's surface is covered with water, hence known as the 'water planet'. Out of this, the oceans cover about two-thirds surface, which is unfit for human consumption. Only around 2.7% is available for human use out of which the maximum is covered under ice sheets and glaciers, thus inaccessible. Finally it comes down to just 1% of the water that can be considered to be fit and available for human use.

India accounts for about 2.45% of world's surface area and 4% of the world's water resources. Rainfall is the main source of fresh water in India. From precipitation alone, including snowfall, India receives 4000 cubic km of water; of which a large part is lost through process of evaporation and plant transpiration. It is troubling to know that India, a nation cradled by mighty rivers and vast coastlines, finds itself confronting a severe water crisis that threatens its very existence. As one of the most populous country, India's water demand continues to surge, fueled by rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and unsustainable agricultural practices. The statistics are sobering: by 2050, India is projected to experience a staggering 50% decline in per capita water availability, raising existential concerns about the nation's ability to sustain its people and progress.

In the midst of this crisis, it is the women of India who carry the heaviest burden. Tasked with the arduous responsibility of fetching water from distant sources, these resilient matriarchs spend countless hours each day traversing long distances, their physical and

mental well-being sacrificed at the altar of water insecurity. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Poverty is the worst form of violence," and the lack of access to water perpetuates this cycle of deprivation and inequality.

While urban areas grapple with the challenges of meeting the water demands of their growing populations, rural India faces a different set of struggles. Over 41% of rural households lack access to safely managed drinking water within their premises, highlighting the stark disparities in water access across the country. This divide echoes the words of Dr. Rajendra Singh, the renowned "Waterman of India": "Water has no boundaries, but we have created boundaries for water." Agriculture, the backbone of India's rural economy, bears the weight of an unquenchable thirst. A staggering 89% of surface water and 92% of groundwater are consumed by agricultural activities, reflecting the immense strain placed on this vital resource. Inefficient irrigation practices and the cultivation of water-intensive crops have exacerbated the crisis, leaving many regions grappling with water scarcity and depleted groundwater reserves. As the ancient Sanskrit proverb warns, "Unchecked greed leads to depletion, even of the ocean."

The Path Ahead: A Confluence of Wisdom and Action

As India navigates this multifaceted crisis, a holistic and sustainable approach is imperative. The time to act is now. India's water crisis demands a collective response, one that harnesses traditional wisdom, embraces innovative technologies, and prioritises sustainable management practices. By addressing this crisis head-on, we can pave the way for a water-secure future, where every citizen has access to this precious resource, and our nation's progress is not hindered by the threat of water scarcity.

Rainwater harvesting, an ancient practice deeply rooted in Indian culture, has emerged

as a critical strategy in the nation's quest for water security. Capturing and storing rainwater for various uses, including groundwater recharge and irrigation, fosters resilience against water scarcity and drought. The southern state of Tamil Nadu, once plagued by severe water shortages, has embraced rainwater harvesting with remarkable success, replenishing groundwater levels and mitigating the impact of erratic monsoon patterns. In the arid regions of Rajasthan, initiatives like the Mukhyamantri Jal Swavlamban Abhiyan have revived traditional water conservation practices, fostering community participation and empowerment.

Rainwater harvesting increases water availability, checks the declining ground water table, improves the quality of groundwater through dilution of contaminants like fluoride and nitrates. Traditional rainwater harvesting in rural areas is done by using surface storage bodies like lakes, ponds, irrigation tanks, etc. Urban areas need to think creatively, which can specially benefit from rainwater harvesting as water demand has already outstripped supply in most of the cities and towns.

Beyond traditional practices, India must also embrace innovative technologies and interventions to address its water woes. Groundwater table monitoring, facilitated by advanced remote sensing and Geographic

Information System (GIS) technologies, can provide valuable insights into the status of aquifers and inform sustainable water management strategies. Water quality restoration through advanced treatment techniques is vital, particularly in regions affected by high levels of contaminants.

No sustainable solution can be truly effective without the active participation of communities. Awareness campaigns play a pivotal role in fostering a culture of responsible water management practices, empowering individuals to become stewards of this precious resource. In the drought-prone regions of Maharashtra, grassroots movements like the "Paani Foundation" has successfully mobilised local communities to revive and maintain traditional water harvesting systems, transforming arid landscapes into water-sufficient areas. Such efforts not only address the immediate water crisis but also instill a sense of ownership and responsibility among communities, ensuring the long-term sustainability of water conservation efforts. Additionally, interventions such as groundwater table monitoring, water quality restoration, pricing mechanisms, circular water economy promotion, and efficient irrigation techniques are vital.

As India marches towards water security...upholding a policy environment that integrates gender considerations and measures progress against gender goals is paramount.

Governments have taken commendable steps to address the nation's water crisis, with initiatives like the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) aimed at providing safe and adequate drinking water to every rural household by 2024. Another such promising initiative is the "Atal Bhujal Yojana," a groundwater management program launched in 2020, which aims to promote sustainable practices like artificial recharge, water budgeting, and participatory groundwater management. By involving local communities and leveraging advanced technologies, this program has the potential to address the critical issue of groundwater depletion in priority areas across seven states.

Furthermore, the integration of water conservation efforts with other national priorities, such as climate change mitigation and sustainable agriculture, can yield multiple benefits. For instance, the promotion of climate-smart agricultural practices like drought-resistant crop varieties, mulching, and agroforestry can not only enhance water-use efficiency but also contribute to carbon sequestration and soil health.

Rain-fed agriculture accounts for 68% of India's cropped area. With huge tract of land falling under arid and semi-arid region, Watershed Management is the most viable option in the rain fed areas of the country. Watershed management refers to efficient management and conservation of surface and groundwater resources. It involves prevention of runoff and storage and recharge of groundwater through various methods like percolation tanks, recharge wells, etc. The success of watershed management in Ralegan Siddhi village, Maharashtra has been remarkable. Through watershed management, the village which was perennially drought hit was made water surplus. It boosted the economic activities and made the village

and villagers self-reliant bringing about a significant environmental and social change.

As India marches towards water security, concerted efforts must prioritise sustainable practices, community involvement, and gender inclusivity. Upholding a policy environment that integrates gender considerations and measures progress against gender goals is paramount. Initiatives like the "Saheli" project in Rajasthan, which trained and employed women as "water ambassadors," have demonstrated the transformative potential of empowering women in water management. Ultimately, ensuring equitable access to water not only enhances socio-economic outcomes but also fosters peace and resilience in the face of escalating water challenges.

Lastly, fostering regional cooperation and trans-boundary water management strategies is imperative for addressing the complex challenges of shared water resources. The Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan exemplifies the potential for international cooperation in water resource management. Only through a comprehensive and inclusive approach, one that harnesses the collective wisdom and efforts of all stakeholders, can India navigate the turbulent waters of this crisis and emerge as a beacon of hope, demonstrating to the world that even the most daunting challenges can be overcome through unity, determination, and a deep reverence for nature's gifts.

Let us pay heed to the wise warning posed by the *Thirukkural*, "Water is the very source of life, without which nothing lives." Yes. It is time for India to embrace this timeless wisdom and chart a course towards a sustainable water future, where every drop is cherished, every river is revered, and every citizen can access this fundamental human right without compromise.



Rain Water Harvesting: A Warrior's Stories

He delightedly called us up to say that not only had the new borewell sprung to life, but the original borewell, which had been dug 30 years ago, was yielding clean and potable water after decades of being dry!

DR MARIANNE FURTADO DE NAZARETH

Bangalore is reeling with a shortage of fresh water, even before summer has truly hit the city. As an International Rain Water Harvesting (RWH) journalist for the last decade or more, this was a day we knew which would come, but not so soon. There are parts of the city that are parched and dry, begging for water and there are some like the 10 women in the gospel (Matthew 25:1-13) who are fine as their lamps are trimmed and ready with Rain Water Harvesting, which they did last monsoon:



Make a decision to harvest rain water and get a specialist in to fix up the mechanisms. You will never have to worry again if the water supply runs dry in the summer months.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten women, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

I see the commonality between the story of the virgins and the rain water harvester today. Harvest the rain for the dry months and you will not suffer when the need comes up for fresh water in the summer.

As a young woman I was told about RWH when we went for Choir Practice by Fr Cecil Saldanha, a Botanist and Jesuit in St Joseph's Boys high School. Obviously 40 years ago when Fr Cecil spoke to us, Bangalore was still a small town and had no water issues. But then he was looking into the future like all scientists do. He explained that we should save all the rainwater that fell and save it for when there was none. At the time we thought he was nuts.

A few years ago our farm in Hoskote was in trouble. Both the bore wells had dried up and we were buying tankers of water to keep the mango and chickoo trees alive. Then I was invited to several media sensitisation courses held by UNEP and UNFCCC in different countries, especially in Africa, where water was a massive problem. It was there that I saw first hand how RWH had helped the population especially in the little villages to survive.

That's when we decided—just two years ago to put in RWH mechanisms in the farm. We first dug several injection

wells in the path of the rain water run off. Eight feet deep and sank ready made concrete rings to hold the sides firmly. The base was left open so that whatever water collected, could percolate down into the aquifers.

The second important step we took was that the entire roof of the farmhouse was edged with pipes, which caught the rain that fell and directed it to a massive tank that we had placed behind the building. The rain filled the tank after which we allowed the run off to flow into the soil around which was held back by earthen bundhs. This water slowly percolated down into the aquifers which fed the bore wells, which had dried up earlier.

All along the entire two acres we built mud bundhs on which we grew wild grass to hold them in place. These bundhs held the rain back across the property and let it percolate into the soil raising the water table across the property. These were conscious decisions taken with a clear objective of not losing any rain water that fell on the property, or came into it from the surrounding areas.

The excitement in the caretaker's voice was palpable. He delightedly called us up to say that not only had the new borewell sprung to life, but the original borewell, which had been dug 30 years ago, was yielding clean and potable water after decades of being dry! It was like a miracle happening before our eyes. This got all the farmers around excited and all of them have begun putting in place RWH mechanisms.

There are several areas in Sarjapur, Bangalore, which I wrote about as a journalist for the *Deccan Herald*, where homes live off the grid on rain water alone. They have put in a series of filters and tanks which gives them water far superior to the Cauvery water supplied by the government.

Make a decision to RWH and get a specialist in to fix up the mechanisms. You will never have to worry again if the water supply runs dry in the summer months.



BENGALURU'S DEVELOPED; SO IS WATER CRISIS

AAKANSHA MUNSHI

When you first shift to a metropolitan city like Bangalore, perhaps for work or studies, your choice of accommodation would likely be limited to hostels or paying guest facilities. If you happen to be someone who wishes to settle down in the city, it would probably be rented apartments that draw your attention, perhaps even gated communities for the ambitious. Because that's the dream, right?

Well, let's think again.

The recent water crisis in Karnataka has affected its capital city the hardest, leaving schools, hospitals, industries, and even residential areas with extreme shortage of water. It has been all over the news about how employees have begun to skip work, tenants have been turning towards shopping malls for their water needs, and that a few residents are even considering moving out of the city.

During this time, those living in apartment buildings are reportedly being asked to wash their cars not more than twice a week, use half a bucket of water for bathing, and use half-flush in their washrooms. This adversity, coupled with the unusually high temperatures of March, has left all of us distressed and wondering how the same city that's now making headlines for pollution, heated temperatures, and most of all, water scarcity, was once known as the 'Garden City of India'.

Bangalore has always been appreciated for welcoming urban growth while leaving its natural vegetation untouched. Most famously, it's during the months of January to April when the city is in full bloom, from the blushing pink *Tabebuia Rosea* around Jayanagar 4th Block to the bright yellow *Tabebuia Argentea* in Kasturba Road. Clearly, this could not have been achieved without a consistent cooperation between the inhabitants of the city as it developed. Truth be told, it was actually effective human intervention that contributed to the city's lush landscape and greenery.

Bangalore was officially recognised as a city in 1537 CE by Kempé Gowdā, a feudal ruler under the Vijayanagara Empire. The area and its surroundings hardly had any natural vegetation back then because it was located at an elevation of about 900 metres (3,000 feet) from the sea level, lacking a major river in its proximity. He supposedly chose this particular region for defence purposes as the thorny shrubs and dry deciduous forest protected the settlements. As the city passed through the hands of several rulers, millions of trees were planted by them along with the citizens. It was during the rule of Tipu Sultan and Hyder Ali in 1758 when numerous parks and gardens were established, while the arrival of the British in 1799 introduced the pink blooms of *Tabebuia Rosea*.

Coming to the water supply, having a land that wasn't connected to any water bodies naturally made its rulers take responsibility for the same. This began with Kempé Gowdā himself as he constructed artificial tanks for irrigation, fishing, and drinking water, following which the lakes were continuously expanded and maintained by subsequent rulers and localities. Gradually the city began to survive on an interconnected supply of man-made tanks or lakes that harvested rainwater. They were essential for drinking purposes as well as for the economy since the farmers depended on them for irrigation, fishers needed them for the supply of

fish, and pastoralists used them for supporting the grasslands.

As the years passed, Bangalore acquired recognition for its pleasant climate and charming gardens. Numerous industries began establishing their headquarters here and finally in 1998 the city grew out of its previous nicknames, such as 'Garden City' and 'City of a Thousand Lakes', and came to be known as the IT hub of the country.

In a mere decade from 2001 to 2011, the city observed a growth of 47%, while now in 2023, it stands as the third most populous city and the fifth most populous urban area in India with a current population of over 14 million. More people equated to more construction, and while the formerly close-relationship with nature that was enjoyed by the community began to fade, Bangalore went on to be transformed into a concrete jungle.

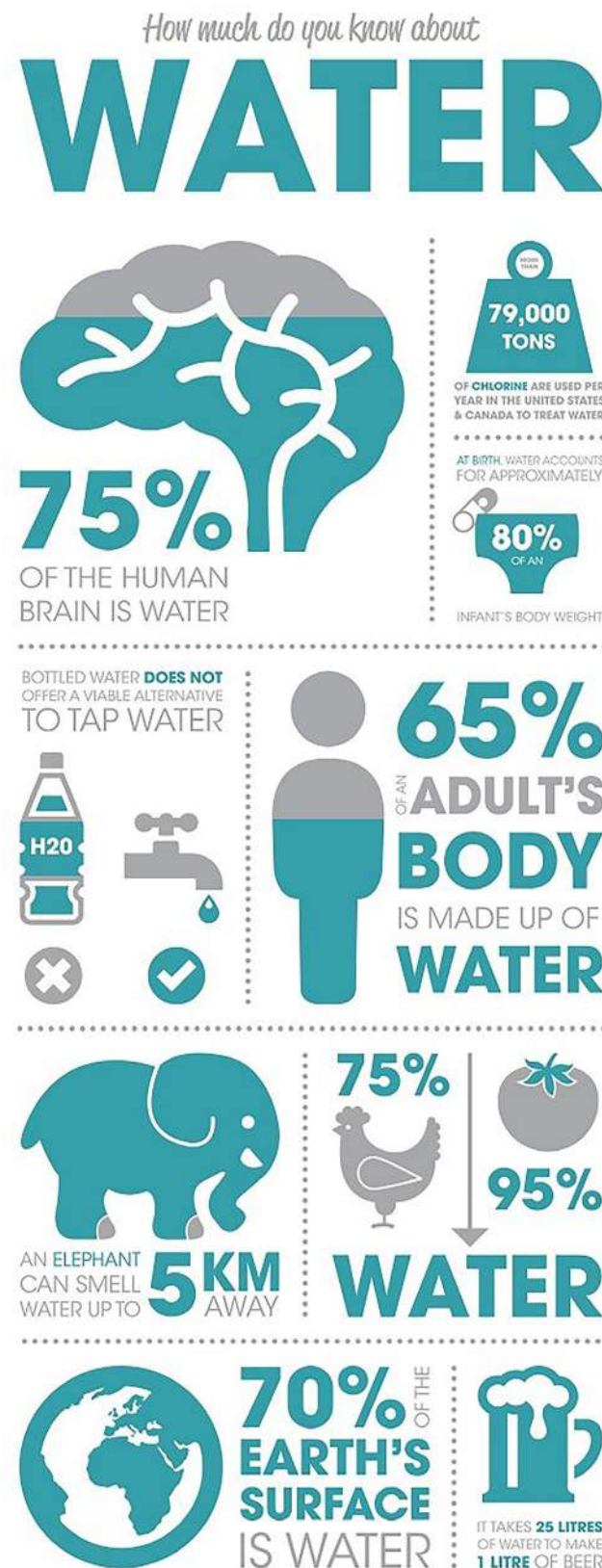
Developmental projects took priority over trees and lakes were soon perceived as sources of risk rather than benefit. Since urbanisation contributed to water pollution with sewage and industrial waste being dumped into lakes, they became sites of diseases such as Malaria or Jaundice, thus needing to be drained and converted into a 'better' area. What used to be the city's central water body in the 19th century, the Sampangi lake, was reconstructed as the Sri Kanteerava indoor sports stadium in 1946; And what used to be a city with over a thousand lakes, is now left with barely eighty.

The disappearance of these lakes along with an increased demand has led to the overexploitation of ground water with the construction of several borewells along the city which supply water to the households through tankers. While the groundwater manages to fulfil about 30% of the demand, the rest relies on the Cauvery and Arkavathi rivers, and due to the large distances between these water bodies and the city, transportation becomes subject to political, environmental, and economic challenges.

The current water crisis is mostly being attributed to insufficient rainfall in the region with the rivers and borewells drying up which has had the harshest impact on those residing at the outskirts of the city. For this, along with short term measures such as prohibiting non-essential use of potable water and taking over several private water tankers, the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) is also looking into the Cauvery Stage V project that aims to cater to the water supply demands of over 110 villages. To accompany that, several environmental activists have been calling for the restoration of the lost lakes of Bangalore, while mass citizen protests have led to a growing awareness for protecting the green cover.

As we head towards April and the arrival of the much awaited monsoon, it can be rest assured that the water crisis will certainly go through a temporary fix. However, it must also be acknowledged that we are simultaneously heading towards increased construction with an abundance of factories, offices, and residential complexes. So, even if you manage to rent one of those luxury apartments in Whitefield or land a job with the best IT company in Electronic City, it'll still be remembered that this was never the dream.

Image: www.bigbathroomshop.co.uk



Euphoria on the Eve of the General Elections

GERRY LOBO OFM

India is on the eve of the General Elections. With a voter-pleasing and government-appealing Central Budget read out by our 'brilliant' Finance Minister, the game is only commenced which was already begun with the raising of the Ram Mandir, the statue being erected and a host of guarantees being thrown into the sentiments of our citizens. The ball has snow started rolling; perhaps the results are in the open even without holding a voting exercise. Why was the inauguration of the Ram Temple held just at the general elections even when the edifice is incomplete? Why was such a haste? Why had the Prime Servant of the country, the Prime Minister, to be the central attraction forgetting the glorious elegant *moorthi* of Ram Lalla sculpted by the young, calm and genius Yogiraj of Mysore?

If some of the highest ranked priests of the holy religion declined to bless the Temple because the prominent place was usurped by the Prime Minister, were they not right in stating that a political leader should keep out of the religious exercise in a mighty event such as this? Does the mandir belong to the people of this land who have sacrificed their mite or to the Prime Minister who gave the impression that he owns it? The political leader of the country is not a priest. He should have appeared only as a devotee like the thousand others with them.

Instead, he took the Prime place and relegated the responsibility of the high priests. Right minded persons will soon recognise in this the 'holiest devotion', the *dhaiva bhakti* of the Mr Narendra Modi, as the first, loudest and clearest form of election campaign ever held in the country which would already pave the way for 'one religion, one nation' slogan to be passed by the law makers. In this vein recently Sri Sri Ravi Shankar publicly stated: "Several generations of our country developed a slave mentality due to insecurity built around secularism. If anything has changed in our country it is that Rashtra Bhakti and Dhaiva Bhakti are on the same pedestal."

This goes to say that generations of Indians neither loved God nor loved their country because of secularism of the Constitutions. When elections are at the door, statements such as these serve only as a fodder for religious fanaticism and hate speeches to flourish.

The bone-less media in the country faithfully bowing to the political emperor, lest they lose their profit and popularity, promote the voice of the government, even if it is not pro-populi. By complying with the religious-political gods and their demands, the media is only joining the bandwagon of dominant parties, not only to woo the voters but also to convert them into partisan ideologies. This well suits the name of the game; the media proprietors and their managers get away with threats from policy makers so that their prostration before the ruling authority would keep their journalism in par with ideologies harped upon by the religious majoritarian domain. What was telecasted in the event of Ram Temple inauguration was a classic example of how the media danced to the band tunes performed by the Prime Minister and his

religion-tainted party colleagues. Almost all the channels without any conscience and without a feeling for a secular country such as ours, encouraged the Indian soul to bow to the performances of the Prime Minister at the Ayodhya celebration.

Is the media there to promote justice, peace, harmony and Ram Rajya or to divide people and segregate them into religious practices and clusters by what they communicate to the citizens? Media is the voice of the people and not their emperor who should be incensed. Media is the servant of the people, not their commander-in-chief. Media is there to serve the voiceless announcing equality and equity, freedom from oppressive structures and powers, and be supportive in their daily struggles, particularly in a country where religion, not love, is preached and propagated today. It should also promote policies of the government provided these are for the just and overall development of the people and humanitarian ones. The media should be instrumental in enabling people to participate in the programmes and projects when these are truly people-oriented.

Instead, the media in our country in the last ten years during the incumbent central regime has been uncritically siding with a government that is almost turning fascist. This is not justice for the citizen who longs for better life and an inter-religious harmonious existence. While the threats placed before the media by the government agencies for speaking out truth which are well known to citizens of this country, the united voice of the media can definitely withstand the onslaught of sedition and threat mechanisms being used today. In this media has failed people and their frail voice.

As the election being the dominant theme for the media emperors, they will divert opinions, convince indirectly the voters in favour of a party which promotes their telecast and keeps them secure. The citizens are made to be confused, undecided or be even indifferent about their franchise right and duty. Many, going along with the

screams of anchormen who are surviving only because their un-tinted devotion and faithful adoration to the majoritarian god, switch sides and cast their votes according to the convincing channel. Unfortunately even the educated become numb to issues paralyzing the country today and without a heart for the lost and the least, choose the one who can win with a lot of toys. People choose to vote for a religion, not for a country, although one knows the negative consequences of countries ruled by religion.

This is a sad story of the Indian mind encouraged by the media power which it seems has sold the truth for favours, justice for lies. The Indian mind flocks where milk and honey are promised by rulers while retaining destitution and physical suffering as normal. If the freedom of speech is the Constitutional right, then for freedom's sake the media can certainly strike against the powers who want them to be their mouth-piece slaves.

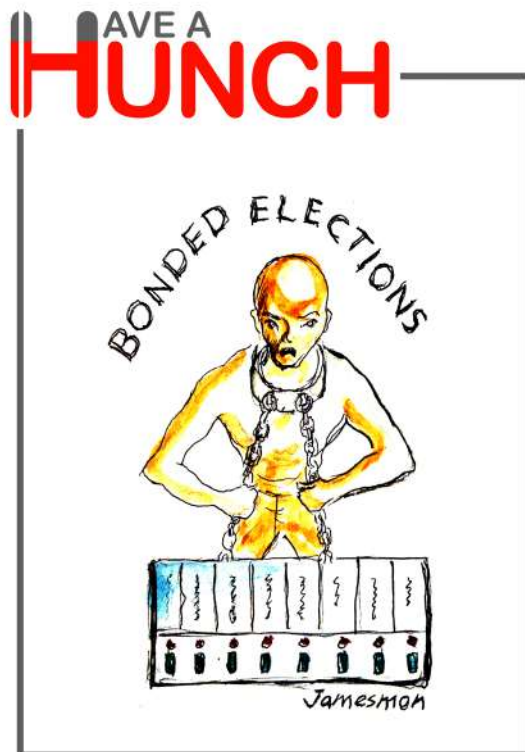
Notoriously the incumbent government at the centre smells the rat on the eve of the elections. Besides dabbling with religion and its practices freely, besides becoming a sensational actor with grand hollow speeches at frequent rallies for promise-making that never see the day of implementation, this government is misusing the law, especially to kill any opposition, break the governance in states ruled by opposing parties by going after officers, state ministers, including chief ministers with unfounded allegations against them. The Enforcement Directorate fanned by the central rulers is working overtime as a faithful slave by serving notices overnight, by sending sleuths at dawn at the door of officials and by arresting them. What the country witnesses at this hour is fear; today it could be you and tomorrow me, quickly picked up and thrown behind bars. This is a sad state of affairs.

In an interview, P. Chidambaram stated this way in *The Wire*: "Agencies are being used to ensure no opposition by hunting

down federalism in the country." The citizens of this nation seem to be passive in political matters but aggressively active in religious matters. Or are they lethargic? Or are indifferent? Is a government of the people simply allowed to act monarchical by the citizens? Because of a strong majoritarian power and hoping to acquire even stronger majority, the voter seem to be disinterested in who sits on power and who relinquishes power. The Prime Minister has even made prediction in the Parliament in his response to the President's speech that his ruling party would win above 400. The Indian citizen is complacent about such politicking by the Prime Minister which was done in the 'Temple of Democracy.' The speech by the President during the Budget session was another bloated rhetoric and nothing but election manifesto for the Party which elevated her to the highest position. In her speech Ayodhya was mentioned several times so that voters know who to pick up on the Election Day.

The time between the blessing of Ram Temple in January in Ayodhya and the General Election in the coming months, as one observes, seems to be a time licensed by the ruling government to communal forces in the country to carry out criminal exercises to polarise, to intimidate, to have free hand in hate speeches and in policing. What took place in a school in Dakshina Kannada (Karnataka) in mid-February is a clear case of taking law into one's own hand by the sitting MLAs and by false accusations hurled at the educational institution administered by the Christian religious women who for more than sixty years in running their schools never have a record of proselytizing. This is also a time for opportunist politicians who after enjoying prestigious positions for long while to switch sides without a conscience and a love for their country. During this period it is also for the government to declare myriad of projects labeling them with psychedelic Sanskrit-Hindi names which the Prime Minister is famous for.

The top advocates of our country are critically evaluating the performance of the government these days. They are at times even disheartened by the judiciary. This, perhaps, is a stage for the death of democracy and the burial of our Constitutions. What a ploy! India is on an election euphoria!



Why Is There So Much Hate?

DR GEORGE JOHN

"Sometimes the Bible in the hands of one man is worse than a bottle of whiskey in the hand of (another) ... There are just some kinds of men who're so busy worrying about the next world, they've never learned to live in this one, and you can look down the street and see the results."

— Lee Harper, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Hate, a formidable and all-consuming emotion, has woven itself into the fabric of human existence since time immemorial. It festers in hearts, breeds violence, and destroys connections that should bind us together. The profound insight shared by Harper Lee in *To Kill a Mockingbird* captures the complex reality that the human capacity for hatred can be deep-rooted and destructive. One needs to explore the civilisational, evolutionary, neuroscientific, psychological and philosophical aspects of the emotion of Hate to understand its multifaceted nature properly. Scrutiny of the personality traits that render a person susceptible to experiencing hatred will deepen our understanding when hatred towards another becomes the prevailing social phenomenon. We also need to examine the potential means of mitigation and sublimation of this emotion while also acknowledging the influence of scripture and religion. Tragically, hatred, in general, and hate of those unlike us have become institutionalised and internalised in some modern societies, which have a deep philosophical history dating back to antiquity.

From a civilisational and evolutionary point of view, hatred has been an unfortunate constant in most human civilisations

throughout history. From wars to genocides, it has perpetuated suffering on an unprecedented scale. Evolutionary theorists suggest that the roots of hate can be traced back to our primal survival instincts. In a world where resources were scarce, and competition was fierce, harbouring animosity towards rival tribes could have conferred an evolutionary advantage. It is disheartening that such primal emotions continue to be a driving force in mankind when modern man is supposed to have become much more intellectually enlightened through our long evolutionary journey thus far. Unfortunately, the inclination to perceive "others" as threats still lingers, albeit in a more complex social context. Au contraire, contemporary society's interdependence necessitates a paradigm shift from tribalism to a more global perspective that prioritises cooperation and empathy.

Neuroscience provides insights into the biological mechanisms that underlie hatred. Hate is believed to arise from the intricate interplay between brain structures, particularly the amygdala, which processes, and the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for rational thought. Studies utilising neuroimaging techniques have demonstrated heightened activity in these regions when individuals experience hate. This underscores hate's dynamic nature arising from emotional reactions and cognitive processes. By better understanding the neural underpinnings of hate, we can develop strategies to interrupt its destructive path and promote emotional regulation.

The psychological basis of hate can be seen as an outgrowth of fear, insecurity and the need to control. According to psychologist Erich Fromm, hate can be



Narcissism can fuel a sense of entitlement and disdain for those deemed inferior. Similarly, individuals with authoritarian tendencies may be inclined to hate those who challenge established authority and norms.

a manifestation of the individual's own internal conflicts projected onto others. The act of dehumanising the "enemy" can serve as a coping mechanism, reducing cognitive dissonance by justifying hostile actions. Furthermore, hate often emerges from the desire to establish a sense of superiority and identity, especially when individuals and groups feel vulnerable and uncertain. This notion dovetails with the social psychologist Gordon Allport's observations that hatred can result from ingrained biases and stereotypes. By acknowledging these psychological drivers, we can work towards dismantling the foundations of hate.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault described hate within the context of power dynamics. He explored how societies construct norms that marginalise certain groups, and hate becomes a tool for social control. Foucault's insights invite us to examine hate not merely as an individual emotion but as a manifestation of systematic oppression. By recognising this fact, we can challenge the structural inequalities that breed hatred and perpetuate cycles of violence.

Certain personality traits can also render individuals more susceptible to hate. Narcissism, for instance, can fuel a sense of entitlement and disdain for those deemed inferior. Similarly, individuals with authoritarian tendencies may be inclined to hate those who challenge established authority and norms. Psychologist Karren Douglas suggests that people who possess an external locus of control, thus attributing events to external factors, may be more likely to project their frustrations onto others in the form of hate. Self-awareness and emotional intelligence can mitigate these traits and reduce vulnerability to hatred.

Mitigating requires a multi-pronged approach, and education plays a pivotal role in dismantling biases and promoting empathy. Exposure to diverse perspectives can challenge preconceived notions and foster understanding. The practice of mindfulness can aid in emotional regulation, helping individuals to navigate intense emotions like hate. Moreover, engaging in dialogue, as those like Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. advocated, can bridge divides and humanise the "other".

Religion and scripture also offer avenues for mitigating hate. Many faiths and religious traditions emphasise compassion and forgiveness to maintain humanity's interconnectedness. The concept of "love thy neighbour" resonates across most religious texts and can serve as a powerful antidote to hatred. By internalising these values, we can reshape our perspectives and actions.

Dr George John is a retired Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist from London who is now a freelance essayist with a special interest in the relationship between Psychiatry and religion.

TEACHING IS HARDER THAN IT LOOKS

Teacher being the only source of knowledge has become a thing of the past.

DR ALICE MANI

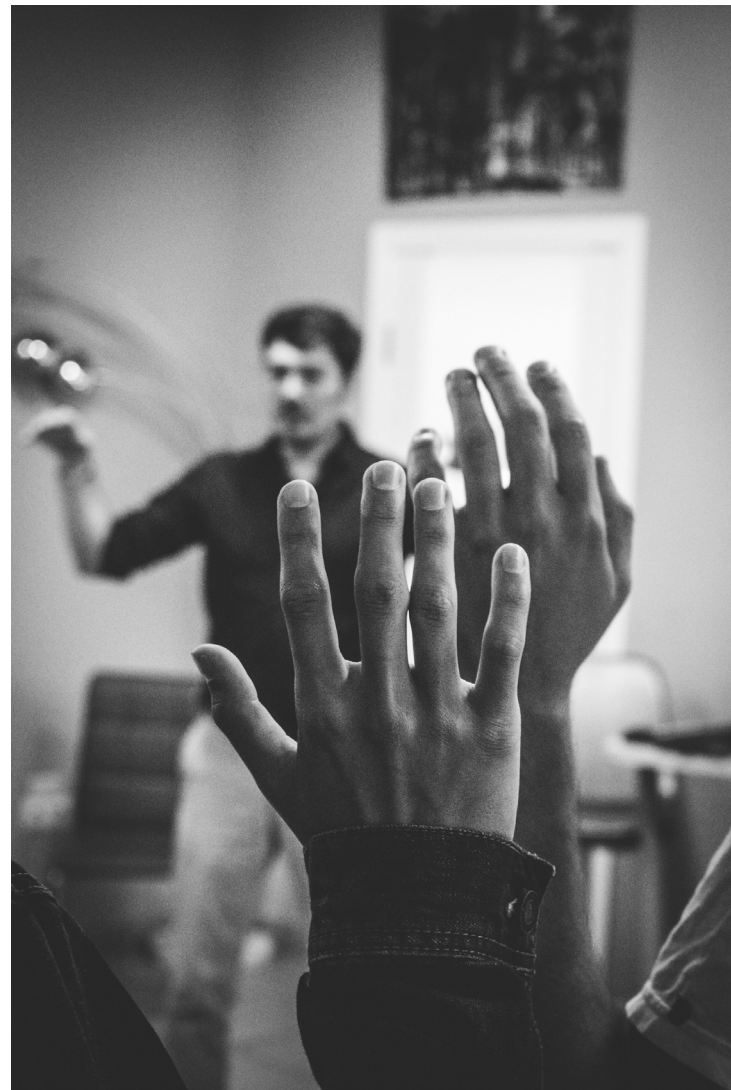
I ask myself a lot of questions. I ask myself what to wear every day, I ask myself what to do when I am bored. But today I ask myself a different question. I ask the question most teenagers would ask to themselves facing the mirror. How I have changed so fast? So different over the years and even without realising that I am facing a new world and challenging times.

As a teacher, I have changed a lot in several ways. It was not long ago when I would choose how to tutor my students, I used ways and methods that I considered to be the best, until the big dark cloud called. "The Curriculum" eloped me in its shadow. Today I have a definite method that is imposed on me, leaving me with limited opportunity to defect and teach my own best method. Sadly, my students see as the person my curriculum picturise me and not my real substance.

When I started this profession thirty years ago, I loved the job! I took pride in it. My students considered me as the major source of knowledge. They looked up for help, be it academics or non academic. I represented a leader, a teacher I would proudly put it. Ironically, I see myself as more of an informer than a teacher. Teacher today are perceived as facilitators in the learning process. They are supporters rather than educators and perhaps advisors. Teacher being the only source of knowledge has become a thing of the past.

I wouldn't blame technology alone. Technology has definitely reduced the work load for the teachers, but I must also admit that technology has overtaken the role of teachers in today's classroom. Students today instead of teaching chalk face, they need to be an information technology expert/technician.

The biggest challenge for teachers is that their role in the university management system has also changed. Teachers today are forced to make instant decisions to cope up with the stress of the changing



Technology has definitely reduced the work load for the teachers, but technology has overtaken the role of teachers in today's classroom.

scenario. They have to involve themselves in the management projects, cooperate with younger colleagues supporting them in conducting programmes etc. I have to improve on my research skills; I have to attend numerous training programmes to update my teaching, technology and research skills to cope with the changing pace of teaching.

I as a professor claim that today's students are kinder and are more sexually free and conscientious than they were thirty years ago. I still remember the class divided into perfect halves of gender. Today's students are free and are much more sexually oriented than my students in the 90s.

Sadly, today's kids also suffer from self-esteem issues that their predecessors did not. They are unwilling to take risks and try something new or challenging. I also noted that aesthetic difference between students across the last two decades. Colourful hair, piercing, gender swaps, tattoos, etc were never seen in the past.

I would like to quote a small incident, where a guy came out to me privately in my office and told me that his sexual orientation was to be a female, in 1994. No one talked about gender swaps, nobody talked about being gay. 2024? Students walk around the campus in clothes their hormones ask them to. This reminds of one more instance where I remember students carrying work home to complete the work and come back with a neatly zipped bag that today could fit a desktop. Bags are of old order, books, so primitive; pens, oh! Please who needs them? Get me my smart phone. I can do everything with it. I am surprised to see students walk into the class, as if they walk into a cinema hall with a smart phone. At the time of exams, they take photos of class notes neatly maintained by some girl students in the class. Students today depend way too much on technology which shows them that making notes is such a vague thing. Corporal punishment is a thing of the past. (Let alone the canes I say), such a history.

"Mischief" is at the similar rates. I encounter "mischief" in all my class over the years. I must tell you a secret: I hardly remember the students who topped the class, but I am sure of recognizing faces of students who were caught for their mischievous acts. But what I see in that fringe behaviour is mental health issues; anxiety and depression have increased drastically. What is worse? Students don't seem to have the same thirst for education that they did thirty years ago.

I fully believe change is good for prosperity and growing. Even if it seems tough, we are learning as a person. Everyone gets bored when things are so stagnant for long. Let's embrace the change happening in the education system and look forward to the future.

Dr Alice Mani is published author, and teaches in a university.

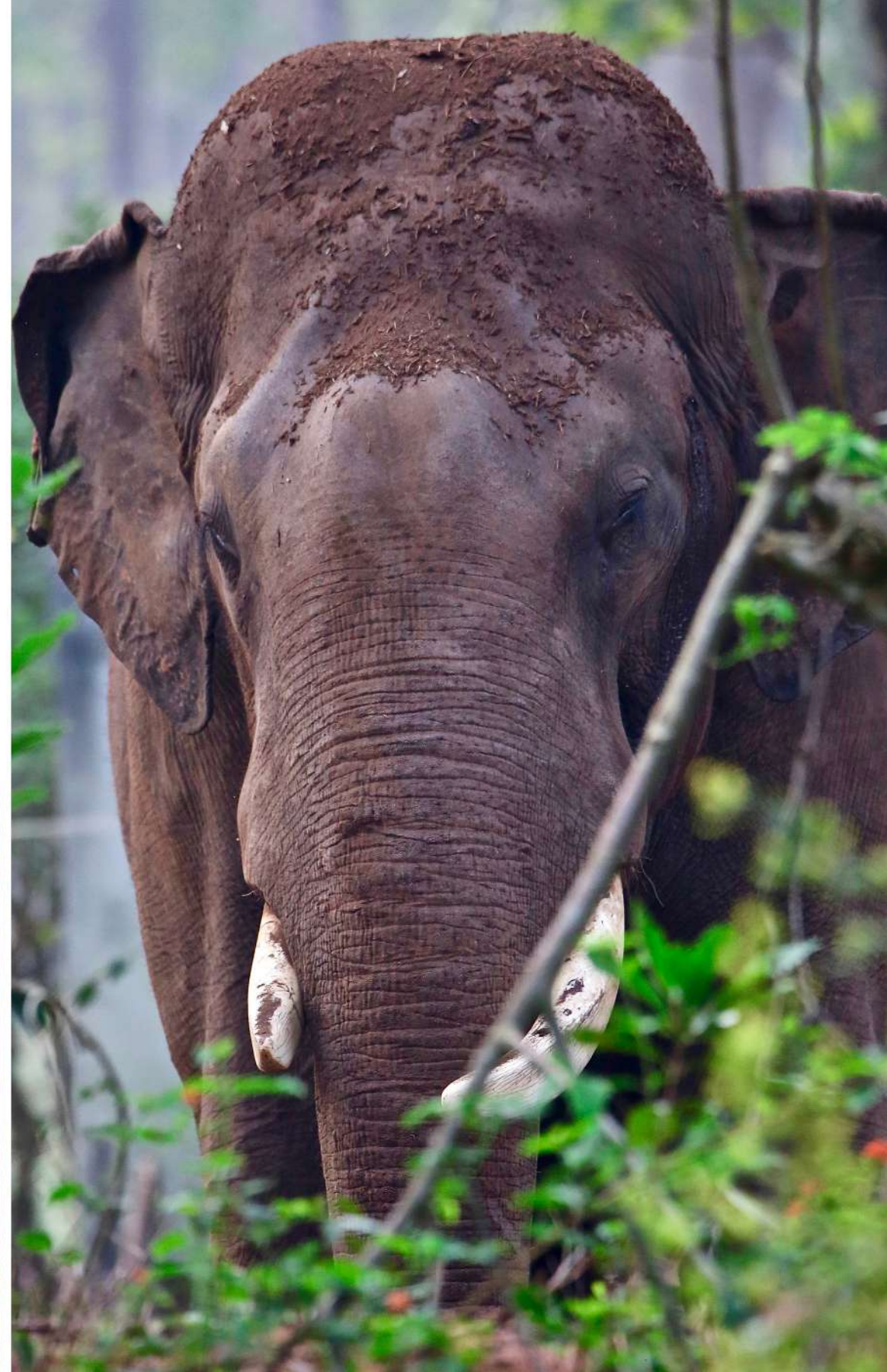
IN PICTURES

The Gentle Giants of Nagarhole

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

The morning mist was still hovering over as I approached the Nagarhole Elephant Camp. It was all very quiet but suddenly there was a deep, resonant trumpeting sound shattered the silence—the call of one of nature's most majestic creatures—a male tusker. An elephant, unhurried and magnificent, slowly emerged. I stopped, took position at a safe distance. Slowly it became playful and bouncy but had no intention to hurt anybody. It looked around with an air of authority and ownership, pushed a tree for a while, then took a sand bath; and it kept repeating it.

The Nagarhole National Park, with this elephant camp in it, is spread across 843 square kilometres and the elephant corridor begins at Mudumalai in Tamil Nadu and covers Sathyamangala, BR Hills and Bandipur Tiger Reserve and extends up to Brahmagiri Forests. With ample food, and plenty of water the elephants thrive in this forest. One never gets tired of watching these gentle giants.



Be Resurrection

RICHARD ROHR OFM

Understanding the Universal or Cosmic Christ can change the way we relate to creation, to other religions, to other people, to ourselves, and to God. Knowing and experiencing this Christ can bring about a major shift in consciousness. Like Saul's experience on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9), we won't be the same after encountering the Risen Christ. Many people don't realise that the apostle Paul never met the historical Jesus and hardly ever quotes Jesus directly. The Risen Christ is the only Jesus that Paul ever knew!

In the historical Jesus, this eternal omnipresence had a precise, concrete, and personal referent. God's presence became more obvious and believable in the world. The formless took on form in someone we could "hear, see, and touch" (1 John 1:1), making God easier to love. Jesus willingly died—and Christ arose—yes, still Jesus, but now including and revealing everything else in its full purpose and glory.

When we believe in Jesus Christ, we're believing in something much bigger than the historical incarnation that we call Jesus. Jesus is the visible map. The entire sweep of the meaning of the Anointed One, the Christ, includes us and all of creation since the beginning of time.

The Resurrection of All Things

I want to enlarge your view of resurrection from a one-time miracle in the life of Jesus that asks for assent and belief, to a pattern of creation that has always been true, and that invites us to much more than belief in a miracle. It must be more than the private victory of one man to prove that he is God.



Resurrection and renewal are, in fact, the universal and observable pattern of everything. We might just as well use non-religious terms like "springtime," "regeneration," "healing," "forgiveness," "life cycles," "darkness," and "light." If incarnation is real, and Spirit has inhabited matter from the beginning, then resurrection in multitudinous forms is to be fully expected. Resurrection is just incarnation taken to its logical conclusion.

One reason we can trust Jesus' resurrection is that we can already see resurrection happening everywhere else. Nothing is the same forever, states modern science. Geologists with good evidence can prove that no landscape is permanent over millennia. Water, fog, steam, and ice are all the same thing, but at different stages and temperatures. "Resurrection" is another word for change, but particularly positive change—which we tend to see only in the long run. In the short run, it often just looks like death. The Preface to the Catholic funeral liturgy says, "Life is not ended, it is merely changed." Science is now giving us a very helpful language for what religion rightly intuited and imaged, albeit in mythological language. Remember, myth does not mean "not true," which is the common misunderstanding; it actually refers to things that are always true!

A New Energy and Joy

Contemplative theologian Beatrice Bruteau (1930–2014) describes the profound effect that our participation in the eternal life of God can have on us. Now that we know that our "roots" are "immortal" ... we are reconciled to taking up again the work of the world. We come again into everyday life. But the transformation is still going on, both in ourselves and in the world that we touch. What is different is that we are no longer concerned to gain eternal life for ourselves. We have that, we know it, we are sure of it. And because of that confidence, "faith," we turn our attention and concern to manifesting the divine life in the forms of cosmic reality. We are looking now from a point of view that is rooted in our sense of our own reality in God. It

makes everything look quite new to us, and our new ability to offer love-and-meaning energy to our world helps it to become "new".

Theologian and mystic Howard Thurman (1899–1981) poetically described the surprise of resurrection and renewal: It is ever a new thing, a glad surprise, the stirring of life at the end of winter. One day there seems to be no sign of life and then almost overnight, swelling buds, delicate blooms, blades of grass, bugs, insects—an entire world of newness everywhere. It is the glad surprise at the end of winter. Often the same experience comes at the end of a long tunnel of tragedy and tribulation. It is as if a person stumbling in the darkness, having lost their way, finds that the spot at which they fall is the foot of a stairway that leads from darkness into light. Such is the glad surprise. This is what Easter means in the experience of the [human] race. This is the resurrection! It is the announcement that life cannot ultimately be conquered by death, ... that there is strength added when the labors increase, that multiplied peace matches multiplied trials, that life is bottomed by the glad surprise. Take courage, therefore: When we have exhausted our store of endurance, When our strength has failed ere the day is half done, When we reach the end of our hoarded resources, Our Father's full giving is only begun.

Be Resurrection

Matthew Fox is one of the primary contemporary theologians to articulate a renewed vision of the universal or cosmic Christ. Here, he focuses on the Resurrection's cosmic implications: Who does not seek Resurrection? Who does not seek a full and fuller life? Did Jesus not promise, "I have come that you may have life, life in abundance" (John 10:10)? How am I Resurrection ... [and] Life for others?

To be Resurrection for another I need to be Resurrection for myself. That means I cannot dwell in [despair] and death and anger and oppression and submission and resentment and pain forever. I need to wake up, get up, rise up, put on life even when days are dark and my

soul is down and shadows surround me everywhere.... I have to listen to the voice that says:

“Be resurrection.” ... “Be born again. And again. And again. Rise up and be counted. Rise up and imbibe the good news deeply—that death does not conquer, that life, not death, has the last word....”

Resurrection is a commitment to hope and being reborn. It is a commitment to creativity, to the Spirit who “makes all things new”. Resurrection is the Spirit’s work. It is the life of the Spirit.

And what about Life? How am I Life? How living and alive am I? How much in love with life am I? Can anyone or any event separate me from my love of life? Paul the mystic asks (and then answers), “Who shall separate us from the love of God? Neither death nor life, height nor depth, neither present nor future”. Is my curiosity alive? My gratitude? My mind? My imagination? My laughter and sense of humor? My creativity? My powers of generosity and compassion? My powers for continually generating and regenerating life?

Many mystics ... say, “God is life.” Thus to say, “I am fully alive and fully in love with life” means that I am feeling fully the God presence in me—I am in love with God who is Life; the living God. And to say “I am the Life” is to say “I am God,” or at least a part of God, a son or daughter of God, an expression, an offspring, a manifestation, an incarnation of God. Another Christ.

How are we doing? Are we growing in God-like-ness? In God action? In works of justice and compassion and healing and celebrating? To celebrate life is to celebrate God, to thank God for life, to worship. How are we doing in expressing the “sheer joy” of God (Aquinas) as well as the justice of God?

Yes, I am, yes, we are, the Resurrection and the Life. We bring aliveness and rebirth and plenty of hope into the world, however [distressing] the news becomes.

That is what it means to believe in Easter Sunday and the Resurrection. We become Resurrection and the Life. Christ rises anew.

Seeing and Recognising Are Not the Same

Christ appeared a number of times to his apostles and followers after Jesus’ death. The four Gospels do the same thing, describing how the Risen Christ transcended doors, walls, spaces, water, air, and times, eating food, and sometimes even bilocating, but always interacting with matter. While all of these accounts ascribe a kind of physical presence to Christ, it always seems to be a different kind of embodiment. Or, as Mark says right at the end of his Gospel, “he showed himself but under another form” (16:12). This is a new kind of presence, a new kind of embodiment, and a new kind of godliness.

This, I think, is why the people who witnessed these apparitions of Christ seemed to finally recognise him, but not usually immediately. Seeing and recognizing are not the same thing. And isn’t this how it happens in our own lives? First we see a candle flame, then a moment later it “blazes” for us when we allow it to hold a personal meaning or message. We see a homeless person, and the moment we allow our heart space to open toward them, they become human, dear, or even Christ. Every resurrection story seems to strongly affirm an ambiguous—yet certain—presence in very ordinary settings, like walking on the road to Emmaus with a stranger, roasting fish on the beach, or one who appeared like a gardener to the Magdalene. These moments from Scripture set a stage of expectation and desire that God’s presence can be seen in the ordinary and the material, and we do not have to wait for supernatural apparitions. We Catholics call this a sacramental theology, where the visible and tactile are the primary doorway to the invisible. This is why each of the formal Sacraments of the church insists on a material element like water, oil, bread, wine, the laying on of hands, or the absolute physicality of marriage itself.

Christ is the light that allows people to see things in their fullness. The precise and intended effect of such a light is to see Christ everywhere else. In fact, that is my only definition of a true Christian. A mature Christian sees Christ in everything and everyone else. That is a definition that will never fail us, always demand more of us, and give us no reasons to fight, exclude, or reject anyone.

The Trust

FR KM GEORGE

The hairdresser and his client could be total strangers to each other. They couldn’t be speaking the same language or following the same religion. Nor could they be sharing the same nationality or region of the world. Yet they can trust each other perfectly well.

In the picture we see the client is bundled up, and placed on a chair. This arrangement disables the movement of his hands and body, and he is literally defenceless. The hairdresser is wielding two of the sharpest of all tools- the scissors and the knife. (The sharpness of the knife and the skill of the barber were such that in medieval Europe, before the rise of modern medicine, surgeons were barbers who did surgical operations on patients).

In our barber shop the client trusts a total stranger holding a dangerous weapon just behind his neck. We, however, never hear of any untoward incident in barber shops. Instead, everywhere in the world it is a place of mutual trust and bonhomie.

“Trust building” is an expression that we often come across in diplomatic negotiations for the resolution of conflicts and the ending of war. But in every day life we go through a series of “trust” deals. For example, you order a samoosa or a sandwich, and you eat it whole without bothering to tear it open and see for yourself what is inside. You are offered a clean glass of juice or water, and you drink it without suspicion of any sort.

But not everybody is so trustful. Even many political leaders elected by the people seem to mistrust the same people once they are in power.

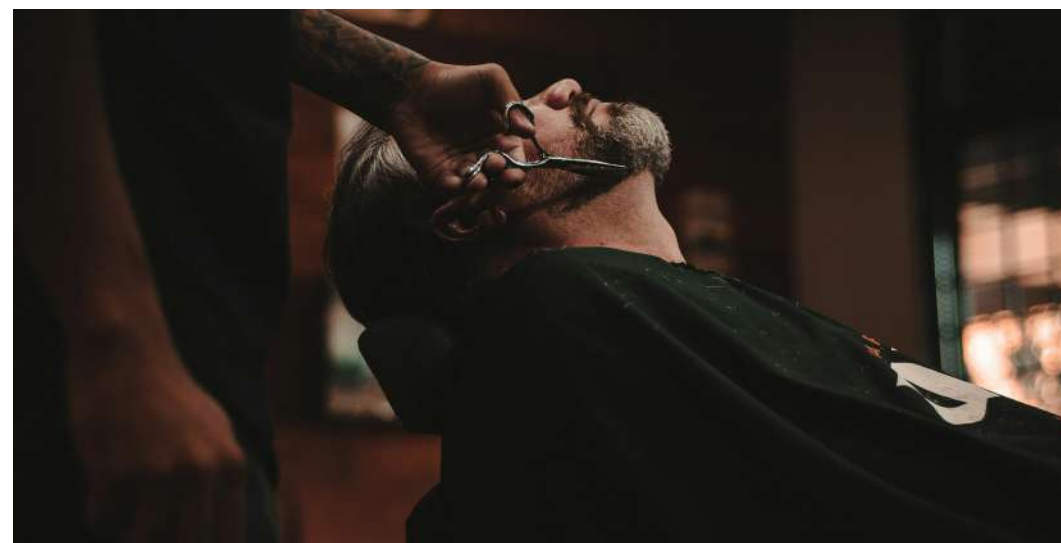
Trusting is certainly taking risks.

Still, we need to acknowledge that trusting with intelligence and trustworthiness with discernment are an essential value in human social life despite all chances of us being cheated, exploited and even killed.

This applies at the level of personal friendships, familial relations between husbands and wives, parents and children, and national and international relational relationships networks.

This is true not only between humans, but also between humans and the “wild” animals. They are afraid of us and attack us because we humans first started encroaching on their home territory, depriving them of their natural habitats, and killing them for our pleasure or profit. Recognizing this fact might help us resolve the vicious circle of human beings versus wild animals, and arrive at some measure of mutual trust between the human and the nonhuman life.

A truly human civilisation can be built only on mutual trust. There is no alternative.





Can Genocide Be Normalised?

The ability to feel and empathize with the suffering of others is fast disappearing from the radar of many countries and individuals across the world.

JAMESMON PC OFM

“The most heinous crimes, the most horrible declarations calling for genocide and ethnic cleansing are greeted with applause and political reward.”

(From Arundhati Roy’s acceptance speech at the P Govinda Pillai award function held in Thiruvananthapuram on December 13, 2023)

It seems that the ability to feel and empathize with the suffering of others is fast disappearing from the radar of many countries and individuals across the world. We have reached a state where one can simply anesthetize from any semblance of guilt or remorse about war stricken, starving children and pregnant mothers. The cry for an immediate ceasefire at Gaza is falling on deaf ears. But what is all the more worrying is the fact that India as a nation has lost its soul. Arundhati Roy in the aforementioned acceptance speech said: “...we, as a country, have lost our moral compass. Across the world millions of people—Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Communist, Atheist, Agnostic—are marching, calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. But the streets of our country, which once was a true friend of colonised people, a true friend of Palestine, which once would have seen millions marching, too, are silent today”. This silence is an indication of a deep rooted, right wing attitude among a growing number of populace and the growing nexus of leaders, including our own, who embrace and emulate war criminals like Netanyahu (indeed he is) and the likes across the globe. There is an undeniable shift in the guts of people around the world, who, though have access to the news and images in their gadgets, of continued slaughtering of kids, women and men,

their starvation and misery, choose to remain aloof or look the other way. Have we reached a saturation level of images of violence around the world so much so that we are unmoved and automatically become party to a genocide that is happening before our eyes? Are we so naive as to believe that these are normal courses of events that must happen? Can genocide be normalised?

Manipur is the most recent and closest field of genocide for the Indians. The horrible slaughtering, raping, parading and mass graves...and the continued tentation in the area to this day, is a received by most Indians as something normal. As long as it does not affect me directly, it is just another spectacle! This numbing of senses and conscience is the basic recipe for disaster. Till it reaches our doorstep, we shall remain silent spectators of this chain of violence and murder.

Whistleblowers on Trial

The extradition of Julian Assange is looming large as the trial in the UK is drawing to a close. And nobody knows how the US is going to treat him, who exposed the Big Bother’s wickedness through his WikiLeaks! “Every level of the case against Julian Assange has been shot through with corruption and the abuse of process.” said another whistleblower Edward Snowden. It is important to see the connection between the denial of free and independent press and what the US is doing around the world. With regard to what Israel is doing to the Gaza strip and the Palestinian people is directly sponsored and overseen by America. America is unmistakable the greatest genocide enabler of the modern times. Every shell or missile that kill innocent children proudly carries the great seal of the United States. The Americans seems to have been providing the intelligence, logistics and arms for war and genocide around world, but do not allow anyone to question their intentions. Arundhati Roy said it most poignantly: ...what the US seemed to be saying is: Finish the job. But do it kindly.

Here the Differently Abled Are Welcome

MONICA FERNANDES

Verna, Salcette, Goa was once a verdant village. It is today a hub of the IT industry. Nevertheless it still retains its old world charm and one can spot sprawling bungalows with a courtyard in the center built when Goa was a Portuguese colony. One such bungalow is owned by Roy da Gama and family. Roy and Sybil da Gama's son Savio has Down Syndrome and is the inspiration behind their venture. They have transformed the family house into a workshop mainly for mentally challenged young adults, aptly called Atmavishwas which means confidence in one's own abilities.

Alas! We often harbour prejudice against 'special' people. We think in terms of 'we', 'us' and 'they', 'them'. We are slaves of prejudice and think that 'they' cannot be efficient or talented. It was precisely to overcome these societal hurdles and to give the mentally and physically challenged a sense of self-worth that Roy and Sybil founded the 'Atmavishwas' workshop. The entire family is active in this venture. Roy handles the finances. Roy and Sybil's daughter Liane has a degree in Psychology followed by a Bachelors in Special Education and is a dynamic educator. This efficient and

dedicated young lady has over ten years of experience in the field of Special Education and, when invited, speaks at various workshops for the mentally challenged in India. Sybil is a patient teacher and Savio's ever ready smile warms the cockles of one's heart.

I have spent a few days as a volunteer at the center and gleaned some information about Downs from Sybil. Downs is a genetic disorder caused by the presence of all or part of a third copy of chromosome 21. Individuals with this syndrome have characteristic facial features and are often short in stature. They have mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. Other challenges some of them face are congenital heart disease, a weak stomach, sight, hearing and speech impediments. Despite the odds, these youngsters are very amiable and cheerful. Hats off to them!

Sybil says that some parents of mentally challenged children need to be enlightened. Parents underestimate the capabilities of their kid, and think their duties end with clothing and feeding their child. There are cases where they are perceived as a burden. Atmavishwas educates such parents.

She also mentioned that unfortunately in Goa there are families who are ashamed and hence secretive about their mentally challenged family members. These unfortunate family members are kept at home away from prying eyes. There was a time when Atmavishwas was trying to open a live in facility for the care of young adults with Downs and allied syndromes. Upon hearing of their proposed project, Roy and Sybil were approached by a resident of Verna, asking them whether they would look after his mentally disabled brother whose very existence they were unaware of. Liane has given several radio and TV interviews in order to dispel these deep rooted prejudices.

The Atmavishwas credo is : 'Offer dignity, not pity; Rights, not charity; Equality, not dependence; Participation, not segregation.'

Each day starts with a short prayer instilling positivity and togetherness. As concentration is a strain on the minds of the young participants, they are given two breaks – one for tea and biscuits, and the other for having their lunch. They wash their own plates under the watchful eyes of Sybil or Liane so that they do not look down on doing menial tasks. Thanks to the dedicated staff of this workshop, the students learn to focus on their strengths in order to produce quality goods in sufficient quantities to meet the market demands. The ratio of staff to students is one staff member for three students. Some youngsters embroider exquisite borders for hand towels. Their cloth carry bags are much in demand. Others patiently decorate candles. They make craft items for festivals and occasionally cook or do organic gardening in the backyard of the bungalow. Savio has honed his guitar skills and is an accomplished musician who performs regularly on stage. A few of them have even visited Germany for the Fifth International Congress for People with Disabilities under the watchful eye of Liane.

We have much to learn from these cheerful youngsters who are always ready to give one another a helping hand. Each day is an adventure for them and they are eager to learn. They yearn to be like others. "When can I go to college and read a newspaper?", "Why can't I be a bank officer?", are some of the questions they ask. The staff reassure them that they are productive members of

society and emphasise that whatever they do, they should do well. If they make a mistake while embroidering an item, they remove the stitches and redo the piece. They produce quality work. Psychological sessions are held on some days. I witnessed one of these sessions. The participants were each given chart paper with a drawing. They were then asked to pencil in the colour light blue on a designated portion. As they do so, Liane says that they are colouring in a peaceful blue sky or a calm sea. And so forth with various colours. This exercise is to promote a feeling of well being and peace.

A café has been opened at the center where the youngsters are trained to politely attend to the customers. An amusing incident took place when my daughter Minal was at the café. Savio came to take our order. "Good morning Ma'am", he said with a formal bow to Minal. "What is your order?" Laughing, Minal said to him, "What Savio! You are my cousin and know me since the time I was born. Why don't you call me Minal?" Minal was floored with the reply. "Outside the café you are Minal. Here you are Ma'am," declared Savio stoutly.

But it is not all work and no play at the center. The trainees are taken for excursions to various spots in Goa. The Christmas party is a much awaited event. They also sing or play an instrument at events, supported by musicians. There are strong bonds within the group. Roy recalls one incident when they were all supposed to sing. To the chagrin of the teachers, they started backing out one after another because one girl was absent. A delegation was sent to the girl's house to persuade her to join her friends. It was only after she joined them that the youngsters went on stage.



Coast to Coast Chronicles

SAJI SALKALACHEN

Embarking on a month-long American journey, we traversed the country, waking up in a new place every two days and immersing ourselves in novel experiences. The adventure unfolded with once-in-a-lifetime moments, challenges, moments of dismay, and exhilarating highs. Amid various occasions that led to frustration and humility, we tried to confront physical and emotional tolls with optimism and determination. Below are specific moments that define an unforgettable sojourn.

Coastal Redwoods

Coastal Redwoods, the tallest and oldest tree species in the world, are primarily found in Northern California. The Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park in Santa Cruz County near Felton showcases a 40-acre redwood grove, providing all nature lovers with a serene and awe-inspiring experience. The park serves as an ideal destination for both hiking and relaxation, featuring the Redwood Grove Loop Trail, a gentle 1.5-kilometre stroll allowing visitors to trace

the growth and history of these majestic giants, reaching towering heights of 280 to 300 feet with a lifespan of up to 2,000 years.

Despite the shallow root system, extending only 6 to 12 feet below the ground, the redwood trees intricately intertwine to form a family circle, fostering good bonding. They thrive on the coastal fog and the temperate rainforest climate of the region, and their thick and fibrous bark offers a barrier against forest fires. The cinnamon-red hue of the bark, attributed to tannic acid, serves as a defence mechanism against insects, bugs, fungus, and fire. The park is also home to diverse wildlife, including bats, bobcats, raccoons, sandhills, and gopher snakes, as extensively detailed in the museum at the entrance.

Golden Gate Bridge Micro-climate

While exploring the San Francisco Bay Area, one encounters the unique micro-climate surrounding the Golden Gate Bridge, where the cold Pacific fog envelops the bridge, creating a chilly and windy atmosphere.



Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park in Santa Cruz County: Mature Redwood trees reach 300 feet high and have a diameter of 15–17 feet.

Although its main span (suspension) is no longer the longest at 1.2 km, the bridge remains an iconic symbol in the United States, second only to the Statue of Liberty. With a walking path and towers rising to 225 meters above the water, the bridge witnessed a notable sag of nearly seven feet during its 50th-anniversary celebrations in 1987, caused by the weight of approximately 300,000 people crossing it on foot.

Around the Fisherman Wharf, the clam chowder served in a sourdough bread bowl is a coveted delicacy. Another favourite among discerning visitors is the perfectly grilled and caramelised banana splits topped with ice cream.

Southwest Adventure

A journey through the American Southwest brings the visitor face to face with the iconic Saguaro cactus plants, tall columns

with human-like arms, resiliently adapting to the harsh desert. Their vertical growth, showcasing a remarkable adaptability for resource competition, is a testament to millions of years of evolution. The cream-coloured blossom, the official flower of Arizona State, which unfurls only on cooler nights, adds charm to their already captivating presence across the Sabino Canyon and the Santa Catalina Mountain Valley in Tucson.

Las Vegas, the city of indulgence, beckons all visitors to The Strip. The Sin City is a vibrant transformation from an arid desert to a gambler paradise. The extravagance of casinos like MGM Grand, housing the biggest in size bronze lion sculpture in the U.S., and the captivating water and light show of the Fountains of Bellagio left us in awe.

The Hoover Dam on the border of Nevada and Arizona, approximately 50 km southeast of Las Vegas, is a testimony to human engineering and prowess. According to the bus driver guide, the construction—an arch-gravity dam—commenced during the



Views of the Golden Gate Bridge shrouded by fog: For 27 years, after its construction in 1937, it held the title of the longest and tallest suspension bridge in the world.

Great Depression (1931–1935), when advanced technology did not exist. The purpose was to regulate the Colorado River, provide irrigation water to arid regions, and generate hydroelectric power greatly needed for the energy-demanding Las Vegas and millions of residents in households across Arizona, Nevada, and California.

Originally named the Boulder Dam, it was renamed in honour of President Herbert Hoover and evolved into a crucial transportation link connecting Arizona and Nevada. As traffic grew, the dam route became hazardous and congested, prompting the decision to construct a new bypass bridge. It resulted in the creation of the Hoover Dam Bypass Bridge in 2010. This massive concrete arch-gravity structure spans 1,900 feet across the Colorado River, at a height of 900 feet between Arizona and Nevada. With a pedestrian walkway accessible to the public, it offers breathtaking views of the Hoover Dam, the Colorado River below, and the encompassing desert landscape. Notably, on the Nevada side of the bridge, it follows Pacific Time, while on the opposite end in Arizona, it adheres to Mountain Time.

As the bus drove by, we marvelled at the remarkable engineering landmarks in history, showcasing human ingenuity alongside the natural splendour of the Colorado River.

The Grand Canyon is undeniably an iconic and extensively visited destination in the United States, which tops the wish list of all visitors. The ownership and operation of the Grand Canyon Western Rim belong to the Hualapai tribe—a Federal Native American community. Their



Left: Hoover Dam spanning the Colorado River, situated between the States of Nevada and Arizona. Right: Bypass Bridge marking the division between the Pacific and Mountain Time Zones.

ancestral lands border the Grand Canyon and extend towards the centre of the Colorado River, encompassing the Hualapai Indian Reservation.

And then, there is the Skywalk—a structural marvel forming a cantilevered U-shaped bridge that suspends approximately 4,000 feet above the canyon floor. This walkway is generously sized at 10 feet width, diligently crafted from 5-layer composite glass panels, each measuring 4×10 feet and boasting a substantial 3.5-inch thickness. While it accommodates up to 120 visitors concurrently, stepping onto the bridge requires stowing away all metallic items, cell phones included.

The initial step onto the Skywalk is a thrill that resonates. Amidst fluttering butterflies in the stomach, a sense of admiration and wonder began evolving as one gingerly proceeded to the outermost edge. It is a moment of pure awe to immerse in the unfolding marvels of nature: the breathtaking gorge and its exquisite stone formations gracefully descending towards the Colorado River. The bridge extended a daring seventy feet into the canyon, and it seemed hovering on air, a mirage of weightlessness. But no one can be deceived by its delicate appearance; the engineering and design defy natural elements, rain, erosion, temperature, and gravity, including the formidable 150-mph winds that sweep through the canyon.

Our journey paid tribute to the Navajo Tribe, discovering a new cultural significance of red chilli—a culinary and spiritual emblem intertwined with their heritage. The Navajo Tribe is a prominent Native American community with a deep-rooted cultural and historical presence in the southwestern parts of the USA (Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico) whose people have a rich heritage of art, craftsmanship, and spirituality. They are known for their intri-



cate weaving, vibrant jewellery, pottery, and a profound connection to their land and language (Navajo). Their enduring traditions and harmonious relationship with the natural world are integral identity characteristics.

The red chilli in Navajo culture is not merely a culinary element but a cultural emblem tightly interwoven with spirituality, healing customs, and a sense of identity. The red colour is symbolic of life forces, energy, and protection. In ceremonies and rituals, the Navajo apply red chilli to create pigments for body paint, pottery, and sand paintings. Traditionally, red chilli aids digestion, imparts bodily warmth, and fosters overall well-being, while some regard it as beneficial to harmonise body energy. Red chilli establishes a link to the Tribe's forebearers and the lands they have inhabited for generations.

A detour to Los Angeles allowed us to witness the resilience of nature. Universal Studios and Theme Park at Universal City were on the radar, but our plans tripped as a storm (nicknamed Hurricane Hilary) forced everyone indoors. A storm in Los Angeles is not easy to believe in. However, as the weather predictions were firm, the freeways emptied, and people stayed home. The next day after the storm passed, the classic blue Californian skies returned, and nature bestowed all abundantly.

The City That Never Sleeps

No visit to the USA is deemed complete without soaking up the vibes of New York City (NYC). The journey led to the East Coast, where Manhattan, flanked by the Hudson and East Rivers, stands as the cultural, financial, fashion, media, and entertainment ethos of the United States of America. Manhattan, divided into Lower, Midtown, and Uptown regions, integrates millions of residents and visitors with diverse cultures and backgrounds. Widely known as The City That Never Sleeps, NYC presents opportunities and fortunes to those who seek them.

Our experience in Times Square, often dubbed The Crossroads of the World, unfolded against a vibrant backdrop featuring exotic street food, fashion, and curios sold by traders from around the globe. Times Square, the pulsating heart of NYC, invites people to unwind and immerse themselves in multicultural street plays, billboard advertisements, and a lively environment.

On an up-and-downtown city ride (hop-on-hop-off) and a boat cruise, we marvelled at iconic landmarks such as the 102-storied Empire State Building, the vintage Macy flagship store, Penn Station, and the Statue of Liberty. The Charging Bull on Wall Street, a 3-ton bronze sculpture, projects the symbol of financial optimism, which captivates visitors and inspires millions worldwide.

The most poignant part of the visit was the walking tour of the 9/11 Memorial Ground. In the exact locations where the Twin Towers once stood, the North and South Pools pay homage to the nearly 2,800 individuals who perished on that fateful day. The One World Trade Center, standing at 1,776 feet (symbolic of the year of independence), houses the Observation Deck and Memorial Museum, serving as a testament to the resilience and unity of the American people in the face of tragedy.

This trip held particular significance for me as it fulfilled a long-standing wish to visit the 9/11 Memorial, acknowledging the grim fact that a colleague's son was present in the building during the tragic events. Seeing his name on the memorial monument provided a deep and emotionally fulfilling experience with the enduring impact of that fateful occasion.

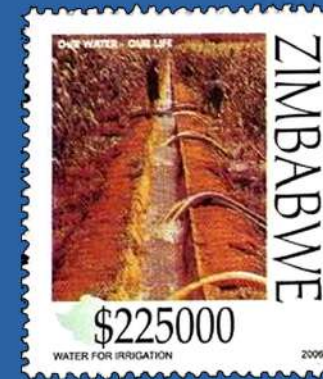
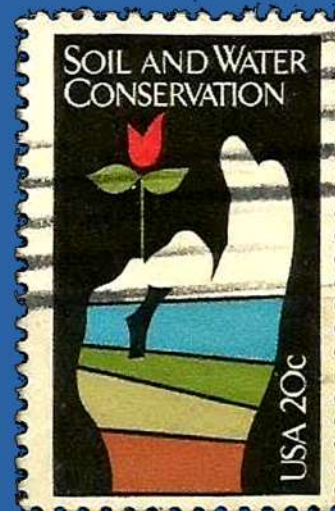
IN STAMPS

22 March

International Water Day

TOM JOHN

The theme for World Water Day 2024 is “Water for Peace”. This theme highlights the importance of cooperation in managing water resources and how working together can contribute to global harmony. This is your reminder that water is a human right. While water resources are becoming more scarce because of climate change, we need to work harder than ever to ensure everyone has access to clean water.



By the Sweat of Your Brow You Will Eat Your Bread

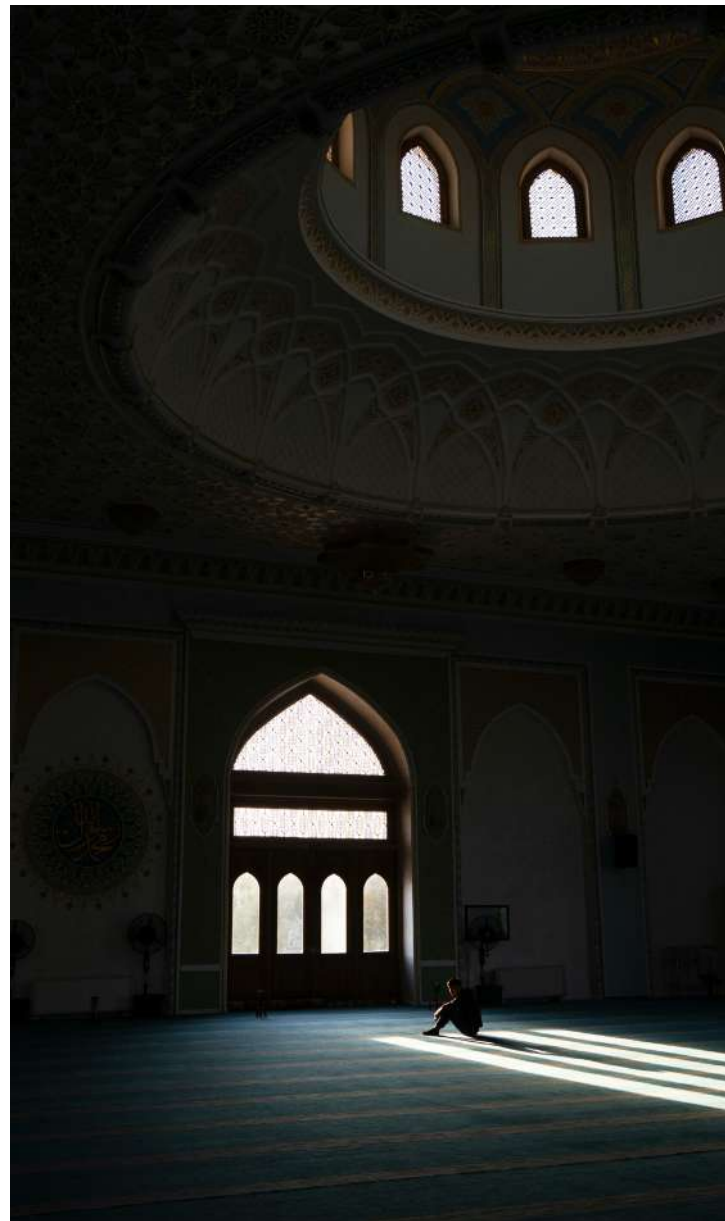
DR MN PARASURAMAN

I came across two stories about our Nabi (Sallallahu alayhi wasallam) yesterday, while reading that book in the exam hall. And I stopped feeling surprised that I feel a deep connect with him.

When he wanted to commence the Hijrah, a follower offered him two camels for riding and transporting things. But even in this hour of crisis, he refused to take them for free and insisted on paying the prevailing market price.

In the second incident, his followers and he reach Yaathrib (later renamed as Madeenat ul Nabi or the City of the Prophet). They are looking for land on which to build a mosque. Nabi (Sallallahu alayhi wasallam) is already a much revered celebrity in Yaathrib and many new Muslims come forward to donate land. But he once again insists on buying the land for full, fair payment.

When I look at religious organisations among all communities taking donations in cash and kind running into crores of rupees, even when there is no need (forget about a crisis like what our Nabi -Sallallahu alayhi wasallam-faced) I really appreciate the profound ethical standards of that man. No wonder I wish I had been around him!



Art: Jameson PC OFM



We associate death with darkness, but we need to remember that windows are light sources.

Windows

SUSANNA MARIAN VAS

I see life and death together. Life in the tree, death in the tombstone. Life here looks gnarly (the bark) but still beautiful (the blossoms). So it is with death. The tombstone looks cold and forbidding, but something about its smooth, graceful curves and lines make it more approachable.

We tend to think of death as a finality, but the window hints at a chance of communication beyond the grave. Cracking open a window is an act of liberation and freedom—liberation from the shackles of mortality. You've doubtless heard it said that when God closes a door, He opens a window. When God closes the door on this temporary home of ours, He opens the portals to eternity.

Windows are transitional thresholds that allow both entries and exits. Windows are usually associated with seeing and observing, but in the case of life and death, the living are on one side of the window while the departed are on the other. In this case, the windows are barriers that prevent either from participating in each other's worlds.

We associate death with darkness, but we need to remember that windows are light sources. We are not swallowed by darkness when we die, but rather enveloped in light.

People usually wait eagerly or anxiously at windows for someone to appear. We stare at tombstones the same way we stare out the window, hoping for a fleeting glimpse of someone dear or the confirmation of an unknown reality.

The eyes are also called windows. When God closes our eyes (our windows to this world), He opens the eyes of our souls to a different world.

THE RESURGENCE OF SURVIVAL THRILLERS: MANJUMMEL BOYS

ROMIL UDAYAKUMAR TNV



Survival thrillers have long captivated audiences with their gripping narratives and the raw portrayal of human resilience. In the Malayalam film industry, a recent standout in this genre is *Manjummel Boys*, directed by Chidambaram. The film not only broke box office records but also redefined the technical and narrative benchmarks for regional cinema. This essay delves into the film's impact, its technical mastery, and its place within the broader context of survival thrillers.

At the heart of *Manjummel Boys* is a story that resonates with the primal instinct of survival. The film is based on a true incident from 2006, where a group of friends from Manjummel, near Kochi, find themselves in a life-threatening situation during a vacation to Kodaikanal. The narrative's strength lies in its relatability; the characters are everyday people, making their ordeal all the more impactful. The director's choice to focus on the psychological and emotional aspects of survival, rather than just the physical, adds a layer of depth to the film that is often missing in commercial cinema.

Chidambaram's meticulous direction is complemented by the technical team's prowess. Cinematographer Shyju Khalid's use of natural lighting and handheld camera work creates an immersive

experience, placing the audience right alongside the characters. The sound design by Sushin Shyam is another technical marvel. The subtle nuances of the forest, the rustling leaves, and the distant cries for help are all captured with such clarity that one can't help but feel a part of the narrative.

The interval of *Manjummel Boys* serves as a crucial turning point in the film. It is here that the narrative tension reaches its peak, leaving the audience on the edge of their seats. The interval scene is crafted with precision, ensuring that the suspense is maintained without revealing too much. This break in the film allows the audience to digest the intense events that have unfolded and sets the stage for the escalating drama that follows.

It also pays a heartfelt tribute to Kamal Haasan's iconic film *Guna*. The film's director, a fan of Haasan, has woven references to *Guna* throughout the movie, including the use of the song *Kanmani Anbodu* from the film during a pivotal rescue scene. This homage extends beyond the soundtrack, as the story itself takes a significant turn when the group visits the famous Guna caves in Kodaikanal. The film's connection to Haasan's work adds a layer of intertextuality, enriching the viewing experience for fans of both movies.

The success of *Manjummel Boys* is indicative of the audience's appetite for survival thrillers. This genre offers a visceral exploration of the human spirit, showcasing the lengths to which people will go to survive against all odds. The film joins the ranks of other Malayalam thrillers like *Malayinkunju* and *Helen*, which have also received acclaim for their portrayal of survival against natural calamities and man-made traps, respectively.

Manjummel Boys has had a significant cultural impact, sparking conversations about safety in adventure tourism and the importance of respecting nature's

boundaries. It has also led to discussions about the representation of different body types in media, as the film features a diverse cast that challenges traditional beauty standards.

This film has made a remarkable impact in Tamil Nadu, transcending linguistic barriers and cultural differences. The film's success in the state is a testament to the universal appeal of its storytelling and technical execution. Despite being a Malayalam film, *Manjummel Boys* resonated deeply with Tamil audiences, leading to an unprecedented box office performance. It became the first non-Tamil Indian film, without a Tamil-dubbed version, to exceed ₹50 crore in gross earnings within Tamil Nadu.

The movie's appeal in Tamil Nadu can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the relatable theme of friendship and survival struck a chord with viewers across demographics. Additionally, the film's release coincided with a period when there were few Tamil star vehicles, which helped it gain traction among moviegoers looking for quality cinema. The film's screenings expanded from multiplexes to single-screen theatres, indicating its widespread acceptance.

Furthermore, the film's homage to Kamal Haasan's legacy, particularly the reference to his iconic *Guna*, created a nostalgic connection with the Tamil audience. This, combined with the film's gripping narrative and technical finesse, captivated viewers, leading to repeat viewings and strong word-of-mouth promotions.

The success of *Manjummel Boys* in Tamil Nadu is not just a win for the film but also a significant moment for Malayalam cinema, showcasing its potential to captivate audiences beyond its traditional market. The film's historical run in the state has sparked hope for more regional films to cross over and find new audiences, enriching the tapestry of Indian cinema.

This movie is more than just a film; it's a cultural phenomenon that has brought survival thrillers to the forefront of Malayalam cinema. Its success is a testament to the power of storytelling and technical excellence. As the film industry continues to evolve, *Manjummel Boys* will be remembered as a benchmark for future thrillers, inspiring filmmakers to push the boundaries of what's possible in regional cinema.

POETRY

Water, Water, Water

FRANCIS XAVIER OFM

Entire Bangalore is crying for water.
The days are getting hotter and hotter.
Known as India's Garden City
But now? Oh, what a pity!

Pupils, if absent, were punished with a fine
But now, are requested to study online.
Young and old are working from home.
Who, in the city, once did roam.

Mercilessly we've butchered numerous trees
And now, longing for a bit of breeze.
We've leveled all hills and mountains
The birth place of streams and fountains.

We go on sucking the earth empty
Forgetting that refilling it is our duty.
Tube-wells are now releasing only air
Oh man your greed is unfair!

All open wells and lakes
Are filled up for our sakes.
After turning ponds into plots.
We beg for water with empty pots.

Have mercy on us, oh God
For, our condition is too odd.
Send us Lord, cool wind and rain
With this prayer, here I remain.



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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