FEBRUARY 2026 | VOL. 20 | ISSUE 02 | ₹ 45

together

a national family magazine

together

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

The magazine *Together* is a conversation platform. Nothing changes until our families change. It is an effort at making worlds meet by bringing down fearful, pretentious and defensive walls. *Together* is a journey, an ever-expansive journey—from me to us, from us to all of us, and from all of us to all. Let us talk, let us cross borders. The more we converse and traverse, we discover even more paths to talk about and travel together.

Together is also an effort to uncover our shared humanity.

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

EDITOR
Saji P Mathew ofm
editoroftogether@gmail.com
editor@togethermagazine.in

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
Jamesmon PC ofm
John Sekar ofm

COPY EDITORS
Augustine Pinto ofm
Joy Prakash ofm

LAYOUT/EDITORIAL DESIGNER
Kapil Arambam

PLEASE NOTE: The views of writers do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the publisher.

DIRECTOR
Xavier Durairaj ofm

PUBLISHER
Basil Lobo ofm

MANAGER
Anthony Mathew Joseph ofm

PUBLICATION OFFICE
Franciscan Publications
St Anthony's Friary
#85, Hosur Road, Bengaluru 560095
Karnataka, India

managertogethermagazine@gmail.com
manager@togethermagazine.in
Mob: +91-88971 46707 / +91-77366 64528

PLEASE NOTE

When you subscribe or renew or contribute to *Together*, please inform the publication office about the same, mentioning your name and details.

SUBSCRIPTION

To subscribe to the magazine or to contribute to the running of Together please log on to www.togethermagazine.in

Pay online (NEFT) Transaction
Franciscan Publications – Together, South Indian Bank
Branch: Christ University, A/c. No. 0396053000005736,
IFSC: SIBL0000396, MICR: 560059010

Pay by Cheque or Demand Draft
in favour of Franciscan Publications – Together

ADVERTISING IN *TOGETHER* (PER ISSUE)

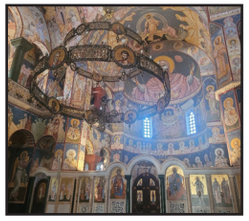
Back cover	₹13,000
Inside back cover	₹8,000
Inner full page	₹5,000
Inner half page	₹2,000
Inner quarter page	₹1,000

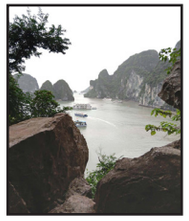
SUBSCRIPTION RATES

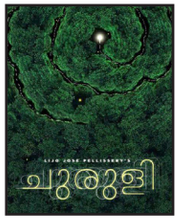
	1 year	3 years
India	₹500	₹1,400
Other Countries	US $75	US $200

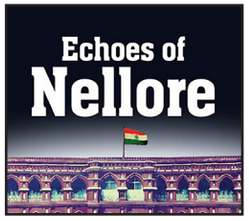
Contents

February 2026 Vol 20 Issue 2









The Paradox of Postmodern Surveillance

The watchtower is no longer hidden. It is in our hands. We bought it ourselves—the iPhone, the Ring doorbell, the Alexa that listens even when we forget it's there. We didn't just accept surveillance; we crave it, pay for it, and update it when new versions arrive.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

The vain emperor walks in procession without clothes. Fearing to appear incompetent and unfit, the emperor and his court pretend to see the nonexistent clothes. The swindler corporations keep selling the most exquisite nonexistent clothes and make their profit in broad daylight. Hans Christian Andersen's 1837 fable, *The Emperor Has No Clothes*, comes true today more than ever before. We know we're exposed—our data harvested, our privacy dissolved, our intimate moments archived and monetised—yet we cannot stop the procession. The modern emperor is trapped in the performance, unable to stop because the algorithm demands continuation. Who will break the collective delusion? Where is the petite whistle-blower child?

When Michel Foucault examined Jeremy Bentham's panopticon in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), he described a prison designed around a central watchtower from which guards could observe inmates without being seen themselves. The genius of this architecture was not the watching itself, but the uncertainty it created. Prisoners, never knowing when they were observed, began to police and regulate their own behaviour. The watchtower became internalised. State-surveillance transformed into self-surveillance. What Foucault could not have fully anticipated was how thoroughly we would dismantle the watchtower and rebuild it in our own pockets, tie it on our very hands, and plant it in our personal computers.

Surveillance has always been an architecture of authoritarian hierarchy—a tool of power over the powerless. In prisons, the architecture spoke clearly—stone walls and iron bars declared who watched and who was watched. In the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, this model expanded beyond prison walls. George Orwell's *1984* imagined telescreens that broadcast propaganda while simultaneously recording citizens, the two-way mirrors of a surveillance state. East Germany's Stasi employed nearly two lakh informants creating a society where neighbours watched neighbours and kept the totalitarian regimes informed; trust dissolved into suspicion. The idea of surveillance spread like cancer into every cell and fabric of everyday lives.

During the Civil Rights Movement in America, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI deployed secret agencies to surveil, infiltrate, and disrupt activists. Martin Luther King Jr. was monitored, his phone tapped, his private life weaponised against him. Surveillance was the state's dagger, cutting away at dissent. The message was clear: to challenge power is to invite the gaze, and the gaze is unkind.

This was surveillance as domination. The cameras pointed downward. The microphones belonged to those in uniform or undercover. The files were kept in locked rooms. And the people being watched knew it, feared it, and when possible resisted it.

The Postmodern Shift

Something shifted in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The architecture remained, but its appearance changed. Shoshana Zuboff, in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), describes how corporations discovered that human experience could be harvested as raw material, converted into behavioural data, and sold to the highest bidder. Google, Facebook, Amazon—these platforms offered services that felt free, even liberating. We signed terms of service, written in fine print, which we never 'read' and agreed. The cameras turned around. We began pointing them at ourselves.

Instagram asks us to curate our lives into aesthetic moments. TikTok rewards us for performing our personalities. Snapchat's maps let friends see exactly where we are, exactly when. We check in at restaurants. We tag our locations. We go Live. We share not just what we see but what we eat, what we wear, whom we love, where we hurt. Going even further, we don't just live; we perform living to be seen attractive and fitted in. Everyone is performing, everyone is watching, everyone simultaneously is surveilled and surveiller. The watchtower is no longer hidden. It is in our hands. We bought it ourselves—the iPhone, the Ring doorbell, the Alexa that listens even when we forget it's there. We didn't just accept surveillance; we desire it, pay for it, and update it when new versions arrive.

In the influencer economy, we have become our own censor board and prison guards. We have internalised the gaze so completely that we preemptively edit ourselves before posting, anticipating how we'll be perceived, calculating engagement, chasing metrics that quantify our social worth. We make our lives surveillable. David Lyon, a scholar of surveillance studies, coined the term 'surveillance culture' to describe a society where being watched is not an imposition but an expectation, even a pleasure. We don't just tolerate surveillance; we have gamified it. Prisons disciplined individuals by forcing them inside a cell and making them visible. We have automated visibility; we queue up to enter in; and algorithms keep guard over us.

The cruelest trick of contemporary surveillance is that it feels like freedom. We choose our apps, we decide what to share, and we can delete our accounts (in theory, though the data often persists). This veneer of choice hides the intimidation beneath. In the words of Foucault, recognizing how power operates is the first step toward resistance; here we have the illusion of choice, which makes resistance harder. Perhaps our way forward lies in making surveillance visible again. We must wakeup the whistle-blower child within us who shouts, 'the emperor has no clothes.'

Panopticism: Power Asymmetry and Paranoia

The observer holds power over the one being observed. The invisible is invincible.

LILAVATI

I shall start this article with a personal anecdote. Two months ago, at a wedding, a woman unexpectedly started talking to me about how authorities had shown up at her relatives' house at 3 in the morning, asking if they knew the accused in the recent blast at the capital. They did not. In hindsight they remembered talking to their son, who studies in Delhi, to make sure he is safe. In another relevant episode, an adolescent boy talked to his father's business partner on the phone, saying 'Aa samaan wott', (Kashmiri for 'yes, the goods have arrived'). Later that day, a man in ordinary clothes with a team of people wearing black uniforms demanded answers from the boy, where are the goods? What have you been up to? The kid innocently (and nonchalantly) pointed to the storehouse referring to the box of chocolates and other packaged foods for his father's provision store. Before he could open the door to give them a tour, he found himself being beaten to reveal some 'coded' information. He had no idea what, how and from where to get the answers needed there. His father was told afterwards that they had heard about some goods being delivered from one party to another on the call. It was being tracked by a bug planted on his sister's Wi-Fi network, which he often used. The story was narrated to me by the sister.

These were two out of billions of examples of panopticism and hyper-surveillance, in contemporary times. Based on 'Panopticon' (Bentham, 1787) – a perfect surveillance structure to monitor prison inmates wherein the tower guard can see into every inmate's cell, with tinted windows and lights so bright, that the inmates cannot observe the guard back. This ensures the inmates internalise discipline by self-regulation. A social psychological experiment revealed that subjects tend to display more acceptable behaviour when they know they are being monitored, constantly. In fact the conclusion still stands, if the observation is passive, like that of a CCTV camera, or more surprisingly, a simple picture of a pair of eyes. This is known as the Hawthorne Effect in psychology. Panopticism, according to Foucault (1975), refers to a system wherein "the individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead—all this constitutes a compact model of a disciplinary mechanism".

The disciplinary mechanism that Foucault mentions, in this case, is an aggregation of state-led strategies, which are required to constrain seditious activities, and counter insurgency. However, what this mechanism inevitably ends up doing is violating privacy and to a larger extent, freedom of speech of the general population. It does so by creating a discrepancy of power. The observer holds power over the one being observed. The invisible is invincible.

This concealed, omnipresent observer is the source of perpetual fear and consequently, paranoia. He is the man in the tower. Internalisation of fear manifests into psychosomatic disorders, anxiety disorders, PTSD and psychosis. 10 years ago, a journalist was reported to be on the verge of psychosis, as a result of prolonged paranoia. In Orwell's 1984, the people of Oceania live in a 'virtual prison', where the political system is inherently intrusive, monitoring every household

What effect does a society on the brink of dystopia have on people's behaviour, and mental state?

conversation, thereby dangerously gaining access to the psyche of its people. This panoptic surveillance ingeniously used by Orwell 76 years ago, is relevant to modern times. Likewise, Kafka uses this concept in The Trial, where the rigid, bureaucratic structure is designed to be invasive; closely monitoring intersystem and intrasystem individuals together with their social connections. The pervasive system acts as the dominant, omnipresent third eye. This all-watching, incomprehensible and faceless observer, gives rise to a dystopian context, wherein, the individual is destined to be crushed.

What effect does a society on the brink of dystopia have on people's behaviour, and mental state? Kashmiri people struggle with disoriented psychological health, and a fractured society. Knowing not whom to trust, breaks the collective power of the society. Sadly, people are gradually habituated to putting on a mask, carefully concealing their actual opinions, and suppressing their emotions. Panopticon has been extensively used in geopolitical areas of conflict to curb certain threatening elements. The important question that arises is how much freedom does a commoner have to forgo, in order for 'The Party' to fight crime and insurgency in the state. Shahnaz Bashir, in his painfully crafted, award-winning book Scattered Souls (2016), uses the metaphor of the bullet lodged in Ameen's spine for a panopticon: unwanted and interfering, however ever-present. Additionally, he uses the same metaphor for its consequences. The unification of fear as a part of the body. This constant fear due to the panopticon (bullet) is a death warrant for the body, wherein it slowly but surely will kill its host.

Whenever asked about the concerns of violating human rights due to obtrusive surveillance, authorities have said that national security comes first. Many have argued that the methods are unobtrusive. The unnoticeable nature of the panopticon does not entail its absence. Rather, its inconspicuous nature creates a sense of further unease, because we are unaware when and how we are being monitored.

Critics insist that the panopticon nature of surveillance 'more often captures the right-moralled prisoners', insinuating the blameless commoners, purposelessly caught like I mentioned in the beginning. It manufactures more criminals than it captures; the actual criminals become experts at escaping the 'old-fashioned' monitoring system. Civilian security is as important as national security.

Ironically, as I'm writing this article or I talk about the contents of this article over the phone to my friend, there is a persistent, subconscious fear in the back of my head. The continuous fear that every movement is being observed, and recorded. Unfortunately, the consequences of the present extend ambiguously into the future.

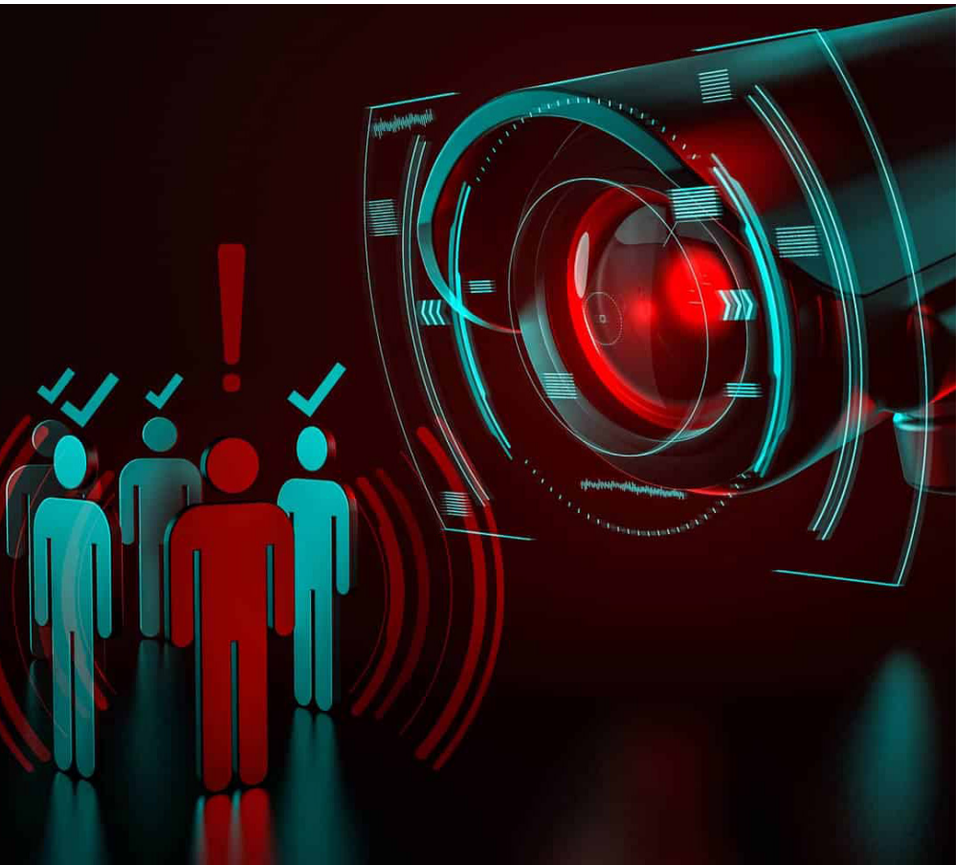
Under the Watching Eye

The Psychology of the Gaze

People might not show their true feelings of sadness, anger, or unpopular opinions; instead, they might show a carefully filtered version of themselves.

Dr AKEELA P

In *1984*, George Orwell novel depicts a dystopian world where people are been controlled and regulated not by punishment, but through the persistent of being watched. The phrase "Big Brother is watching you" captures a psychological reality: when people believe they are being observed, they are display of being guarded a psychological defense mechanism to protect themselves of being vulnerable. Even in the absence of visible authority, behavior changes. Orwell's novel, though fictional, offers a powerful starting point for understanding how observation becomes a form of control.



People who constantly check on themselves have been shown to be more anxious and less psychologically comfortable because they are almost always aware of the internal observer.

In today's digital world, surveillance has subtler and in the most familiar forms. In some countries, state monitoring through cameras, data collection, and digital tracking is a routine part of daily life, justified in the name of security in order to protect citizens from terror attacks. Citizens in such environments often adapt by becoming cautious in speech and public behaviour. In contrast, countries like India we continue to enjoy relatively greater personal freedom in everyday expression and we are protected by 19(1) A article, however recently though digital monitoring is steadily been increasing. Meanwhile, in the United States, public debates around data privacy, government surveillance, and individual rights have intensified, reflecting a growing awareness of how observation can shape autonomy, especially Facebook Cambridge case the public were made aware that our digital privacy has become a mechanism to be influenced by some propaganda.

Digital observation is though invisible; unlike traditional surveillance yet rarely can we escape from it. Smartphones not only keep track of where you are, what you do, and how you use the internet. Websites gather personal information, look at preferences, and guess how people will act. People may not always be aware of this surveillance, but the fact that digital footprints exist has a subtle effect on how people act online.

For instance, people often think twice before posting their thoughts on social media because they know that posts can be screenshotted, shared, or misread. A lot of people delete tweets, save posts, or have separate "private" and "public" accounts. People censor themselves online to avoid being judged, getting backlash, or facing long-term consequences.

Social media sites make the psychology of the gaze stronger by turning everyday life into a show. Likes, views, comments, and follower counts are all signs that people like you. People change how they act, look, and even feel when they know they're being watched by an unseen audience because they think that's what people expect of them.

People might not show their true feelings of sadness, anger, or unpopular opinions; instead, they might show a carefully filtered version of themselves. Over time, this can make you feel more fake and emotionally drained. The gaze is no longer just one person's; it's now a group of people, which makes self-surveillance constant and unavoidable.

The Psychological Effect of Being Watched

People become more careful when they think someone is watching them, whether it's online or in person. Language becomes careful, humour is kept to a minimum, and self-expression is limited. This causes people to pay more attention to how others see them than to how they really feel.

This caution may encourage people to fit in, but it can also stifle creativity, spontaneity, and honesty about feelings. People who constantly check on themselves have been shown to be more anxious and less psychologically comfortable because they are almost always aware of the internal observer.

Privacy as a Form of Psychological Safety

Being able to be alone is very important for mental health. People can process their feelings, figure out who they are, and make mistakes without worrying about what others will think in private spaces, both physical and digital. When surveillance, whether by the government or by the internet, breaks down these spaces, the mind adapts by becoming defensive instead of expressive.

Knowing this helps us understand why discussions about digital privacy are not just legal or political, but also very psychological. Privacy protects the mind's ability to relax, think, and be real.

The gaze has changed from Orwell's *1984* to today's digital platforms, but its psychological power hasn't. Being watched, whether it's by the government, through data tracking, or on social media, changes how people act and feel. The psychology of the gaze teaches us that freedom isn't just about what we can do; it's also about whether we feel safe enough to be alone. By protecting privacy, societies protect not only rights but also mental health.

Male Gaze and the Hegemonic Power Structure

We don't see a human being; we see a series of fragments, a midriff, a pair of lips, the curve of a hip.

SUMIT DASGUPTA

When Laura Mulvey first articulated the concept of Male Gaze and the power structure it inhabits inside, in 1975, she wasn't just writing a critique of Hollywood, she was performing a forensic audit of how power operates through a lens. She suggested that the camera is never neutral. Instead, it adopts the perspective of a heterosexual male, forcing everyone in the audience, regardless of their own gender, to see the world, and specifically women, through that singular, often hungry perspective. After years of watching the light hit the screen, I've seen this gaze evolve from the black-and-white morality of early Indian cinema to the hyper-masculine, "alpha" blockbusters of our current era. To understand the sociopolitical tensions in India today, we have to understand how we've been taught to look.

The Three-Way Mirror

The male gaze functions through a triptych of looks that are almost impossible to escape once you know they are there. First, there is the look of the camera as it records the scene, second, the look of the male characters within the film's world; and third, the look of the spectator.

In this structural trap, the woman is rarely allowed to be a person with a complex interior life. Instead, she is reduced to what we call "to-be-looked-at-ness." She is the landscape, the prize, or the problem the hero must solve. For the male viewer, this creates a narcissistic identification, he sees a surrogate of himself on screen who is active, dominant, and in control. For the female viewer, the experience is more alienating. She becomes both the spectator and the spectacle.

In the Indian context, this gaze has historically been expressed through a stark, almost religious binary: the Madonna and the Whore. For decades, the "ideal" Indian woman was the *Sati-Savitri*, the self-sacrificing mother or wife who served as a metaphor for the nation's purity and honour. But as our cinema "modernised," the gaze didn't disappear; it just changed its clothes.

Think about the "item number" from a storytelling perspective, these sequences are usually entirely redundant. The plot stops, the narrative takes a breath, and for five minutes, the camera performs a visual dissection of the female body. We don't see a human being; we see a series of fragments, a midriff, a pair of lips, the curve of a hip.

This fragmentation is a psychological tactic. By breaking a woman down into "parts," the gaze strips her of her humanity. It turns her into a fetishised object. When you see only a part of a person, you don't have to reckon with their soul. This leads to what authors, philosophers, and writers far more intelligent than I call the "monster problem" of representation. When women are constantly presented with these fragmented, airbrushed, and impossible versions of femininity, they begin to view their own bodies from the outside. They develop an internal "surveyor" that never sleeps. This creates a sense of self that feels distorted and inadequate, a "monster" that can never live up to the cinematic image designed for male consumption.

From the Screen to the Street

The danger of this gaze is that it doesn't stay behind the velvet curtains of the theatre. It spills out into the streets of our cities, providing a cultural script for how we treat one another. In India today, we are seeing a massive resurgence of the "hyper-masculine" hero. These characters are often aggressive and possessive, defining their manhood through their ability to "claim" women.

This cinematic regression, which trivialises a woman's "no" into a playful "yes," does more than just tell a bad story; it actively justifies a sociopolitical culture that views female independence as a threat. By consistently casting men as the "active surveyors," our screens grant them an unearned sense of ownership over public life, effectively rebranding street harassment as "Eve-teasing" and turning shared spaces into a purely male domain.

Also, the historical burden of treating the female body as a repository for "national honour" has transformed the male gaze into a powerful tool for social surveillance. In this framework, a woman's attire or mobility is no longer a personal choice but a public reflection of family or state status. Ultimately, the gaze achieves its final victory within the mind itself. Having been raised on this visual diet, many women find themselves performing for an invisible audience even when alone, proving that the surveyor is no longer just on the screen—he has been internalised by the surveyed.

The Challenge of a New Vision

Could a "female gaze" be a simple fix? We cannot just put a woman behind the camera and expect the gaze to change if she is using the same visual vocabulary. The same lighting, the same editing, the same tropes that has been built over a century of patriarchy.

A true shift requires interiority. It requires a camera that is more interested in what a woman is feeling than how she is lit. It requires stories where women are allowed to be messy, unlikable, and entirely independent of their relationship to the hero. In India's growing independent film scene, we are seeing the first real flickers of this. Films that refuse to fragment the body and instead insist on the wholeness of the human experience.

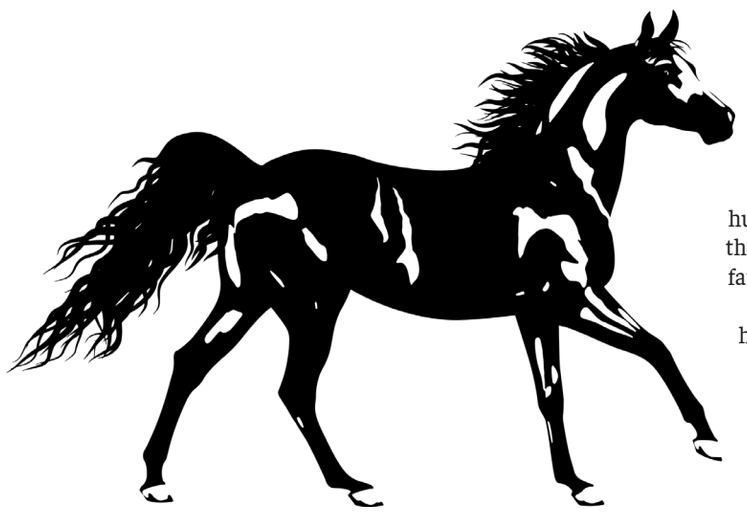
The male gaze is a lens that has coloured the Indian soul for generations. It has dictated our desires, our laws, and our deepest insecurities. As we move further into this decade, the stakes have never been higher. We are at a crossroads where we must decide if we will continue to be a society of surveyors and objects, or if we will have the courage to dismantle the camera entirely. The goal isn't just to change the images on the screen, but to change the way we see the person standing in front of us. We need to move toward a visual language that recognises humanity over utility. Only then can we move past the "monster" in the mirror and see the reality of the Indian woman not as a symbol, not as a prize, but as a person. The first step toward freedom is simply realising that the lens is there. Once you see the gaze, you can never unsee it, and once we unsee it, we can finally begin to look away.

The Price of Loyalty

Unquestioned loyalty can lead to disappointment and frustration, as citizens realise that their efforts have been used to benefit those already in power.

NIYA S ANIL

In *Animal Farm*, Boxer the horse represents the working class: strong, loyal, and endlessly hardworking. He is admired for his physical strength and willingness to labour without complaint. Boxer never seeks praise or reward; instead, he believes that dedication and obedience will lead to a better future for everyone. His personal motto, "I will work harder," perfectly captures his character. Through Boxer, Orwell explores how loyalty and hard work, when combined with blind faith in authority, can lead to exploitation and tragedy.



Boxer is one of the most dependable animals on the farm. He undertakes the hardest tasks, often working longer hours than anyone else. His strength becomes essential to the farm's success, particularly after the animals overthrow their human owner in the hope of creating a fair and equal society. Despite his immense physical power, Boxer is gentle, compassionate, and kind-hearted. He cares deeply for the other animals, especially the weaker ones, and genuinely believes in the promise of equality that the revolution claims to represent.

However, Boxer lacks education and critical awareness. While he is strong, he is not intellectually confident, and this makes him vulnerable. Rather than questioning authority, he places complete trust in the pigs, particularly Napoleon, who gradually takes control of the farm. Boxer believes that the leadership knows best and that any hardship is necessary for the greater good. Even as the pigs begin to behave more like the humans they replaced, Boxer refuses to doubt them. His loyalty never wavers, even when the farm becomes increasingly unjust.

This blind faith is what ultimately leads to his downfall. As the pigs consolidate power, they exploit Boxer's labour for their own benefit. He works harder than ever, believing that his efforts will secure a better future for all animals. Instead, his strength is used to maintain a system that favours the ruling elite. When Boxer becomes injured and is no longer able to work, the pigs betray him. Rather than caring for him as promised, they sell him to a knacker, a slaughterer of old horses, in exchange for money. Boxer's tragic end exposes the true nature of the leadership and reveals how easily loyalty can be manipulated.

This betrayal serves as a powerful reminder that those who contribute the most to society are often the ones most easily exploited. Boxer is the backbone of the farm, yet he is discarded the moment he is no longer useful. Orwell uses his character to demonstrate how authoritarian systems depend on the unquestioning obedience of hardworking individuals while offering them little in return.

Although *Animal Farm* is a political allegory, its themes remain relevant today. Boxer's story resonates strongly when viewed alongside the experiences of millions of working people in modern societies, particularly in India. Across the country, individuals work tirelessly to support their families, communities, and the nation. From farmers in rural areas to labourers in factories and on construction sites, hard work is central to daily life. Yet, this dedication is often taken for granted or exploited by those who control political and economic systems.

Political leaders often make promises about improving living standards, creating jobs, and fighting corruption. Many citizens support these promises with hope and commitment, working hard in the belief that change will follow.

India has a long history of political movements and strong leadership figures, and citizens frequently place deep trust in those they elect. People believe that their loyalty and hard work will bring progress, stability, and prosperity. Political leaders often make promises about improving living standards, creating jobs, and fighting corruption. Many citizens support these promises with hope and commitment, working hard in the belief that change will follow. However, much like Boxer's faith in Napoleon, this trust is sometimes misplaced.

When promises remain unfulfilled, it is often the ordinary people who bear the consequences. Their loyalty is rarely rewarded, and their voices are frequently ignored. Blind devotion to political leaders or ideologies can prevent individuals from questioning systems that fail them. Just as Boxer never doubts the pigs, many people continue to trust authority figures even when evidence suggests corruption or inequality. This unquestioning loyalty can lead to disappointment and frustration, as citizens realise that their efforts have been used to benefit those already in power.

Beyond politics, economic exploitation is also widespread. Many workers in India, especially in the informal sector, endure long hours, low wages, and unsafe working conditions. Farmers face unpredictable markets, rising debts, and insufficient support, despite their crucial role in sustaining the nation. Like Boxer, they work with the hope that their sacrifices will eventually lead to a better future. Yet for many, improvement remains out of reach.

The parallels between Boxer's experience and the lives of real-world workers are striking. In *Animal Farm*, the pigs justify their authority by claiming intellectual superiority. They argue that they are the "brainworkers" and therefore best suited to make decisions. The other animals, especially the labourers, accept this explanation without protest. Over time, the pigs use this power to enrich themselves while demanding even greater sacrifices from the workers.

Boxer's fate underscores Orwell's critique of systems that exploit the working class. His tragedy is not just personal; it is symbolic.

This mirrors how power often operates in real societies. Those in authority may claim expertise or necessity to justify inequality, while expecting loyalty and obedience from the working population. Workers continue to carry the burden, believing that their efforts serve a greater purpose, even when rewards are unevenly distributed.

Orwell also highlights the dangers of moral corruption through key events in the novel. During the Battle of the Cowshed, when humans attempt to reclaim the farm, Boxer fights bravely to defend the revolution. In the chaos of battle, he accidentally kills a human boy. Despite the act being unintentional and occurring in self-defence, Boxer is deeply distressed. He feels guilt and sorrow, showing his compassionate nature and strong moral conscience.

This moment reveals an important contrast. While Boxer is troubled by the loss of life, the pigs show no such remorse. They focus only on victory and power, treating violence as a necessary tool. This difference highlights the growing moral divide between the leadership and the workers. Boxer's compassion makes him human in spirit, but it also makes him vulnerable. His goodness prevents him from recognising how far the revolution has strayed from its original ideals.

Old Major, the boar whose ideas inspire the rebellion, warns early on that power can corrupt. Although he speaks mainly of human oppression, his warnings foreshadow the pigs' betrayal. After his death, the pigs gradually assume control, transforming from revolutionary leaders into tyrants. By the time Boxer is sold to the knacker, the pigs have become indistinguishable from the humans they once overthrew.

Boxer never realises this truth. His belief is simple: if he works harder and remains loyal, everything will turn out well. This belief, though noble, blinds him to reality. He never questions changing rules or growing inequalities. Even when his body begins to fail, he continues to push himself, trusting that the leadership will care for him in return. Instead, his loyalty is repaid with betrayal.

Boxer's fate underscores Orwell's critique of systems that exploit the working class. His tragedy is not just personal; it is symbolic. It shows how regimes maintain power by encouraging devotion without understanding, obedience without accountability. Loyalty becomes a tool of control rather than a shared commitment to justice.

Ultimately, *Animal Farm* reminds readers that hard work and loyalty, while admirable, are not enough on their own. Without critical thinking and awareness, they can be manipulated by those who seek power. Boxer's story serves as a warning against blind faith in authority and highlights the importance of questioning systems that demand sacrifice without offering fairness in return.

In both fiction and reality, societies depend on hardworking individuals. Their efforts deserve respect, protection, and recognition. Orwell's portrayal of Boxer calls for a more conscious approach to loyalty—one that values dedication but also demands justice. His story urges individuals not only to work hard, but also to remain alert, informed, and willing to challenge exploitation. Only then can loyalty become a force for genuine progress rather than a path to quiet betrayal.

Surveillance Undermines Democratic Values and Personal Liberties

SHENELL MARIA DSOUZA

Surveillance plays a central role in order to control and manipulate every aspect of citizens' lives, from their actions to their thoughts. The concept of 'Big Brother' symbolises the government's omnipresent, invasive control over personal freedom, which bears a striking resemblance to the Indian Income Tax Department's new law that allows monitoring of digital footprints, including social media, emails, and online activities, starting in 2026.

This shift in India toward surveillance under the pretext of curbing tax evasion could raise significant concerns about privacy, governmental overreach, and freedom of expression. Much like Orwell's *1984*, where the Party justifies intrusive actions under the guise of public order, this surveillance could easily evolve beyond its intended purpose. The vague definition of relevant data for tax compliance makes it easy to imagine that innocent individuals may become unwitting targets. Orwell's depiction of thought crime, where the government punishes even unspoken dissent, mirrors how such surveillance could potentially be used to stifle political or social opinions, coercing people into self-censorship.

The concern that individuals may feel compelled to suppress their true thoughts or refrain from expressing themselves openly on digital platforms is valid in this context. Orwell's warning against totalitarian regimes that justify their actions in the name of national good becomes ever more pertinent. The surveillance state in *1984* is built upon the idea that the government must oversee every aspect of citizens' lives to maintain order and control. The Indian government's proposed measures, while framed as a mechanism for ensuring tax compliance, run the risk of becoming an Orwellian tool for broader state dominance.

Moreover, the global trend toward digital surveillance, as seen in other nations too, underscores the precarious balance between security measures and individual privacy. In an increasingly digitised world, the question of how far government surveillance should extend becomes more pressing. While monitoring online activities may be justified by the government as a way to ensure compliance, it could also represent the erosion of privacy and autonomy, echoing the themes of total control and manipulation in Orwell's works.

While the Indian government's new tax compliance measures are intended to tackle tax evasion, they resonate strongly with Orwell's cautionary tales of surveillance and control. The risk of such laws being abused to curtail freedoms and suppress dissent is something that should be watched carefully. As Orwell's works remind us, the unchecked rise of surveillance could easily slip from a tool of regulation to an instrument of oppression, undermining democratic values and personal liberties in the process.

Social Media as a Surveillance Agent

Privacy has come to pass—not through some all-powerful government forcing its authority by force of arms, but through the same tools individuals so freely utilise every day.

LEENYA RAOMAI

George Orwell's *1984* presented a grim and unnerving picture of a world governed by surveillance, propaganda, and control of what people could think or say. The totalitarian regime, Big Brother, monitored each citizen, controlled information flow, and dictated what individuals could believe or utter. Now, Orwell's warnings have become hauntingly pertinent—not as a monolithic totalitarian state, but through the pervasive power of social media. These online sites have made a world where there is constant surveillance, truth is distorted, and independent thought is under growing attack. Social media, originally envisioned as a revolutionary platform for worldwide interaction and open speech, has turned into a cyber-dystopia reflecting Orwell's darkest visions of domination and repression.

One of the most glaring similarities between *1984* and the social media world is mass surveillance. In Orwell's book, the Party watches every citizen through telescreens, concealed microphones, and an army of informants, so that no one ever has a moment alone. In our contemporary world, social media sites monitor users in equally invasive ways, if not more Each click, like, comment, and search is tracked, building comprehensive digital profiles that show not just individual habits and preferences but also political views, emotional states, and psychological vulnerabilities. These sites learn more about us than our nearest friends or family members know, leveraging this immense reservoir of data to nudge behaviour, anticipate future actions, and drive targeted ads with disturbing accuracy. We are constantly being monitored, but we volunteer to undergo this monitoring just like Orwellian citizens who willingly submitted themselves to Big Brother's gaze. The difference, of course, being that surveillance was mandated by the State in *1984* and is presented now as an entertainment, convenience, and personalisation and thus infinitely more insidious.

The ramifications of such surveillance are much greater than targeted ads and personalised recommendations. Such mass personal data lie within reach of governments, firms and political parties alike to control the people on an unparalleled scale. Politicians, for instance, utilise social media analytics to micro-target citizens with a message crafted around them, with some even creating misinformation to secure their support for elections. While authoritarian regimes are utilising online platforms to oversee dissidents, follow protest activism, and keep at bay opposition politicians. Even in democratic countries, mass surveillance via social media poses serious ethical issues regarding privacy, freedom of expression, and manipulation of public opinion. Individuals are no longer consumers of content, they are the product, with their personal information being harvested, analysed, and sold to the highest bidder. Orwell's caution about a reality in which there is no more privacy has come to pass—not through some all-powerful government forcing its authority by force of arms, but through the same tools individuals so freely utilise every day.

The other Orwellian feature of social media is the way that reality can be distorted. In *1984*, the Party totally controls history through constant alteration of the past. What was so is deletable or modifiable, and individuals are supposed to go along with these modifications without questioning them, as if they had never been otherwise. Social media operates in a remarkably analogous manner, warping reality and reorganizing narratives through command algorithms, viral falsehoods, and selective censorship. False information disseminates at a shocking pace, frequently influencing the opinions of the people before truth has an opportunity to arise. Social media moguls have the power to amplify certain voices and silence others, essentially controlling which ideas and perspectives enter the public discourse. Orwell's 'doublethink' idea, people accepting contradictory truths unquestioningly, is reflected in how users will accept whatever appears in their streams as true, irrespective of facts. In a realm where information can be so easily manipulated, the very notion of truth itself is growing weaker.

The rapid spread of misinformation has had extreme real-world consequences. Misleading health information, for example, has caused vaccine hesitancy, promotion of untested treatments, and widespread distrust of public health authorities. Political disinformation has stoked social unrest, causing profound division in societies and even violence. Social media's algorithm value engagement over factuality, such that the most contentious and emotive content has the highest chances of going viral, even when misleading or even entirely false. History is manipulated to fit the Party's agenda in *1984*; now, reality itself is manipulated in real time based on which narratives social media firms and their algorithms deem worth spreading. This power to shape public opinion is an unparalleled amount of power—one equivalent, even to Orwell's prophesied dystopian state government.

Echo chambers, yet another perilous aspect of social media, are an echo of the Party's capacity for thought control. In *1984*, independent thought is a crime, and citizens are taught from childhood to only believe the Party's truth. Social media algorithms have the same impact by presenting users with information that supports their existing beliefs and excluding opposing views. Rather than being exposed to alternative perspectives, individuals are stuck in ideological bubbles, which reinforce their biases and inhibit constructive discussion. This results in a perilously polarised society where rational debate is substituted with blind allegiance to a specific group or ideology. As Orwell's citizens lost the capacity for critical thought, so have many social media users lost the capacity to discern fact from propaganda, as they are only ever presented with material that supports their current worldview.

The consequences of these online echo chambers are vast. Political polarisation has increased to unprecedented degrees, with individuals from either side of the ideological divide becoming less and less willing to have real discussions or even find common ground. Social media platforms reward outrage and controversy, further fuelling division and hostility. This is not an accident—algorithms are deliberately designed to maximise user engagement, and outrage is one of the most powerful emotions that keeps people glued to their screens. Instead of uniting people through open dialogue, social media has created a society where distrust, hostility, and misinformation thrive. Orwell's prediction of a world where independent thought is frowned upon has become reality in a society where individuals are becoming increasingly resistant to questioning their own perspectives or other's point of view.

Cancel culture, a social media-bred phenomenon, is reminiscent of Orwell's Thought Police. In *1984*, individuals who dare express out-of-favour opinions are erased from existence—punished, jailed, or even killed. On social media, those who utter an unpopular or politically incorrect thought can become the target of mass indignation, online abuse, and even offline repercussions in the workplace or in society. While accountability is vital, cancel culture has resulted in an atmosphere of intimidation, where individuals self-censor lest, they incur retribution. This twenty-first century Thought Police guarantees that only sanitised views are articulated, suppressing free speech and deterring honest debate. Orwell's warning of a world in which individuals are too scared to think for themselves is no longer fiction—it is our reality.

Even the facade of happiness on social media is Orwell's dystopia. In *1984*, citizens must always show loyalty and happiness, even when they are miserable. Likewise, social media compels individuals to show a perfect image of their lives. Members meticulously stage their posts, displaying only their finest moments and concealing setbacks and failures. They thus generate an untrue reality where everybody seems cheerful, successful, and satisfied while actually being plagued by anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Such compulsion to keep the illusion strains individuals to repress their real feelings, something similar to how people of Orwell's Oceania have to be perpetually obedient to Big Brother.

Social media is an Orwellian instrument of repression, determining what we view, how we think, and even how we act.

Social media is an Orwellian instrument of repression, determining what we view, how we think, and even how we act. Its capacity to surveil, control, and muffle people is uncomfortably akin to the repressive regime of *1984*. But in contrast to the world Orwell created, in which the state imposes domination, today's dystopia is fuelled by corporate interests, advanced algorithms, and the lure of digital engagement. The question is: can we resist this digital Big Brother, or are we already very deeply entrenched in its grasp?

The solution is awareness and action. If individuals are aware of the risks of uncontrolled social media power, they can fight it. It involves challenging what they read and watch, defending their privacy, having open communication, and avoiding the conformity of the digital realm. It also involves making social media corporations answerable for their manipulation of the public sphere and intrusion into the private sphere.

Orwell's *1984* was intended as a warning, not a prediction. Whether we take that warning to heart or let ourselves get completely swept up in the digital Big Brother is something that is still in our control, for the moment. If we don't do something about it, we're likely to lose our freedom to think, to speak freely, to share and connect with each other. Orwell's dystopia may seem like a far-off future, but it is already present; it is our reality, and it is our choice whether we resist it or get dominated by it.

The Cycle of Oppression

AARUSHI SARKAR

Raju was a young and ambitious auto-rickshaw driver from a small village in India. He lived in a cramped, rented room with his wife, Laxmi, and their two children. Despite his hard work, Raju struggled to make ends meet, often going hungry to feed his family.

One day, while driving his auto-rickshaw, Raju witnessed a group of wealthy businessmen exploiting the local vendors, forcing them to pay sky-high fees for selling their wares on the street. Raju was outraged, and he decided to take a stand.

'We must do something about this, Laxmi,' Raju said to his wife that evening. 'These businessmen are sucking the blood out of our people.' 'I know, Raju,' Laxmi replied. 'But what can we do? We're just poor people.'

'We may be poor, but we're not powerless,' Raju said, his eyes burning with determination. 'I'll rally the vendors, and we'll demand fair treatment.' And so, Raju began his crusade against the wealthy businessmen. He spent every spare moment organising the vendors, attending meetings, and negotiating with the businessmen.

As the days turned into weeks, Raju's message began to resonate with the people. They saw him as a champion of the poor, a man who was willing to stand up against the powerful and fight for justice.

'We're lucky to have Raju on our side,' said Kumar, a young vendor who sold fruits on the street. 'He's the only one who cares about us.' But as Raju's fame and influence grew, so did his ego. He began to see himself as a messiah, a man destined to lead the poor to victory.

'I'm the only one who can save these people,' Raju said to Laxmi one day. 'They need me, and I need to be in charge.' Laxmi eyed her husband with concern. 'Raju, you're changing,' she said. 'You're becoming just like the men you opposed.' Raju laughed. 'Don't be ridiculous, Laxmi,' he said. 'I'm still the same man. I just need to make some tough decisions to ensure our people's victory.'

But Laxmi knew better. She saw the way Raju looked at her, the way he spoke to her, and the way he treated her. He was no longer the man she married. As months passed, Raju's behaviour became more and more erratic. He began to demand money from the vendors, claiming it was for 'expenses'. He started to use his influence to silence anyone who opposed him.

And then one day, Kumar came to Raju with a complaint. 'Raju, your associates are demanding a hefty fee from me to operate my fruit stall,' Kumar said. 'It's not fair; I thought you were on our side.' Raju looked at Kumar with a cold, hard gaze. ' If you want to operate a business, you need to pay the price,' he said. 'It's business as usual, Kumar.'

Kumar was devastated. He realised that Raju had become the very thing he had once opposed – a ruthless exploiter. 'Raju, you've changed,' Kumar said, his voice shaking with emotion. ' You're not the man I thought you were.'

Raju sneered. 'You're just a foolish idealist, Kumar,' he said. 'You don't understand how the world works.' But Kumar did understand. He understood that Raju had become his own worst enemy, that he had fallen victim to the very same cycle of oppression that he had once fought against.

As Kumar walked away from Raju's office, he felt a sense of sadness wash over him. He had lost a hero, a man whom he once admired and respected. But he knew that he had to move on. He had to continue the fight for justice, even if it meant opposing the man who had once been his champion. The cyclic nature of human behaviour had played out once again, and Raju had become a cautionary tale of the dangers of unchecked ambition.

TEACH CHILDREN TO LOVE THE ENVIRONMENT

Dr MARIANNE DE NAZARETH

"What's that sound, Dad?" I asked one night, standing in the open back door, in our family home in Goa. "Birds singing at night?" It was a magical night when I, a city child, heard a frog's symphony in the fields around the family homestead. "Those are frogs. Little, tiny frogs who live in the fields back there," said Dad. My eyes went big and my mouth dropped open. My smaller brothers and sisters pushed forward, curious to hear as well. That was the moment when all of us breathed in and were in awe of the natural world around us.

A parent's role in teaching the child to respect nature and the environment is all important. My boys would go outside every day, because by encouraging them it is easily their happy place, now as adults. Today a parent's role is even more important with children getting addicted to social media on devices. So how did I get so lucky? Is it genetic? The fact is, I have worked with a purpose to instil these values in my kids, and it is not a coincidence that they have grown into who they are today. But it's also not that hard at all.

To teach a child to love the environment, and immerse them in nature with unstructured outdoor play—like gardening—rather than just playgrounds. Foster appreciation by birdwatching, creating nature-based art, and teaching them eco-friendly habits like recycling and conserving water and electricity. Here are six ways that you can raise kids who love nature.

Create family traditions that include nature: We have a few family traditions that involve time spent outdoors, but my favorite is our weekly visits to the farm in Hoskote. The boys were taught to plant saplings and water them there and over the years they were so excited to see them grow and fruit. Today they enjoy picking the fruit and sharing them with family and friends. They watched their grandpa do it, then I do still and so they love to walk up to friends in the neighbourhood and share the extra organic fruit.

Encourage a sense of wonder and curiosity: It is easy to forget how magical our world is. Luckily I noticed that first chorus of frogs croaking from the fields in Goa and asked Dad. Parents need to try to be mindful of the smallest signs of natural beauty and point them out to their kids often and with reverence. Draw their attention to worms and butterflies, flowers that bloom, lasting for long and those that die after just a week. Stars and fireflies, puffy cumulus clouds and the heavy monsoon rains. Point out small changes that you take for granted. Encourage questions and if you don't know the answer, look it up together. Kids who notice nature are more likely to appreciate its subtleties.

Teach them to be unafraid of insects: I remember how shocked I was when my little grand daughter screamed and cried when she saw a spider for the first time. She had never seen one and it scared her. I carefully picked it up and showed her how utterly harmless they are. Over the years she picks cicadas up herself and quite happily gardens with her Dad in South Carolina, mindful of the beauty of nature around her.

Today's children are constantly exposed to media that promotes technology, processed food, medication, and pressure to constantly perform better. In contrast, nature offers them a space to slow down and reconnect with the world around them.

The joy of planting their own little trays of seeds: Give your kids time to plant seeds into seed trays on a sunny day. Fill the trays with compost and soil and let them plant french bean seeds to germinate them. Soon they will have baby bean plants unfurling their leaves to their immense excitement. Later teach them to replant the little seedlings into the ground or a pot so it can grow to maturity. Playgrounds may be a great place to meet friends or burn off some excess energy before bedtime, but to really appreciate nature kids need to have time to immerse themselves in it. You'll be amazed at how much they learn through their own experiences.

Encourage them to attend Nature talks in school: Use peer pressure to your advantage. Today schools plan talks on the environment for various age groups. Encourage your children to join in and learn about nature by going on school organised trips. Reach out to other families who share your values and coordinate some adventures together. If you aren't sure who to invite on your weekend hike, ask your kids. When their friends join your picnic, they are more likely to want to join in too. Some of our best friends and favourite memories were made on picnics which were near river banks or even the nearest park.

Create a nature-rich environment in your home: You don't always have to go outside to create lasting connections with nature. Bringing plants into your home, filling your bookcases with field guides and reading nature rich stories together are great ways to encourage curiosity and spark passion for the natural world. My grand kids collect stones, shells, pine cones and acorns to decorate their rooms. You should also engage the kids to research in books or online to answer their many questions about the environment, everything ranging from cloud types and plant identification to bird calls and weather forecasts.

Today's kids are surrounded on a daily basis by the media that pushes technology, processed foods, medication and the importance of being faster and better at everything they do. Nature provides them the opportunity to slow down and appreciate the natural world around them. If we ground our children in the bigger picture and allow them to experience childhood more simply, they will learn to care more about others and not just themselves. They will have a lifetime to experience the priorities of adulthood. So! As the old cliché goes– teach them to relax and smell the roses.

IN PICTURES

A Journey to Asia's Cleanest Village: Mawlynnong

RONY JAMES VELLARINGATTU

Nestled within the emerald embrace of the East Khasi Hills in Meghalaya, the village of Mawlynnong, widely celebrated as "God's Own Garden," gained international acclaim when Discover India magazine declared it Asia's cleanest village. Far from a mere title, this distinction is a living, breathing reality maintained by a community that treats cleanliness not as a chore, but as a sacred duty.

The journey into Mawlynnong is a transition into a world where the chaotic footprint of urbanisation has been replaced by a strict no-plastic zone and meticulous landscapes. The air is crisp, scented by wild blooms and the earthy fragrance of the surrounding rainforest. Here, the villagers are fiercely dedicated to their surroundings; every path is lined with colourful bamboo dustbins, and even the fallen leaves are swept away with rhythmic precision.

At the heart of Mawlynnong is its social structure, rooted in the strong matriarchal traditions of the Khasi people. Visitors will find that the village's vibrant commerce is largely led by women; young entrepreneurs and mothers run the local shops with a graceful efficiency that reflects their central role in the community. The men, equally committed to the village's ecological ethos, are the architects of the landscape. They can be seen constructing intricate, eco-friendly huts and sky-high treehouses—engineered entirely from bamboo and local materials. The culinary landscape of Mawlynnong is so robust and the presentation so inviting that the meal was finished long before we thought to capture a photograph.

Exploring the Many Facets of Anxiety

Expectations to achieve and accomplish push people to give in much more than they actually can. This stress eventually manifests into anxiety.

DEBAPRIYA MAJUMDAR

"Anxiety may be defined as apprehension, tension, or uneasiness that stems from the anticipation of danger, which may be internal or external." (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 1980). It is a raging occurrence in the population today, and has been increasing manifold.

It includes several aspects like feeling overwhelmed, nervous, tense, and even confused. To individuals who experience chronic anxiety, it seems as though the mind is always suffocated by thoughts, and is always active. Even a lone moment seems like a breath of fresh air to the overworked mind. Anxiety is often associated with overthinking, where the individual has multiple thoughts which may or may not be related.

Humans are social beings whose mindsets are shaped by societal norms and pressures, and social media further distorts communication by creating misleading perception gaps, such as mistaking emoji use for genuine politeness.

Anxiety can be caused due to a number of factors, such as academic pressure, societal expectations, and even due to personality factors. In today's fast paced and competitive world, achievements and accomplishments play an extremely crucial role in determining an individual's lifestyle. Hence, to attain the best, they often exert themselves to give in much more effort than they actually can. This leads to prolonged stress, which eventually manifests into anxiety. This occurs in the field of academics as well as work life. Moreover, the idea of work–life balance is somewhat distorted: people devote more time to their professions than to their personal life. Due to this, they cannot vent out their stress properly, leading to frustration and burnout.

As we know, humans are social animals. It is no wonder that society indeed plays a major role in influencing each one's mindset. Individuals are often expected to abide by certain codes of conduct which they might personally find to be suffocating. Moreover, due to the advent of social media, there is often a communication gap among people. For instance, the usage of emojis may impact one's perception of politeness. He/ she may perceive the other person to be polite when many emojis are used, although it may not be so in real life. Societal expectation in terms of profession, choices, and other fields exert significant stress that can culminate into anxiety.

Personal factors form yet another crucial aspect. As we know, the different types of personality: A, B, C, and D determine an individual's traits. For example, type A personality is characterised by competitiveness, high need for achievement, and is prone to stress. On the other hand, type B personality presents individuals who are calm, organised, and do not stress out much. Since stress and anxiety are highly related to each other, it can be said that individuals with type A personality are highly prone to stress, and consequently to anxiety.

Often, owing to the stigma surrounding mental health and faulty portrayal by media, anxiety is seen as a harmful occurrence, which affects physical health greatly, and challenges the wellbeing of an individual. It has been scientifically proven that stress and anxiety do impact the physical health of individuals, in the form of low immunity, psychosomatic disorders like diabetes and ulcers, hypertension, and so on. It even slows down the mental processes of people, and adversely affects their memory, decision- making, attention, problem- solving, and other cognitive abilities.

These views may adversely affect a person suffering from anxiety disorders. It may lower their self-esteem, and make them feel inferior to others, leading to further complications. However, they can be made to feel that it is a part of their identity, and not their entire identity: it does not define who they are. In fact, their confidence and affirmative attitude can be boosted by stating that anxiety in mild or optimal levels makes them more vigilant, cautious, and mindful to minute details. This would in turn encourage them to reach out for help when required.

Anxiety is a highly prevalent phenomenon today. As responsible humans, we must try to support and assist an individual who requires professional support while dealing with anxiety. Mental health is as important as physical health, and must be prioritised. Afterall, a healthy body is nothing without a healthy mind. Stereotyping and stigmatising a mental disorder do not benefit an individual or a community at large; it is mutual and community support that contributes to a positive growth and wellbeing. Hence, steps must be taken to support people who require it during their toughest days. By being a ray of hope in each other's lives, we can create a thriving, healthy community based on mutual benefit.

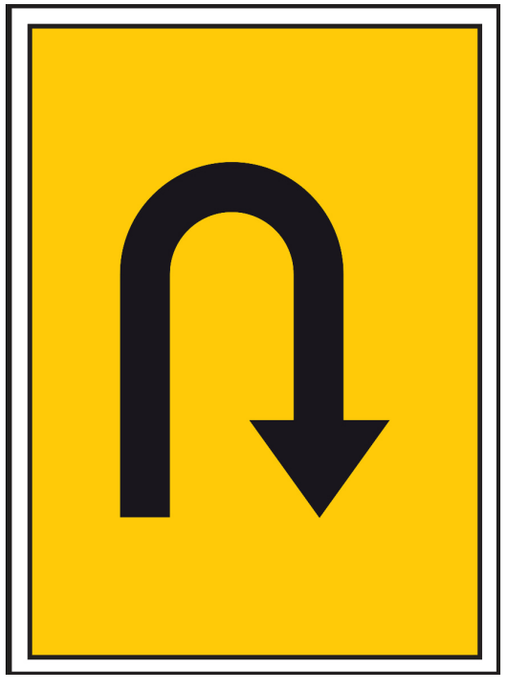
THE TURNING POINT

MONICA FERNANDES

At times life throws us a challenge. We follow our usual set daily routine to include time for work, studies, fun, play and prayer. Everything seems honky dory. And then out of the blue a life changing incident occurs –an accident, the sudden demise of someone close to us, an unexpected failure, a world-wide pandemic. Our usual road is blocked. We have reached a pivotal point in our lives. There are other roads to follow and it depends on us which road we choose.

On June 7, 1893, a young Indian lawyer, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (later known as the Mahatma or 'great soul') was forcibly evicted from a Whites only carriage on a train in South Africa. Till then he was a regular brown sahib. But this eviction was a watershed moment in his life. He began to lead protests against segregation via a passive resistance movement called Satyagraha which means 'force which is born of truth and love and non-violence'. The Mahatma drew a lot of inspiration from the bible and would often quote, from Mathew 5: 39, 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who treat you badly. To the one who strikes you on the cheek, turn the other cheek; to the one who takes your coat, give also your shirt.' The father of our nation went on to galvanise an entire country to shed the oppressive shackles of colonialism through non-violent methods. Amazing! An entire nation had reached a turning point. He was the inspiration for other leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King. If the Mahatma had chosen to just grumble about injustice and not act after that fateful day in South Africa, the entire history of our nation may have been different.

We have all heard motivational speakers whose lives took an about turn after a major operation or a serious accident. One such iconic lady is Arjuna awardee Deepa Malik. She became a paraplegic at the tender age of 29. This lady with a fighting spirit is proud of her military background as both her father and husband are army men. On September 12, 2016 at the age of 45, Deepa made her country proud by becoming the first Indian woman athlete of win a medal at the Para Olympics.



Some of you, dear readers, may be facing roadblocks in your lives. At the end of the day, it is not what happens in your life that matters, but how you react to it. Following the footsteps of his father and older brother, young Anurag was bent on joining the Indian Institute of Technology. He prepared hard for the entrance exams but disaster struck on the day before the exams when he was hospitalised with a serious infection. Not one to quit, Anurag decided to try his luck the next year but had a bad fall and landed up with a fractured hand and, as luck would have it, his left hand with which he wrote. Anurag was very despondent but his mother, who is a teacher, pointed out to him that there are many roads to success. Anurag went on to study at the London School of Economics. Today he is happy and successful in his career.

But a traumatic event has not always been the turning point. Gautama Buddha was Prince Siddhartha from the Shakya clan. His father protected him from being exposed to sickness and disease. It was during chariot ride outside the palace that the young prince first beheld suffering and death when he saw an old man, a diseased man and a decaying corpse. After years of meditation, he began preaching the eightfold middle path between extreme sensual indulgence and severe mortification.

Mother Teresa joined the Loretta order of nuns as a teacher. She witnessed two very traumatic events – the Bengal famine of 1943 and the bloodshed before the partition of India. She also saw poverty and suffering on the streets of Calcutta. This prompted her to start the Missionaries of Charity so that the poorest of poor could live and die in dignity.

A twist in fate could happen to anyone. The death of the main bread winner of the family, a failure in exams, loss of a job, an accident or sickness, being jilted and last but not least, the strain of living during a pandemic – these are some of the challenges being faced. But do not despair for there is always a way forward.

How do we condition ourselves to find another road during a roadblock in our lives?

- We all have ups and downs in our lives but some of us seem to have more downs. Let us not waste precious time bemoaning our fate. Nor should we compare ourselves adversely with others, envying them for being luckier than us. Negativity and seeking sympathy results in us being blind to other alternatives.
- Develop our Spiritual Quotient. We could read the precepts and lives of great spiritual leaders and sages. The parables of Jesus Christ all have a message to strengthen us mentally. Spend some time in prayer. Through personal experience during difficult times, I believe this approach helps.
- Reach out to others. This approach makes us less likely to think that nobody has seen the troubles we have seen.
- We should not neglect our physical wellbeing and make time for yoga, walking and exercise.
- Surround ourselves with positive people who truly care for us. Who are our friends? Can you rely on them in good times and in bad?
- We should not hesitate to seek advice and help from those wiser than us. There is no loss of ego in seeking help.
- Be proactive. You may have lost your job due to the pandemic. Is it possible to attend on line courses to hone your skills? If your particular job profile is no longer of relevance in the current scenario, is it possible to change your line entirely, considering your strengths and talents?
- Above all, we must believe that we are made of sterner stuff and we SHALL overcome. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "faith in ourselves and faith in God- this is the secret of greatness", "All power is within you; you can do anything and everything."

Breaking the Silence

Therapy should be normalised to make sure that people who undergo it does not feel their illness as a character flaw.

JOSELINE FIONABRIGHT

In a country rich in culture, diversity and also various advances in technology it is quite concerning about the alarming rates of mental health issues. On this note, the youths of today have realised the importance of mental health regardless of the stereotypes, superstitions and stigmas that surround mental health.

Mental health, as defined by the WHO, "is a state of well-being where an individual realises their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and make a contribution to their community". The government of India has taken efforts to promote the importance of mental health by organizing campaigns and setting up mental healthcare centres.

The stigma surrounding mental health it quite a difficult barrier to overcome. When it comes to India, people tend to belittle people when it comes to the mental health aspect. Many people still believe that "mental health isn't important", "depression isn't real", "people who go to therapy are weak", "why go to therapy when you have friends", etc. On the other hand, it has also been normalised to diagnose people randomly without knowing any verified information of the mental disorder, "you are so dumb, do you have autism?" "Why are you so hyperactive?" "You are such a neat freak, do you have OCD?", "I'm depressed, I missed my flight!" and so on.

Families often feel pressured to make sure their children are considered "normal" by society, they must understand that there is nothing wrong with going to therapy, seeking help or taking care of their mental health. To make them understand that it is an honest health issue and not a weakness, more awareness about mental health should be given. Furthermore, the working class should also realise the importance of mental health so that they can take care of themselves and normalise it for the further generations as well. Even though the government has tried to promote mental health awareness and so have many NGOs but the mindset hasn't changed in some parts of our country.

On the other hand, recently the rate of people going to therapy has increased which shows that mental health care is being taken seriously. Therapy has been normalised which is a big step for a country like India which is bound by tradition and belief systems. India does face a treatment gap due to shortage of professionals.

Therapy is not normalised to the rural or the semi-urban areas. It is considered luxury to be able to get therapy due to the lack of professionals and cost. Rural and sei-urban areas are not aware of the entire idea of mental health. As a practitioner, it would be really challenging to navigate this challenge especially due the lack of awareness of mental health and the entire stigma surrounding it.

Families need to be aware of the symptoms of the mental disorder and help that member whenever and wherever necessary. It should be normalised to make sure that that the member is not feeling like a burden or feeling their disorder is a character flaw. Knowledge about the disorder could help everyone feel a little at ease and be aware of what could happen etc., Families should also be active listeners and not neglect any feelings or opinions. Families should also understand the importance of the way they express their care, it shouldn't sound blameful but be more acknowledging.

It is observed that many youths are seen with a high rate of disorders like depression and anxiety, there are various factors that contribute to that like academic pressure, social media and a fast-paced lifestyle. When it comes to academic pressure, the weight of aspirations which hold various competitive exams and the need to prove themselves and others. Competitive exams like NEET, JEE, SATS, etc., tend to be very stressful which leads the deteriorating mental health.

The result pressure can also significantly impact the mental health of adolescents. On that note, the entire idea of a "picture perfect" life that is portrayed in social media pressures them unknowingly to have a similar life. Beauty standards and lifestyle choices become stressors.

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), is a serious cause of anxiety issues, the continuous feeling of that makes them feel their life is lacking. Youths also tend to fall into the dopamine trap and forget the true meaning of life and happiness. Doomscrolling and isolation can also impact the mental health of individuals. Practical measures could be maintaining a healthy screen time, maintaining boundaries, practicing mindfulness, the idea of "social detox" could really help as well and journaling could really help processing emotions.

Why Sad Songs Comfort Us: Music and the Psychology of Emotion

ASMITA BANERJEE

I am on the brink,
Yet not old enough to drink,
So I must drown my sorrows,
In beautiful songs
Till ever tomorrow.

This poem is not only good; it represents a reality of our time. It is quite typical that the youth of today lose themselves for hours in listening to songs with their headphones on, and parents complain, "It's that damn phone." It is not very unusual that one listens to upbeat music when wanting to raise one's spirits. But even more frequent is listening to sad or heartfelt songs when one is down. Science reports that it is due to the catharsis phenomenon. Nevertheless, it can also be a negative thing as the determination of emotion and the regulation of it may become weak due to the fact that a person is constantly trying to change their mood through music.

Still, what if the reason for our choosing that sad playlist is not only the desire to get the sadness out? What if it is something more complicated and, frankly, more beautiful? An intriguing research by Ai Kawakami and her team delves into this very query, and their discovery might upset your view of your most cherished sad song.

The main question is a paradox: if sadness is an unpleasant feeling that we try to avoid, then why would we still let it come into our ears willingly? The scientists came up with an excellent concept, which involved two distinct categories of feelings: perceived emotion and felt emotion. Perceived emotion is the one that you identify objectively. For instance, you may listen to a music piece in a minor key with a slow pace and conclude, "This song is sad." It is similar to diagnosing a person who is frowning and perceiving that he is unhappy.

Felt emotion is the actual emotion that you experience internally. This is where it gets fascinating. Just because a song is sad in your perception, it does not mean that you will also feel sad. In their experiment, the researchers made the subjects listen to music in major (generally happy-sounding) and minor (generally sad-sounding) keys. Then they instructed them to score both the way they recognised the music's emotion and how it actually made them feel. The findings were very telling. While the listeners described the minor-key music as "sad," their felt sad emotion was much lower. What is more, during the listening of that "sad" music, they did not feel "sad" but rather more "pleasure"—the two emotions termed "romantic" and "blithe" by the study—than those they recognised in the music.

To put it simply, the sad music was not only making them sad but was also giving them an ambivalent, mixed emotional experience where beauty and sorrow coexist.

So, how can this be? The research presents an important idea: vicarious emotion. The emotions we evoke from art (music, film, painting) differ from the ones we experience in everyday life.

When the sadness is due to a personal loss, the emotion is direct and linked to a concrete, painful event. On the contrary, the sadness associated with a beautiful piano melody is indirect or vicarious. You are in a safe place. The music will not hurt you. This safety allows you to experience the core of sadness - its profundity, its reflective nature—without the pure, unpleasant danger that is always there with sadness in the real world. The researchers argue that this vicarious sadness is different in quality. It is a "pleasant" sadness. It gives us the opportunity to feel the depths of the emotion from a safe distance, enjoying its aesthetic value without being overwhelmed by the real-world consequences. This is why we feel less of the tragedy we see and more of the romantic, fascinated feelings. We are thus, to a certain extent, crying because of the beauty of the grief itself, not because of a personal disaster.

This leads us back to mental health. Listening to sad music is not always about self-pity or trying to artificially control one's mood. Instead, it can become a necessary and powerful emotional processing tool. It is a safe harbour in which we can experience the complex feelings. It does not deny our sadness but supports it as it reflects it back to us in a beautiful and non-threatening way. The music says, "I know this feeling," and in that mutual understanding, we feel less isolated. Nevertheless, the difference is subtle. Music can become an escape if it is constantly used for ruminating or avoiding facing one's problems in the real world. However, if one uses it consciously, then putting on a sad song is not a show of weakness but of self-awareness—being with a safe, vicarious emotion that helps one to better understand one's heart, all through the beautiful suffering of a melody.

Although sadness is usually avoided, we still engage with sad music because experience operates on two levels: perceived emotion, the sadness we recognize in the music, and felt emotion, the emotion we personally experience.

A Balkan Diary

SAJI SALKALACHEN

Montenegro unfolded like a tapestry of mountains, water, faith, and bonding. Every turn in the journey offered something timeless—a pilgrimage to the cliff heights, stepping onto islands born of legend, towns leaning gently against the sea, and hills echoing with celebration.

As the journey moved from the coastal town of Bar toward the revered Ostrog Monastery, about 90 kilometres away, the road wound through pine-sloped valleys and scattered rural villages. It was a quiet drive—until our convoy came to an unexpected halt at a railway crossing.

The crossing itself was modest and appeared rarely used, as a nearby resident casually confirmed. The low barrier, clearly designed with small vehicles in mind, posed no issue for cars slipping underneath. For our sizeable tour bus, however, it was another matter.

What followed was part comedy, part teamwork. After a quick assessment, with the bus driver's confident nod, a few enthusiastic passengers, and the amused guidance of a watchful lookout (for any locomotive and blaring signals), the group decided to take matters into our own hands. Carefully and collectively, we managed the situation manually; the barrier went up, and our lumbering bus ducked under like a well-fed camel beneath a low gate. It may have been a minor technical violation, but in the circumstances—a quiet track, no train in sight, and a tight travel schedule that allowed no delay—it felt like a reasonable and harmless adjustment. Sometimes, even the road to spiritual heights demands a touch of practical ingenuity.

Ostrog Monastery, miraculously carved into the vertical cliff, is a wondrous sight above the Zeta Valley.

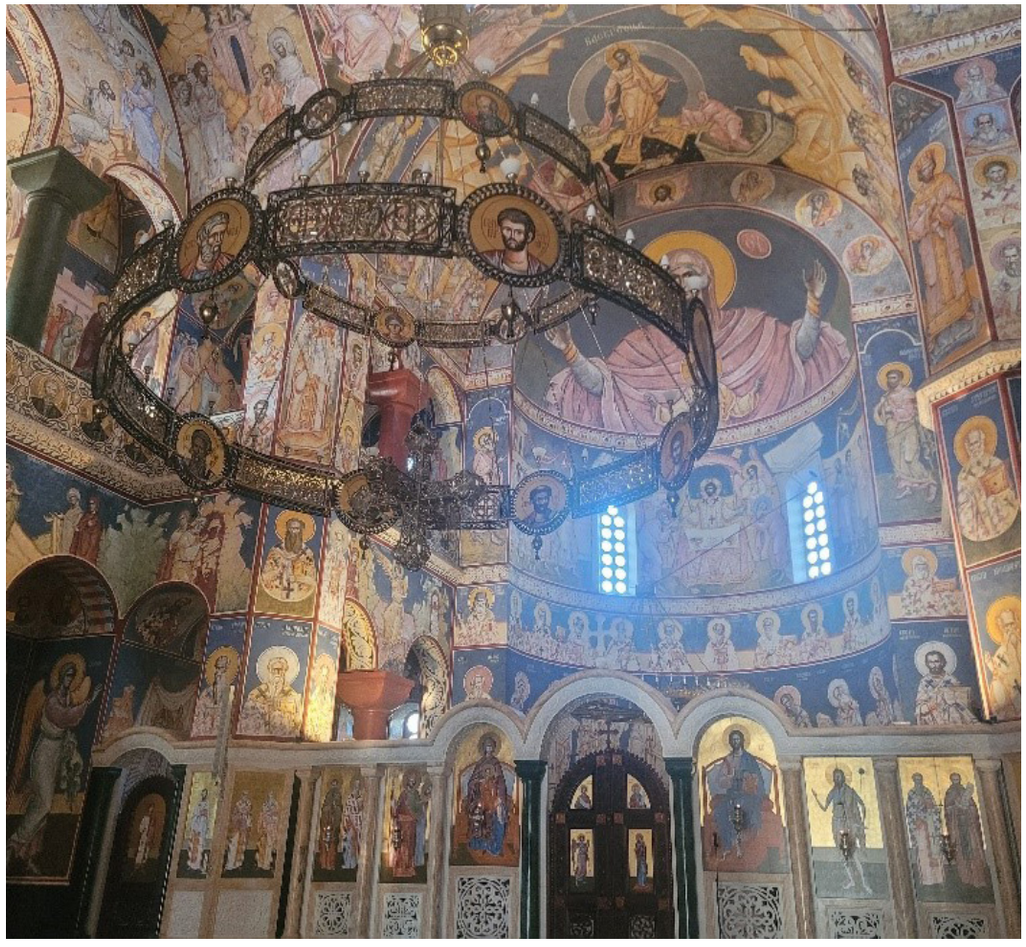
The visit to the Ostrog Monastery was awe-inspiring, as revered as it was extraordinary. It appeared to defy reason and gravity, emerging from the rock like a divine apparition. Perched nearly a kilometre above the Zeta Valley, its whitewashed walls clung to the sheer rock face like a vision suspended between heaven and earth. The road that led us there wound through pine forests and rocky slopes before rising steeply to a silence filled with wonder.

From the lower monastery, pilgrims walked barefoot along a winding path, a three-kilometre act of devotion toward the relics of Saint Basil (who founded it in the 17th century) in the upper monastery. The caves inside became sanctuaries, and the air felt heavy with whispered prayers and stories of miraculous healing. From the terrace, the valley stretched endlessly below—faith echoed from both stone and sky.

Island Legend – A Beacon on the Bay

From the mountains, the path dropped to the sea and the wide embrace of the Bay of Kotor. Amid the deep blue waters lies Our Lady of the Rocks, an island built of stone by sailors returning safely from voyages. A church, a small museum, and a white lighthouse stand on the island, guiding boats as they glide towards them.

As the boat docked, the little island seemed to beckon every passenger ashore—a breeze carrying the scent of salt and mist of distant mountain peaks swept across our faces. Against the backdrop of Montenegro's rugged mountains and the endless Adriatic sky, the lighthouse and the church stood as silent sentinels, where devotion had quite literally created land from the sea. The horizon lay wide open, and peace seemed to rise and fall with the tide.



Kotor – Between Walls and Waters

Kotor reveals two contrasting faces—walled and watery. On one side, a stone bridge over the Škurda River leads through the medieval gates into its walled Old Town, watched over by the heights of Mount Lovćen, whose slopes are dotted with zigzagging trails once walked by traders and now climbed by hikers or zipped over by cable cars. On the other, the bayfront opens into the turquoise Adriatic, with boats gathering along the promenade. Together, they capture the essence of Kotor—cradled between fortress walls and a breathtaking fjord-like bay.

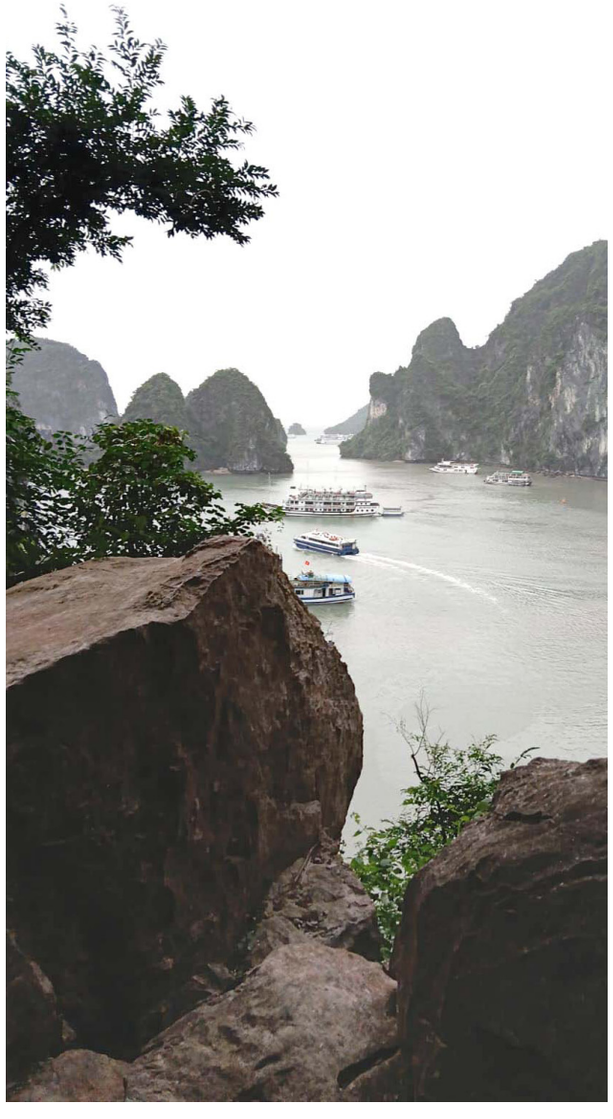
At the town's heart stands the Cathedral of Saint Tryphon, Kotor's most iconic landmark. Built in 1166, as prominently displayed on its front façade, the Romanesque twin towers hold centuries of devotion within — from relics of the patron saint to fine medieval decorative wall paintings — reflecting the city's deep seafaring faith and cultural pride. Life buzzed hurriedly outside—visitors browsing for mementoes, children chasing pigeons in the square, boats and passengers milling on the pier, and the Adriatic swaying with its quiet invitation.

The journey found its most personal moment on Talici Hill, where the joy of a wedding awaited. The hilltop estate, framed by olive groves, rolling mountains, and the nearby sea, seemed made for celebration. Golden evening light bathed the scene as music and laughter carried into the night. Between candlelit tables, warm embraces, and the generous spirit of Montenegrin hospitality, Talici Hill became more than a place—it became a memory stitched into our story.

The hosts, graceful in their welcome and thoughtful in every detail, made everything feel effortlessly perfect. The moment of glory was deeply gratifying, and the celebration far exceeded expectations, making the occasion truly worthwhile.

Montenegro left images etched deep in the soul and heart: the climb and faithful visit to Ostrog, the island-hop across the deep blue Adriatic, the walk around the fortress town of Kotor, and the joyous echoes of a wedding on Talici Hill. Here, devotion and beauty met—and the journey felt like a prayer carried on the wind.

VIETNAM IS A TAPESTRY WOVEN FROM PRIDE, PAIN, AND PERSPECTIVE



AARSHIA CHIDAMBARAM

Vietnam is a country of layers. It consists of ancient serenity and raw history. My journey began in the cradle of its first dynasty: Ninh Binh. This is the capital and hometown of the Đinh dynasty, which reunited Northern Vietnam under their control in 968 following the breakup of the Jinghai kingdom. We pedalled through the ancient village on bicycles before arriving at the Đền Thái Vi temple. This temple was originally built during the Tran Dynasty, serving as a military defence base during the war against the Mongolian invaders. Today, however, it remains primarily as a serene place of worship.

After lunch we took the opportunity to sail and view the features on Ninh Binh's outskirts. Outside the town a limestone karst landscape takes hold amongst a dense system of waterways and wetlands called the Tràng An, interspersed with occasional man-made huts.

These landscapes continued in Ha Long Bay as we began our overnight cruise through the limestone karst site, formed over 20 million years in tropical climates. On the peak of Titop Island we viewed the masses of islands after an arduous climb. We walked through the well-lit limestone formations of the Sung Sot Cave along an 800 m-long stone passage. The cave was discovered only in 1901 after a French explorer entered through the opening, giving way to a 'cave of surprises'.

Back in Hanoi we passed through several capital city attractions, including Văn Miếu, 'the Temple of Literature', the oldest university in Vietnam, founded in 1070. We then turned to a far more sombre chapter of the city's history at Hỏa Lò Prison. This is a jail founded by the French in 1901. Political prisoners who opposed French rule were routinely tortured and executed here, and the prison today serves as an important symbol of the national backstory of Vietnam.

During the Vietnam War, the prison was repurposed by the North Vietnamese to hold American pilots captured during bombing raids. Taps and letters condemning US policy and praising the good treatment of their captors were extorted out of American prisoners through routine torture methods and beatings.

Hanoi's local baguette, "Bánh Mì", was a food highlight on the trip. The famous pho I tried was underwhelming, though the crispy rice cake they served alongside the dish was a nice surprise.

An organic community spirit can be felt walking down the aisles of Trang Tien Street Market, boasting a large variety of local skincare, makeup, and silks. Even though in a language foreign to me, the atmosphere of conversing locals, shopping families & laughing vendors gives the street market a simple joyful charm of shared human experience.

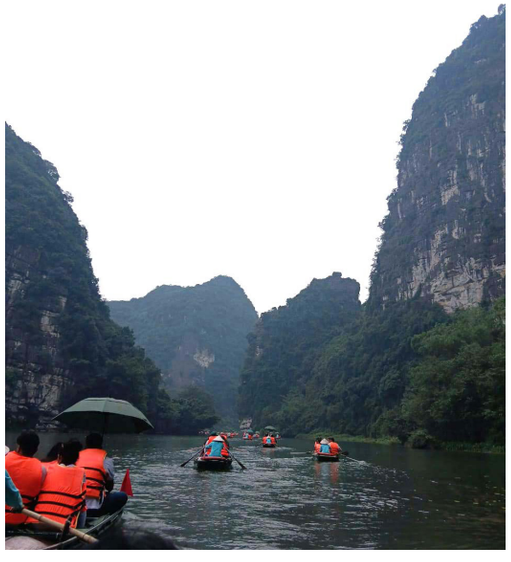
Flying south to Ho Chi Minh City, we perused a second bustling street market. One of my favourite experiences of the trip came in a quieter corner of the city, where a kind, hospitable lady with two dogs sleeping at her feet served me a bowl of rich and spicy broth called "Bún Bò Huế".

We then arrived at the Mekong Delta, a region of intense farming activity at the exit of the longest river in Southeast Asia, the Mekong River. We fared through the tributaries and visited small inhabited cottages on the riverbanks and many islands.

During our trip we saw craft workshops where artisans transform bamboo into everything from clothing to furniture, soap and toothpaste. At Unicorn Island we ate fresh fruit, dragon fruit, pomelo & longan. On a second island we visited a honey farm where we were served longan honey tea. The honey produced here is added to chocolates. On a third island coconuts were used to produce coconut candy, which was fresh, sweet and chewy. The island also produces the traditional medicine rượu rắn, or "snake wine", where whole snakes are preserved inside glass bottles.

Our last stop in the Delta was a famous temple complex featuring large statues of Buddha in various forms as well as the compassionate deity "Quan Âm/Guanyin", from the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit "Avalokitasvara", meaning "he who looks down upon sound", in other words, "he who receives the cries of those who need help". Not all statues were large, like this finely detailed smaller figure in the temple hall. The temple complex featured a tower storing the ashes of the dead, designed to bring their souls closer to heaven.

Back up north, on the far outskirts of Ho Chi Minh City, we visited what appeared to be a peaceful forest under which lay a series of military tunnels built by the Viet Cong. Today sections of the Củ Chi Tunnels have been widened to accommodate visiting tourists; however, the authentic tunnels are only large enough for crawling on all fours. The Viet Cong and their predecessors, the Viet Minh, adopted a military doctrine of persistent hit-and-run tactics, attacking their enemies where their enemies were weak and, where their enemies were strong, disappearing into dwellings where their enemies could not follow.



Annamite swamps, dense forests, mountainous, rural and infrastructureless terrain cause great difficulties for urban power centres seeking to impose their regimes over their surroundings, a reality which is reflected in the language diversity of Vietnam's hinterlands. The Viet Cong and their predecessors, the Viet Minh, benefitted from and took to this power principle, utilising the Annamite Range's impenetrable terrain and building enormous tunnel networks where the Viet Cong stashed equipment, built underground hospitals and were occasionally forced to stay hidden in for multiple days on end during enemy attacks.

Our guide explained how during the Vietnam War ventilation for these tunnels was disguised as termite mounds. Low-cost booby traps like sharpened bamboo stick pits, grenades rigged to tripwires and spiked wooden boards which swing and impale victims were disguised and primed throughout the country.

We shuffled through a section of the Củ Chi Tunnels, which, despite the tourist-friendly enlargements, still felt incredibly claustrophobic. Emerging back out into the open sunlight was greatly relieving, as we listened to the sound of gunfire from a shooting range connected to the tourist site.

The resulting human suffering of the Vietnam War is captured at the War Remnants Museum through photographs of civilian victims. Americans attempted to reach the Viet Cong by pouring millions of gallons of toxic gas, "Agent Orange", across the Vietnamese countryside, causing immense death and suffering for millions of Vietnamese civilians, especially when factoring in delayed cancer-causing and birth-defect consequences down the line. That many Vietnamese as well as American veterans choose not to have children out of fear of their possible Agent Orange exposure is a depressing reality of this conflict's conclusion.

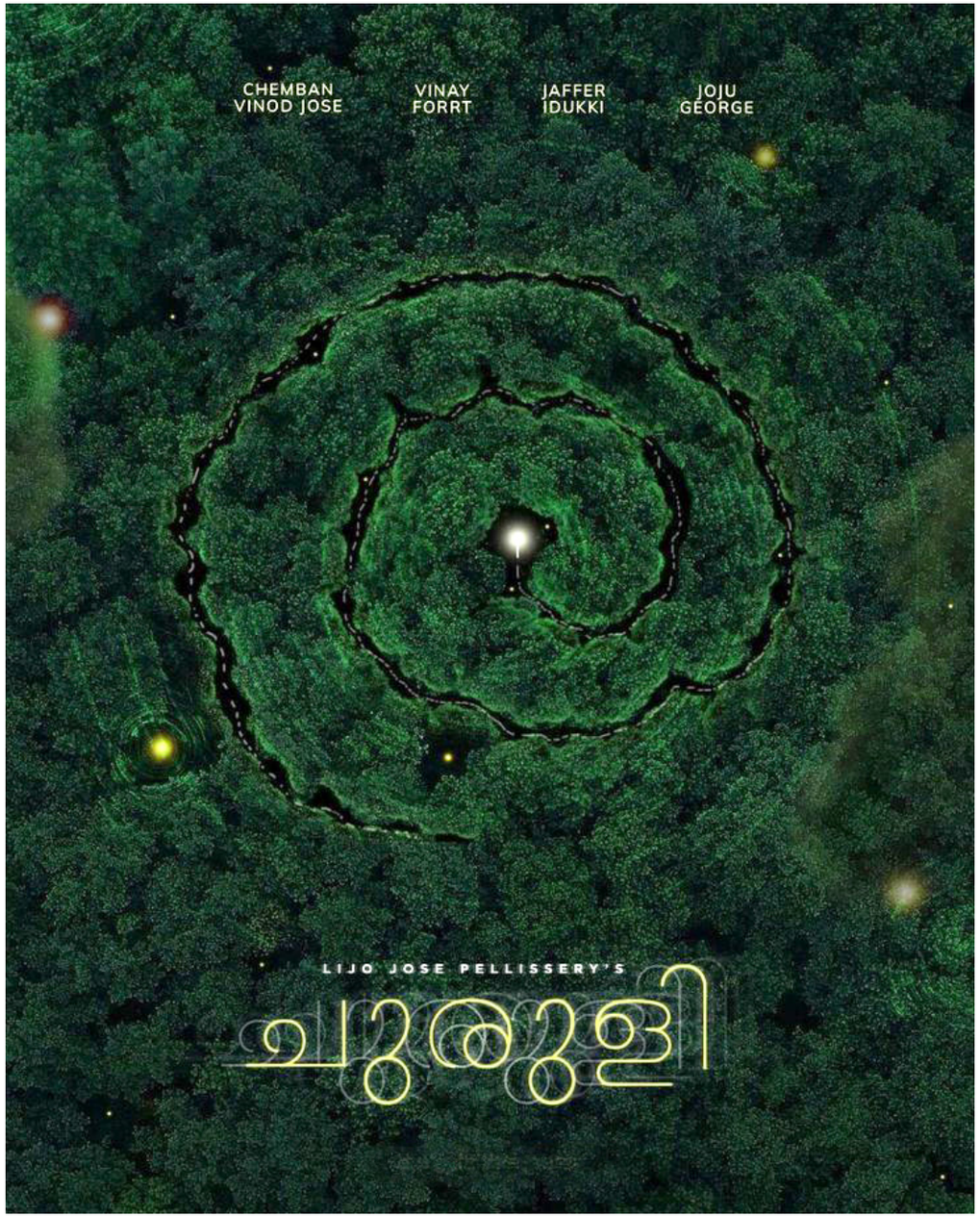
Our final visit was the Independence/Reunification Palace, formerly the seat of the South Vietnamese government. One mythicised moment captured in an image on the 30th of April 1975 was taken of a T-54B tank of the Viet Cong parked at the front entrance of the palace, marking the fall of the Western-aligned Republic of Vietnam.

One feels an unnecessariness to the whole conflict, one in which Vietnamese were pitted against Vietnamese for the power of an urban vs rural regime, Françindo vs insurgent, and Western vs Sino-Soviet, in a conflict which over the decades grew in escalations, scale and human death, egged on by larger powers with their own stake in the conflict's outcome.

This trip was a deeply moving journey. To walk from the serene temples of ancient dynasties into the claustrophobic silence of the Củ Chi tunnels forced me to confront both sides of human nature, the devotion that builds temples and the devastation that digs tunnels of war. Walking from one to the other was a heavy, humbling experience.

This journey only further reinforced the narrative that each country holds its own testimony, a tapestry woven from pride, pain, and perspective. Above all, I left with a deep affection for Vietnam, not for a postcard image, but for its resilient people, who have built a vibrant present upon a complex past.

A VILLAGE WITHOUT WALLS. A PRISON WITHOUT GUARDS



NIKHIL BANERJEE

Churuli (2021) is not a mystery to be solved. Anyone approaching it that way has already missed the point. Lijo Jose Pellissery's film is a study of how power operates when it no longer needs to announce itself. The story presented is less an investigation and more a detailed examination of how luring occurs.

Two undercover policemen enter a remote village to find a missing criminal. That is the last moment the film behaves like a conventional story. Soon, causality loosens, logic bends, and the village reveals itself not as a place but as a system—one that absorbs, observes, and neutralises outsiders without visible force.

There is no central authority in *Churuli*. No tower. No dictator. No law visibly enforced. Yet the control is absolute. Everyone knows everything. Everyone watches everyone. Speech is weaponised, memory is unstable, and truth is constantly rewritten. The villagers do not threaten; they normalise. And normalisation, as Foucault reminds us, is the most efficient form of discipline.

What *Churuli* ultimately confronts is uncomfortable: civilisation survives only as long as surveillance remains invisible. The moment you notice the system watching you, you are already inside it.

What makes *Churuli* unsettling is that surveillance here is not technological or bureaucratic. It is social and mythic. Power circulates horizontally. The gaze does not come from above; it comes from everywhere. This is panopticon without architecture—Bentham's prison dissolved into culture, folklore, and routine. The outsiders begin to regulate themselves long before punishment appears. Their language changes. Their moral certainty erodes. Their sense of time collapses. This is the true horror of the film: not violence, but internalised control. By the time physical danger emerges, it feels almost redundant. The village has already won.

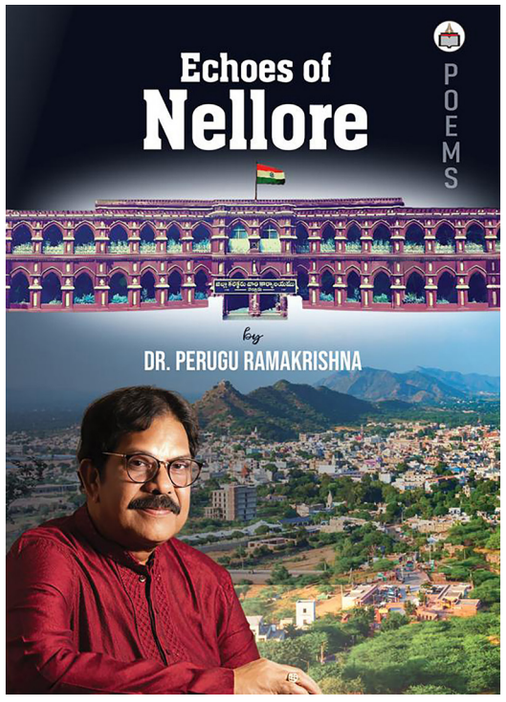
Lijo's direction refuses comfort. Scenes loop, characters contradict themselves, and reality feels unreliable—not as a puzzle, but as a condition. The repeated use of vulgarity is not provocation for its own sake; it is a strategy of gradual depletion. Language here is stripped of civility, revealing the fragility of social order.

Cinematographically, the film resists clarity. Frames feel crowded, overheard, invasive. The camera rarely feels neutral. It spies, lingers, and intrudes—mirroring the village's own logic. Sound design amplifies disorientation, with conversations bleeding into each other, refusing narrative hierarchy.

What *Churuli* ultimately confronts is uncomfortable: civilisation survives only as long as surveillance remains invisible. The moment you notice the system watching you, you are already inside it. There is no escape because escape requires an outside—and *Churuli* has none. This is why *Churuli* divides audiences. It denies catharsis. It denies resolution. It denies the illusion that power can be confronted head-on. Instead, it suggests something far more disturbing: power does not need to be fought if it has already been absorbed.

Churuli is not an easy film, nor does it try to be. It is a cinematic experiment that uses folklore, vulgarity, and narrative collapse to expose a truth most films avoid—that the most effective prisons are the ones that feel like home.

When a City Becomes a Voice



L N KOLLI

Published in 2025 by Authorspress, *Echoes of Nellore* is a resonant collection of verse poems that transforms a lived city into a breathing text. Dr Perugu Ramakrishna approaches Nellore not as a static geography but as a continuum of memory, faith, learning, labour, and aspiration. Each poem functions as an echo chamber where the place speaks through lived experience—quiet streets, sacred thresholds, classrooms, institutions, and the steady pulse of change.

The collection undertakes a comprehensive poetic mapping of Nellore—its history, geography, folklore, and institutions—without slipping into mere cataloguing. Instead, the poems offer a felt realism, where observation is tempered by affection and reflection. The foreword's assertion that the work explores the "variegated cultures, customs, and traditions" of the town is borne out across the book, as the poet moves seamlessly between the intimate and the emblematic.

In *Ode to Nellore*, the poet crafts a panoramic tribute that binds inheritance and hope. The city emerges as a meeting ground where memory and momentum coexist—

"In every breeze and quiet street, / Tradition and tomorrow meet."

Here, Nellore is both archive and horizon, a place continuously becoming itself.

"At the Feet of Ranganatha" dwells in the spiritual cadence of the Ranganatha temple. The poem resists monumental excess; instead, it frames devotion as humility and continuity. The gopuram's ascent is described not as architectural pride but as a gesture of prayer—an image that anchors faith in quiet endurance rather than spectacle.

***Echoes of Nellore* stands as a sustained poetic tribute to a city seen from within. It bridges historical consciousness with forward-looking vision, offering a literature of belonging that neither idealises nor diminishes its subject.**

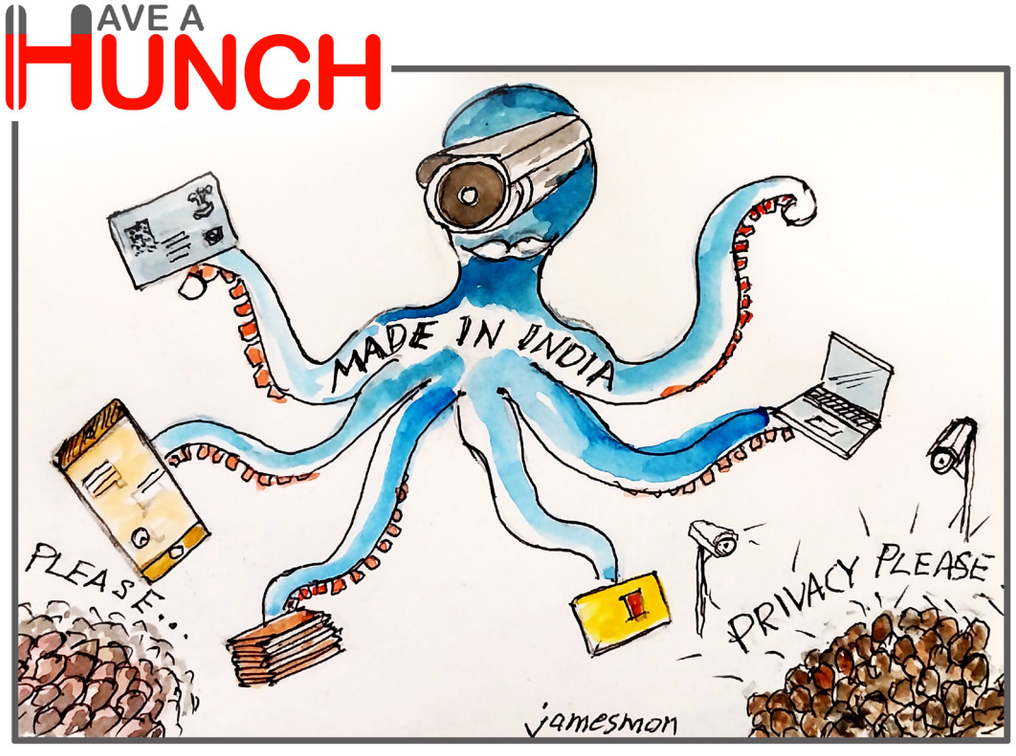
A significant strand of the collection honours educational spaces as sites of social and personal awakening. In *A Diamond in Nellore's Heart*, Dodla Kousalyamma Government College for Women is envisioned as an alchemical space where "chalk and courage" are transmuted into "wings." The poem celebrates education not merely as instruction, but as emancipation.

Likewise, "Nellore–Vikrama Simhapuri University" frames the university as both promise and movement—a collective act of daring for those who choose to imagine beyond inherited limits. *Luminory Nellore, VR Echoes* reflects on Venkatagiri Rajas College, locating its legacy not in "stone and syllabus" but in spirit. The poem affirms institutions as living continuities shaped by generations of thought, discipline, and aspiration.

The poem *The Siren That Shaped My Soul* introduces the soundscape of progress. Industrialisation enters the book not as rupture, but as a slow, shaping presence—its siren marking time, labour, and the evolving identity of the town. The poet's gaze remains balanced, attentive to growth without surrendering the human scale.

Dr Ramakrishna's verse is aesthetically measured and emotionally lucid. The diction is restrained yet evocative, allowing images to carry weight without rhetorical excess. There is a deliberate clarity in the lines, a confidence that meaning can arise from simplicity when observation is sincere. The poems feel scrutinised rather than embellished, revealing what the poet calls the hidden "treasure troves" embedded in everyday urban life.

Echoes of Nellore stands as a sustained poetic tribute to a city seen from within. It bridges historical consciousness with forward-looking vision, offering a literature of belonging that neither idealises nor diminishes its subject. Through remarkable candour and steady affection, Dr Perugu Ramakrishna allows Nellore to speak in many registers—sacred, scholastic, civic, and personal. The result is a collection that listens as much as it declares, leaving the reader with lingering echoes of a place rendered humane, thoughtful, and enduring.



Lessons from a Birthday Party

YOGINDER SIKAND

Recently, I attended the birthday party of the daughter of a friend of mine who is also a neighbour. It was the child's first birthday, and the party was held at a fancy café in town.

When I arrived at the venue, a sizable number of invitees were already present, mostly adults (presumably, friends, colleagues or relatives of my friend and his spouse). The place had been specially done up for the occasion. There were games to be played (organised perhaps by the café folks themselves) and other such 'fun' stuff. Uniformed staff wound their way around bearing soft drinks and short eats, a prelude to the dinner that was to follow. I chatted a bit with some of the guests, had some snacks and then a while later, left.

From this brief description, you can gauge that the party was a rather elaborate and expensive event. I may not be incorrect if I estimate that the amount spent for the occasion—the birthday party of a one-year old girl—might have considerably exceeded 50,000 rupees (the equivalent of two months' or more earnings for vast numbers of people!). This one fact raises numerous issues worth reflecting on:

Since the child whose birthday was being commemorated was likely just too young to understand what was going on, did having such a lavish party for her make any sense at all from her point of view?

What values was this infant being (perhaps inadvertently) socialised into regarding as normal and normative through this costly party held to celebrate her first birthday? What expectations and, also, what sort of lifestyle, was she being subtly (and perhaps unconsciously) groomed into accepting as normative by her parents even at such a young age?

While some people might want to commemorate occasions they consider special, like their child's birthday, and have what they regard as a good time, surely this can be done on a far lower budget than what hosting it at a fancy café would entail. Fun doesn't need to be expensive, as it certainly seemed to have been in the case of this birthday party that I attended.

In earlier times, in many cultures, relatively few families celebrated the birthdays of their children with a party, and those that did almost always held the party in their own home. How might the now increasingly common practice of hosting a child's birthday party at a fancy restaurant legitimise consumerism, the capitalist profit-seeking logic, economic inequalities and social hierarchies? What might this practice also mean for the home itself as a space and the way a child relates to it?

Can one think of other, more truly meaningful ways of commemorating what some might regard as special occasions like a birthday—for instance, by hosting a get-together at a home for the elderly, or an orphanage or an animal rescue centre? Imagine the precious learning experiences in terms of exposure and awareness of, and sensitivity towards, those less privileged that a child (and others present on the occasion) might gain if their birthday party were held in such a space as compared to what they likely would if it were held in an upscale restaurant!

If I could have shared the reflections with my friend that my brief participation in the party he had hosted for his child's first birthday engendered, I might have done so, but of course I couldn't—he could have taken it amiss. Perhaps the best I can do, then, is to highlight them in and through this little write-up, so that even if my friend doesn't get to read it, some others might!

Printed and published by Basil Lobo on behalf of Franciscan Publications and **printed at** Matha Printers & Publishers, 2nd Main Road, 8/7, 5th Cross Rd, Chikkadugodi, Brindavan Nagar, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560029 and **published at** Franciscan Publications, 85, Hosur Road, Bengaluru 560095, Karnataka. **Editor:** Saji P Mathew OFM

Together English Monthly Magazine
Licensed to Post Without Prepayment | **License No:** PMG/BG/WPP-217/2025–2027
Registration No: RNP/KA/BGS/2082/2025–2027 | **RNI No:** KARENG/2006/19274
Published and posted on the 30th of every month at BENGALURU/PSO/BENGALURU-560026. No. of pages 44

ಇಂಡಿಯನ್ ಇನ್ಸ್ಟಿಟ್ಯೂಟ್ ಆಫ್ ಸೈಕಾಲಜಿ ಅಂಡ್ ರಿಸರ್ಚ್ (ಐಐಪಿಆರ್)

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOLOGY AND RESEARCH (IIPR)

Affiliated to Bengaluru City University & Approved by Government of Karnataka
A unit of Sarvodaya Seva Sangha ®

NAAC Accredited With 'B+' (1st Cycle)

ADMISSIONS OPEN 2025-2026

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

B.A. Degree (Triple Major)

1. Psychology, Journalism, Women Studies (PJW)
2. Psychology, Journalism, Optional English (PJO)
3. Psychology, Marketing, Economics (PME)
4. Psychology, Journalism, Marketing (PJM)

B.Sc. Degree (Triple Major)

1. Psychology, Economics, Computer Science (PEC)
2. Psychology, Journalism, Computer Science (PJC)

POST GRADUATE COURSES

M.Sc. Degree

1. M.Sc. Psychology
2. M.Sc. Counselling Psychology

MSW Degree

1. Master of Social Work

Post Graduate Diploma

1. Post Graduate Diploma in Psychological Counselling (PGDPC)

SHORT TERM CERTIFICATE COURSES

1. Basic Counselling Skills
2. Art Therapy
3. Learning Disability
4. Personal Excellence Program
5. Applied Behavioural Analysis

St. Anthony's Friary,
#85, Hosur Road
(Near Madiwala Check Post)
Bangalore- 560095

: office.admissions@iipr.in
: 080 41217484 / 41307111
: +91 7022619130
: www.iipr.in

Scan QR Code to Visit:

Apply