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together

a national family magazine



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

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

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

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

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Independence: A World Without Narrow Domestic Walls

People get branded as anti-national, not always because they do anything wide off the mark against the country, but their position as a Dalit, Muslim, Christian, or Kashmiri attracts it; and the list could go on to LGBTQ+ activists, rationalists, environmentalists, journalists, etc.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav: we are celebrating our 75 years of Independence at a time when Russia-Ukraine war of global consequences is in its sixth month, China is gathering arms and other war facilities around Taiwan, millions around the globe are refugees and migrants in lands which they can't call their own. In times like these, the possibility of living in a sovereign, self-governed, self-reliant country is a luxury. We owe our gratitude to the great selfless souls who fought our wars of independence; we owe respect to people who lead this country with vision, bravery, and passion. Different governments, present and past, have done a lot of good in our country; at the same time no government has been flawless.

We Are a Young Country

As a country we are looking forward than looking backward; which is a simple enough reason to say that we are still young. The phases of one's age is

perceived by how many more years to go, or how much more to learn, realize, and grow. According to various studies, India has a high growth potential compared to many other developing nations.

On the economic and sustainable developmental front, McKinsey & Company have identified areas in which India has great opportunities to achieve; and move up from poverty to empowerment that would ensure acceptable living standards for all. Have Sustainable urbanisation to take advantage of Indian cities. By 2025 India will have 69 cities with a population of more than one million each. There is of course an economic growth possibility; but how sustainably are we approaching it? India must manufacture quality goods for India to tap into large and growing local market. India must harness technology to take advantage of the digital wave. Last but not the least, India must radically unlock the potential of Indian women. Women now contribute only 17% of India's GDP and make up just 24% of the work-

force, compared with 40% globally. Movements toward closing the gender gap in education and in financial and digital inclusion need further progress.

Inclusivity: The Greatest Indian Challenge

In 1946 Jawaharlal Nehru said that India is four hundred million separate individual men and women, each differing from the other, each living in a private universe of thought and feeling. Today we have 1.26 billion separate individual. Numbers have grown, and with it fragmentations too. The Indian reality is one of a kind in the world with so many myriads of languages, cultures, and religions. Majoritarian political parties are pushing for a single dimensional nationalism. The result being that many sensing a strong lack of belonging; and in real life the minorities experience exclusion.

Religious Nationalism

In the past in India and elsewhere in the world, nationalism has brought people together. Nationalism has helped in winning wars, and perhaps have helped in fighting for one's freedom and liberties. But today, by its very identity, India cannot experiment with a single dimensional nationalism, however romantic and empowering it may sound to the majority. Experimenting with religious or linguistic nationalism will be detrimental to the very idea of India. Many great souls, understanding India, had grasped it well in advance.

Rabindranath Tagore in 1917 itself had cautioned India that nationalism is a menace. He had identified it to be the single cause that motivates all the problems of India. Tagore shuns nationalism saying, my refuge is not nationalism; my refuge is humanity. I will not allow patriotism to triumph over humanity. At this juncture of our country it is strengthening to remember the prayer of Tagore in Geethanjali, 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high, where knowledge is free; where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow do-

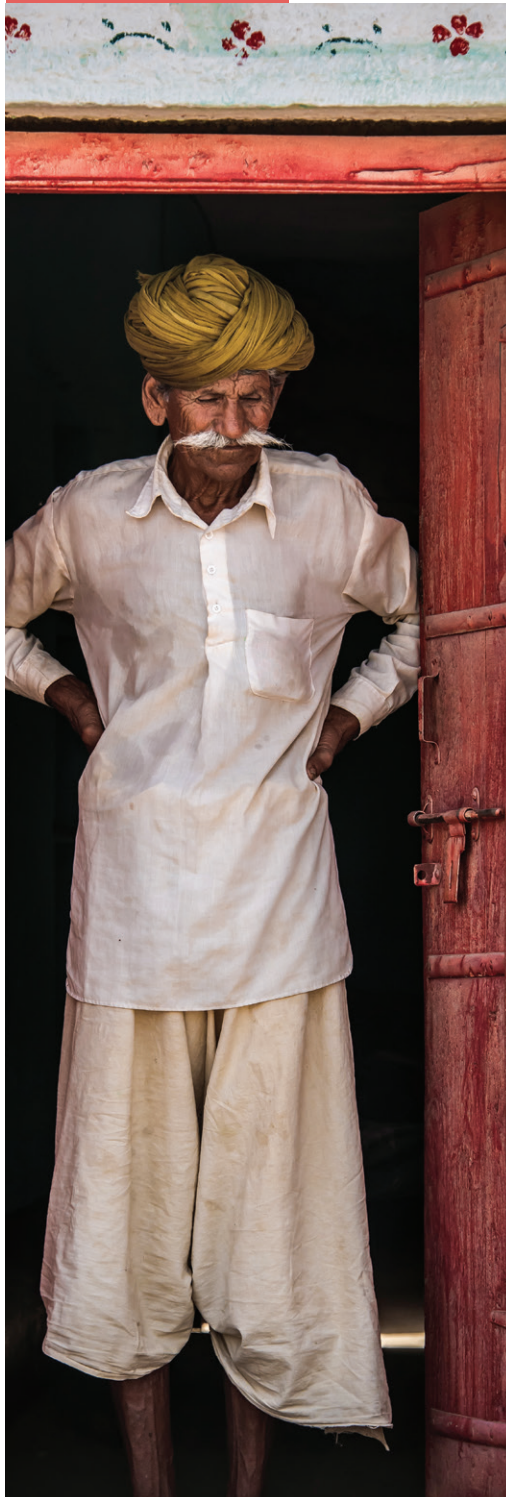
mestic walls. . . Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake. The prayer is not that my country must conquer the entire world. Not that the world must get filled with my country, but he prays for a space, a world, to where our country and every country also must raise up to. Scientists like Albert Einstein to actors like Charlie Chaplin have spoken vehemently against single dimensional nationalism.

Benedict Anderson speaking about nationalism says that it is the imagination of a people that they belong, that they are together. Anderson used the phrase, 'imagined communities' to communicate nationalism. By itself it is okay; but if a majoritarian religion or group uses it for petty gains, then nationalism gives rise to sponsored violence. And, at an extreme end, unchecked nationalism can become a breeding ground for fascism. People get branded as anti-national, not always because they do anything wide off the mark against the country, but their position as a Dalit, Muslim, Christian, or Kashmiri attracts it; the list could go on to LGBTQ+ activists, rationalists, environmentalists, journalists, etc.

Nationalism will divide people across imagined and reinforced narratives and borders and the union build up through centuries will be questioned and put at risk. Nationalism is the most gripping, most potent idea in modern history. An idea becomes a material force when it grips the masses, said Karl Marx. Nationalism is such an idea, an imagination, which has potential stronger than armies and weapons. For freedom, for liberties, nationalism cannot be the end aim of a country. Bernard Shaw says, patriotism, an accepted variant of nationalism, is your conviction that this country is superior to all others because you were born in it.

In contemporary times Indian nationalism has taken on interesting twists and turns; giving emergence to neo-nationalism. It is the idea of a nation where you emotionally belong to, you belong there with your beliefs but you are least bothered whether all in the country belong there. ■





An Independent Nation

Woe to those who think 'independently' and honorably for and with their country men and women – they might find themselves shockingly under house arrest or behind the prison bars overnight.

GERRY LOBO OFM

Seventy-five years ago the Father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi, wrought for millions the long awaited Independence from the British Raj by way of 'peaceful sathyagraha', a non-violent movement history has ever recorded in its annals. Ironically, also shamefully, what the seventy five year old national freedom is offering to its citizens is nothing but the gift of a bulldozer: bulldozing hate and hate bulldozer by spreading bigotry, rioting and literally grounding houses, shops and perhaps innocent people even, whose names and their 'person' are being buried under the rubble. Not only the structures are being bulldozed triumphantly and hatefully, even the spirit of common humanity has been bulldozed by hate speeches leading to senseless

anger and violence. At the seventy-five years of freedom, the warmongers have only created a corridor of hatred in India while the world is looking on with amazement at a nation of great integrity and enormous multifaceted culture. This seems to be the outstanding gift the ruling dispensation of the majoritarian mite placing on the open palms and awaiting spirits of a mature, dignified and expansive-hearted Indians!

When the country is in utter disarray because of a muscular nationalism being exercised by politicians of profit and legislators of venom, when spread of hate for votes and communal flare up is creating anguish, when volcano lava is being fumed through disrespectful and hurting statements by prominent personalities of high ranking positions, when lion-mouthed leaders mouth the fiery slogans to infuse hate, intolerance and division, when even persons supposed to be neutral in their political stand utter partisan slogans and perpetuate an ill-becoming environment, when coloured by the ruling party's ideological agenda governments are communalizing school curriculum and thus igniting emotions across the country through the innocent minds of children and illiterate adults, when an authoritarian streak of the government is pervading the human space of a free nation, when the truth is replaced by a string of convincing lies at the economic and political forums, can Seventy fifth Independence Year of our nation rise up to the Preamble of the Constitution in all honesty assuring every individual equality, liberty and fraternity that it professes?

Seventy-five years of an 'independent' nation! Woe to those who think 'independently' and honorably for and with their country men and women—they might find themselves shockingly under house arrest or behind the prison

bars overnight! Free and open thinking for a friendly environment in the country might be quickly brandished as terrorism and FIR lodged against their activities! Independent India, but a dependent Judiciary, a dependent Election Commission and a dependent Enforcement Directorate—these independent departments being so dependent on a government which alone has the imperial supremacy over all! (However, it must be noted that with the incumbent, the honourable chief justice of India, whose term of office is going to be ended in another few weeks sadly enough, the effort of the judiciary at the apex level in particular, has been to work independently of any powers outside of it, in order to protect the demands of the Constitution.) Journalists have been targeted and communication channels have been served notices about their independent mind and voices in this independent nation. On the other hand, free speech with as many scandalous and hurting statements as possible against other religions has been permitted per se, and no Prime Minister or the Home Minister has intervened to curb such an inimical attack by any independent tongue. Perhaps, it all goes well with the majoritarian strength.

Where is the Independence of 1947? The outstanding names of freedom fighters such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaralal Nehru, in particular, have been almost erased not only from the school textbooks but also from the minds of ordinary citizens, replacing such stalwarts with Nathuram Godse. What sense does it make when the Prime Minister and all those states ruled by communal parties have ordered hoisting of the Indian flag on each and every house as a mark of celebrating seventy five years of Independence? Is this the sort of Independence that men and women are longing for at the present



To the great dismay of millions living in the seventy-fifth year of Independence of *Bharat Matha* it has been an experience of living in a world of escalating religious extremism, of furtherance of hate, and of destabilizing of legitimately elected governments.

juncture of history of this nation? Eight years of democracy-murdered autocratic rule by the government with the Hindutva platform has perturbed the independent nation with legislations that hit hard the common citizen down the lane. By letting the unbridled spiraling prices of daily commodities the managers of our economic affairs have led the commoners to fend for themselves through darkest days, eliminating their independent manner of developing themselves and their families toward a healthy and integrative human life. The Independence seems to be appropriated by those at the helm of affairs, whose benevolence the dependent citizen must wait for, if he or she intends to live in her or his Motherland. How ridiculous is this arrogation!

Due to the inclusion of Hindutva, particularly into the political system of our Independent nation in the recent past, it has paved the way towards violence, disharmony, unrest, discomfort and fear among people. The Hindutva miscreants have legitimacy from the ruling government. Hence taking absolute liberty at blatant hate speeches and inflicting pain upon people's religious faith and practices has become the normal. These miscreants lean heavily on the political party that promotes bigotry and division. Condemning, labeling and propagating falsehood in public forums has become a licensed form of hate arousing passions. Not only the great Prophet Mohammad has been mocked upon by unbecoming statements blurted out by learned and informed leaders, but also certain sectarian leaders at public meetings in certain places of our country in the recent past have denounced Islam as terrorism and not to be considered as a sacred monotheistic religion. This is how the Independence of our nation

has been de-sacralised, vandalised and erased by the so called 'nationalist patriots.' How well does this arrogant attitude correspond to truth, justice and integration found in the flag of this nation? Hoisting the flag on the Independence Day is certainly a sanctimonious rite which the citizens perform dutifully to express their love and commitment to the nation they belong to. However, deliberate forgetful memory of the first Independence Day by a hate-ridden bulldozing mind is a scandal, a sham and utter dishonor to the magnificent Independence.

To the great dismay of millions living in the seventy-fifth year of Independence of *Bharat Matha* it has been an experience of living in a world of escalating religious extremism, of furtherance of hate, and of destabilizing of legitimately elected governments by the power hungry cronies who do not want their voters to live and enjoy the gift of Independence. The independent civilisation in our independent nation has not yet seen the light of day in spite of education, technology, resources and a scientific mind. The Independence does not correspond to slavery, fear, uncertainty in the every-day journey of life. Any day the bulldozer may be around the corner awaiting you and me. Rule of anarchy and unrest pervading the nation has badly hurt its Independence. Moreover, the latest *Agnipath* hand-out projected by the government in consonance with the Defense department with sweet promises has crushed the dreams of a million youth. The Farmers' agitation, unheeded and unresolved fully by the government has, again, shown the ugly side of Independence instead of a prosperous and hope-ridden dimension of Independence for which valiant leaders struggled with non-violent postures. ■

The Neo-colonial Circus

A few have managed to hold on to the hegemonic attitudes of the coloniser with which they can always remain at the top and effect home-grown colonisation.

JAMESMON PC OFM

India is celebrating its 75th year of Independence and, as usual, we have a tagline for the big day: *Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav*. With the present dispensation at the centre and what the country has become in terms of its constitutional ethos and promise, we might ask, 'What is there to celebrate?!' But that is the way to fool people, with mismanagement and disastrous decision-making, as we did with *thali* and *diyas* when COVID-19 'disappeared'.

The focus of this article is not the downward spiral we have got into in terms of politics, economics, poverty, secularism, and social structures. The Indian rupee has fallen to an all-time low compared to the American Dollar, and we have overtaken even Nigeria on the poverty index. But *acche din* has arrived for some, especially a few corporate giants. Hegemony never produces good governance, social structures, or food for all!

Colonial Sediments?

Are we suffering from a post-colonial hangover? Have we internalised the attitudes of both the coloniser and the colonised? It looks like we have. We are colonised by our own people. A few Indians who aspired to become like the colonisers have achieved infamous clout. It has become the SOP for the top man of the Indian government to divide and rule. The Indian corporate giants do the same. And the rest of the bureaucracy plays along helplessly.

So, a few have managed to hold on to the hegemonic attitudes of the coloniser with which

they can always remain at the top and effect home-grown colonisation. Indian corporate giants have reached into other spaces and reached out to other people, sinking their greedy claws into other countries' resources. The coal mines in Australia are a case in point. Shouldn't we congratulate such greedy individuals and give our bureaucracy a pat on the back?

We have picked up bad lessons from the colonial times and have unwittingly remained colonised. We long for the proverbial fleshpots of the Egyptian land. We look down on ourselves, considering our civilisation and culture inferior to those of the colonial powers. This cultural cringe is exactly what the colonisers wanted. They painstakingly created a narrative that suited their nefarious plans.

Gayatri Spivak, a Bengali cultural and literary critic, put forward the idea of the 'subaltern', a term meaning 'of inferior rank'. One of the important agenda items of the colonial discourse was to ensure that in the world, there are people of inferior nature to be subjugated, controlled and civilised. According to subaltern theory, people of certain races, ethnicities, sexes, religions, or any other marginalised categories of identity are incapable of managing their affairs or making decisions and, most importantly, have no history worth mentioning. Gandhi most likely reacted to this opinion of the colonisers when he said it is better not to have a history revolving around men, their exploits, abuse of power, and genealogy. Gayatri Spivak, in her famous essay,



Can the Subaltern Speak?, makes an interesting observation about the British abolition of *sati* in India. She believes it is generally understood as a case of ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’.

Knowledge Is Never Innocent

The creation of knowledge and its dispersal are never innocent, as some thinkers believe—just like the writing of history. When knowledge is created to be used in certain contexts and spaces, it is created with a specific objective, and one of them is to exert control over certain subjects. The colonisers often established libraries that exclusively dealt with the colonised, where research papers were produced about how to control, handle, and manipulate these subjects to their (colonisers’) advantage. They considered this a perfectly normal activity.

Edward W. Said, a literary critic, in his ground-breaking study called *Orientalism* (1978), says the coloniser takes it for granted that ‘Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it, by making statements, settling it, ruling over it: in short, *Orientalism* is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.’ Here, the

colonised have no identity of their own; they are just a mass of faceless people waiting to be explored, controlled, and exploited.

Today, corporate-controlled mass media in India continues to moderate the discourse, setting the narrative that serves our very own neo-colonisers. No wonder most Indian news channels are owned and controlled by corporate giants with an agenda to keep the faceless mass of people under their sway. The majority of the Indian middle and upper classes have become slaves to these corporate-controlled discourses. We have decided to remain colonised under our own people, forfeiting the power to decide what kind of governance we need and what direction the country should take. Our news channels are fake-news factories churning out fictional narratives to the masses. Even our voting patterns enable colonisation.

Contempt of Our Own

When you hear names like ‘Bollywood’, ‘Tollywood’, or ‘Kollywood’, how do you feel? Do you think it’s cool or pathetic? Why are the names of Indian film industries a spin on the American Hollywood? What makes us believe that Hollywood is the gold standard? This is just one little example of our colonised behaviour.

There are myriad ways we express this colonised attitude in our conduct. We believe the standard clothing for any official appearance is a dress suit. In a sweltering country like India, we are willing to get sweat-soaked wearing the attire of the colonisers, believing our clothing is inferior. It is the result of the colonial discourse they established here. We run air conditioners in our offices 24×7 to mimic European climates to suit our (colonial) clothing. We have deviated from the ethos of the *Swadeshi* movement that strived to dispel colonial forces. Gandhi’s hand-spun *khadi* and *charkha* were symbols of self-esteem and positive self-sufficiency and an antidote to the inferiority complex of the colonised. Inculturation is harmless so long as it does not originate from an inferiority complex.

Neo-colonial Times

We live in neo-colonial times. The British, French, and Portuguese still control the markets and economies of their former colonies. Though times have changed, we still see colonisation occurring in subtle new ways. What is happening in Sri Lanka is a classic case of neo-colonialism. The Portuguese, the French, the Dutch, and the British colonised Sri Lanka in the past. But now, we see Sri Lanka in the claws of the Chinese, who invest-

ed in the country through what is known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR). China has been notorious for its two-faced involvement. China has made Sri Lanka eternally indebted, and the Chinese keep occupying the most strategic and economic hubs in the island nation. Today, Sri Lanka is on the verge of civil war. Who should be blamed?

The Trap Called Development

Everyone knows that Western countries suffer from a messiah complex. The whites are always superior to the browns and the blacks. The browns and the blacks are to be civilised and saved. ‘Development’ is the term the colonisers use to trap ‘developing’ countries. But who decides what development means? Of course, the ‘developed’ ones. They reach out to ‘developing’ countries with snares disguised as assistance. The cycle will continue until both sides see themselves for what they are.

There is a need for change in global perception among countries. First-world countries cannot separate their developed status from their history of large-scale colonisation, exploitation, and looting. As long as the ‘big fish eats small fish’ attitude persists, neo-colonialism will continue. And the big fish need not come from abroad; they could also be home-grown. ■



75 Years: The Women Remained So?

KRITI KAUSHIK

Looking back a hundred years in the history of India gives us a fairly good idea as to what 'nationalism' and 'nation-building' truly signified. Over the top it seemed as if everyone was united for a cause, which was to seek Independence from the British Raj. However, critics such as Partha Chatterjee had something else to say. In his literary work titled *Nation and Its Fragments*, he points out that the emerging Nationalism was in fact a vastly masculine, upper-caste, upper-class and without any doubt a patriarchal construct. Although it looked like women were a part of things, it was not entirely so; only a few of the then educated women were able to participate in the process of Nation building to whatever little extent. Women were a highly fragmented part of society. While

nationalism and nationalistic ideologies did win the country freedom, it also allowed a 'Nationalist Elite' to be born who were again highly male dominated and who believed that by going in the same direction as their predecessors they could do the country good.

Development was laid much focus on, in terms of improvement of infrastructure, building of dams, setting up of factories and provision of employment opportunities. In this process of imitation of the West, as Franz Fanon says in *Black Skin, White Mask*, certain fragments of the Nation were left out. One of the pioneer moves of abolishing the Zamindari system however, became a ray of hope in the lives of peasants, although it was highly opposed by many at the time. Agriculture contributed majorly to the

Women of the lower economic groups still continue to struggle to make ends meet.

GDP of the Nation, while industrial and service sectors were booming at a slow pace. All sorts of changes were happening in the country; a country that was so new and at chaos.

Over the decades things have changed immensely, some for the better and some for the worse. The political realm of the Nation has seen a whirlwind of change with various parties coming to power while one dominated for most part. There have been ups and downs in terms of policies, economics, laws, and nation building on the whole. Some of the fragments have become part of the whole; with immense importance being laid on development and competing with the

West, many sections have benefited, however a group of women have remained so.

With the introduction of compulsory education for all, India's female literacy rate which has gone up by a small margin but still remains at 22 points below the world average. This lack prevents them from participating in skilled workforce, thereby limiting their scope of contribution to the economy. Studies have shown that a woman's education has a larger role to play in the lives of the future generation in comparison to that of a man. Women from higher income groups have had the opportunities to be educated thereby giving their future generations the same chance and therefore the key to a better future. But women of the lower economic groups still continue to struggle to make ends meet, let alone educate their children. Overall, India has had only three women leaders at the top with the third one having been elected recently out of a total of 29 leaders who have held office. This is a reflection of what may possibly be a deficit in the mindset of the country. ■

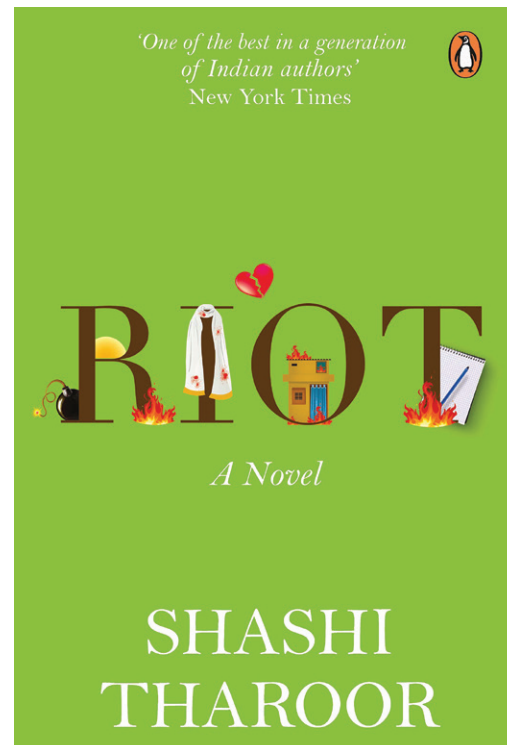
Uncovering The Religious And Cultural Complexity Of India Through Shashi Tharoor's Novel, *Riot*

This book is about love, hate, the clash of cultures, ownership of history and the impossibility of knowing the truth.

Dr SUSHEELA B

Riot: A Love Story is a departure from Tharoor's previous works—less satirical and more of an exploration of religion, cultural differences and especially human relationships. Summing it up in a single sentence, Tharoor says that the book is about love, hate, the clash of cultures, his ownership of history and the impossibility of knowing the truth. Life at various levels like the individual, social, national and international levels are continuously forged and re-forged by their engagement with multiple aspects of violence and the often conflicting and competing ideas of identity. Also, it uncovers in Indian context the subtle interplay of the forces of violence in transforming the collective and individual experience of suffering. In the novel, *Riot*, published in 2001, Shashi Tharoor, articulates his sense, articulates his response to the growing communalism of Indian Political and civic discourse, through various perspective salient to Indian political, communal, religious, civil establishments.

The plot of the novel owes its conception to two diverse incidents of violence in two different continents; an account of riot witnessed by an IAS officer on duty Harsh Mander in remote obscure place in the state of Madhya Pradesh and an episode of racial violence in South Africa, which claimed amongst its unfortunate victims, the life of an American girl working with NGO. Agglomerating the predicament of researchers in investigating the occurrence of violence in Indian context is the baffling range of subsidiary involved in the dynamics of identity formation



and the conflict potential ingrained in it. The writer eloquently brings to fore this dilemma when Lakshman, the District Magistrate of Zalilgarh, itemises it for the benefit of the American social worker Priscilla Hart 'I am an administrator not a political scientist, but I'd say there are five major sources of division in India—language, region, caste, class and religion' The spill-

ing over of historical and mythological, personal and social and political and religious spaces into each other complicates the scenario and creates undesirable friction which lends momentum to conflict and is one of the cultural blocks of violence in India. Tharoor also experiments with multiple narrative forms to wrestle with the nuances of Indian identity and in the process, lays bare the dynamics of violence: cultural, structural and direct. The present paper attempts to locate the entrenched codes of structural violence in the socio-political fibre of the constitutionally secular society, which culminates into, the central crisis of the novel. It also in process interrogates the cultural complicity towards legitimizing and sustain such acts of violence.

The small unassuming town of Uttar Pradesh, Zalligarh, is the stage on which the plot of the novel unfolds. The town is the microcosm of Indian civil-political establishment, with a district magistrate Lakshman in charge of administration and chief of police Gurinder Singh at the summit of power. Both hail from different communities, yet believe in the essentially secular constitution of India. Although at the apex of the administrative body with access to immense power, these two seem to be unfavourably pitted against the bastion of communal arsonists like the rightist Hindu leader Ram Charan Gupta and his cronies at the end and Ali the petty Muslim government and his posses at the other end of the spectrum.

A detailed study of the novel locates structures of violence encoded in usage of language and the manipulation of the cultural codes generated and communicated in it. The multiple versions of the ballads of Ghazi Miyan in rural Uttar Pradesh are no longer viewed as a benevolent example of Hindu-Muslim syncretism. In transient ambience of mutual distrust any vestige religious syncretism is viewed with suspicion and becomes a site for contention. The lopsided perspectives of both Mr Hart and

Mr Diggs isolated Indian identity and culture into a monolith and perpetrate cultural violence as they block out the complexities and interval divisions that exist in the vibrant fabric of its society. The extent to which a foreigner can misinterpret the local social customs and moral codes which clash with their perception of life is demonstrated by the destined affair Priscilla carries with Lakshman the District Magistrate who has a full-fledged family with a wife who is distant and a child whom he adores. By violating the inviolable space of traditional Indian marriage, she displays her utter disregard for the values of social commitment, accountability and responsibility. The affair reverberates with the rhythms of conflict for her and Lakshman both. It earns the indignation of the local virulent Hindu leader, and her own Assistant, Kadambari. She earns the wrath of both Hindu and Muslim communities and pays with her life in the communal clash between the two. The tale of other characters Fathima Bi and Sundari interconnects with and intersects her saga at one or the other point of time with the experience of violence as the common factor.

Tharoor propounds Priscilla Hart, the idealistic young American volunteer with NGO Organisation HELP-US involved with developing population-control awareness against the women of Zalilgarh, as the central protagonist. The novel begins with information of her death in the communal strife that engulfs Zalilgarh. Her extraordinary journey to the Indian heartland with a vision to create differences in the lives of the rural and poor Indian women she hardly understands, translates to cultural transgression and breeds aggression and hatred in the community she precisely tries to help. Kadambari the extension worker and her mother remarks: 'You see, Mrs Hart,' She observe, 'This is the real issue for women in India. Not population control, but violence against women. In our own homes, what good are all our efforts as long as

men have the power to do this to us? Your daughter never understood that.'

She tries to empower the bucktoothed little woman Fatima Bi who lives an extraordinarily deprived life in a ghetto in the Muslim quarter with her seven malnourished children and abusive husband Ali who refuses to use protection and beats her up at the slightest pretext. But her attempts to help Fatima Bi is viewed as intrusion by Ali in his personal life. He just stops short of physical violence when he shouts at Priscilla and Kadambari. Priscilla struggles to break the malevolent cycle of domestic violence perpetrated on the hapless woman. The intricacies of the composite structures of violence woven in the mores and discourse of Indian society frustrate her simplistic quest for solution. The framework of joint family structure, economic dependence and gender bias interpreted through the sanitised cultural codes of socialisation, internalisation routinisation sustains perpetuation of exploitative patriarchal, communal and religious value system. It manacles the responses of women towards any single approach taken to improve their wretched condition.

Jingoism ghettoises her identity into the bracket of a 'foreigner' the 'other' and alienates her from the society and people she works with. Categorised as a busybody foreigner, she is rendered invisible and thus vulnerable to the forces of violence. Kadambari, her assistant, is reluctant to accompany her in her sojourn to the muslim basti in response to the distress call from the eighth time pregnant Fathima Bi. The Government machinery probing the causes and causalities of riot categorise her death as just another unnecessary causality of the riot. Ultimately, she is the most unlucky and unlikely victim of the insidious codes of cultural violence.

Hierarchy and exploitation, which are fundamental to social structures, normalise violence. Violence is born and give birth to fear, anger, loss and power. Fatima Bi beleaguered wife of Ali and Sundari, sister of Kadambari and the victim of dowry violence, both belong to different communities, but are victims of identical patterns of cultural socialisation and subjugation. Ali, Fatima's husband hails from a minority community subject to suspicion and repulsion and serves

in the lowest rung of Government service. He projects his repressed need for domination on his helpless wife, and holds complete control of her life. Priscilla records this in her letter to her friend Cindy.

The story of Sundari resonates with the same pattern of exploitation, physical, physiological and psychological that is legitimised by the cultural codes of obedience, submissiveness and subjugation to the values of patriarchal society. She is burnt by her abusive husband and in-laws for not producing a male heir and not securing enough dowry. The deceptive rightists' ideologists seep into the cultural values and spreads an exclusive notion of identity to sustain the flux of cultural violence. The failure of the State to address the multiple forms of violence, and the measures taken by them to protect the socially marginalised target group/people, amount to violence. After failing to persuade the slogan raising militant mob of Hindus from passing through the Muslim quarters of the town in their journey to Ayodhya to demolish a mosque and rebuild a Hindu temple, Gurinder the S.P and Lakshman the DM decide to contain the Muslims in their ghettos to prevent the Hindus from insinuating and engaging them with violence. The delinquency of police in deterring and punishing the culprits of violence is another result of violence for the victims.

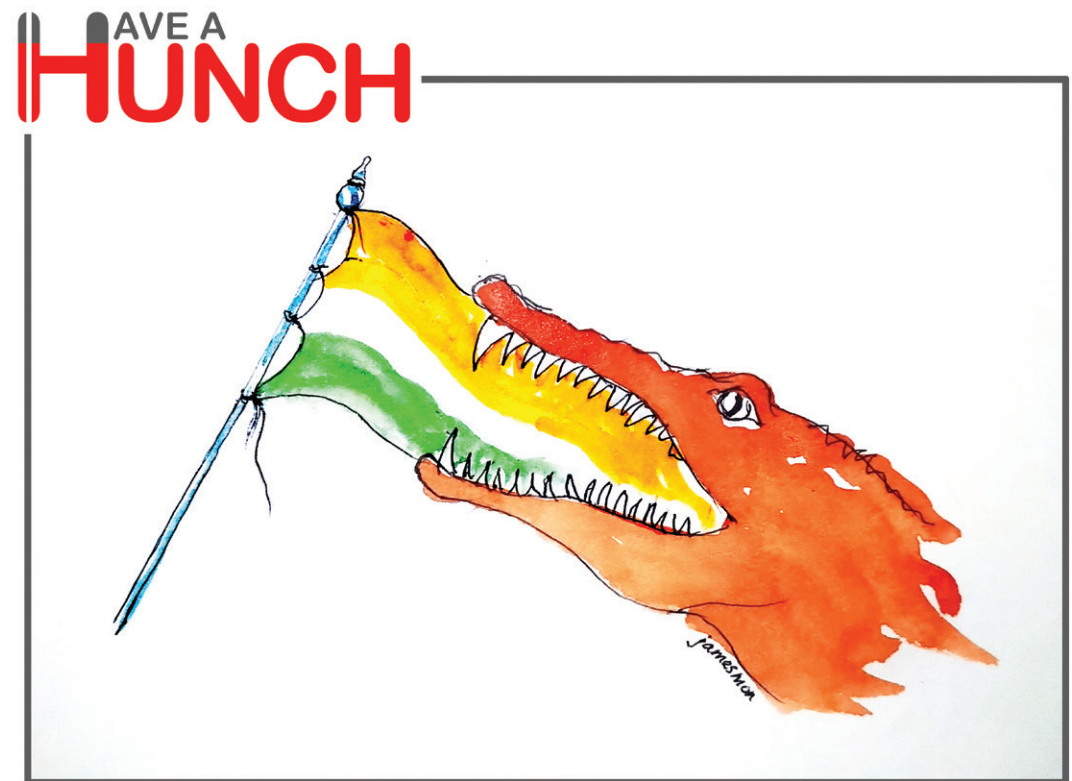
Meta-narrative of cultural/religious purity espoused by Ram Charan Gupta and other rightists leaders is a way to cope with the fractured and diffused sense of identity at the wake of traumatic independence and partition of nation. These grand narratives, however, stifle other contending mini narratives of people like Prof. Sarwar about the richness of Indian identity and erode the vibrant plurality of Indian ethos. Coercion, brutality and violence are employed as a means to this end. In an edited volume on violence Das and Kleinman discuss this phenomenon.

Tharoor's characters like Gurinder, his old father and Md. Sarwar, despite accepting their multiple roles and identities, do not wallow in confusion over their priority of allegiance amongst the identities they choose to define themselves. In the tragic Sikh massacre that followed the assassination of Mrs Gandhi by

her Sikh bodyguards, countless innocent Sikh lives lost in blind retaliation by the angry mobs. Gurinder loses his brother and young nephew to the mindless fury of bloodthirsty mob. His old father comes to his rescue. The speaker invokes Gurinder's Sikh identity only to support his arguments on the importance of the role it plays in fostering his inclusive and broader Indian identity. Md. Sarwar stresses on a similar point when he underlines his notion of identity the way he perceives it to the journalist Diggs. The detailed analysis of the novel reveals that mere passive acceptance of multiple identities and pluralities is not much potent in dismantling the invasive configuration of cultural violence. In fact the cracks along the faulty lines of mosaic identity widens at the times of conflict and stress rendering it vulnerable to the structures of violence. The most inclusive identity at the top and others following the same order create scope for tolerance and space for acceptance of differ-

ence without involving the self in violence. For a stable and safe society, the people who cohabit in it should be in harmony with their multiple perceptions and complex roles within, to appreciate and tolerate truly the same outside.

The novel however is not a dry summary of statistics or impersonal data: on the contrary, it takes the episode from an intimate angle, focusing on a personal relationship that becomes entangled in a larger political imbroglio. At the same time, it experiments with various forms of narration: the narrative presents an assortment of fragments, bits and pieces of information, transcripts of interviews, newspaper reports and other factual data: these pieces ultimately form a collage, all the fragments presenting different aspects of the central event—death of a woman called Priscilla Hart. How did she die and what were the circumstances? The story is shown through the pieces in the collage like canvas, the mode of narration being as unusual as the tale itself. ■



At 75 the Question Still Remains: Are We Independent?

ROSELINE FLORENCE GOMES

We claim to be autonomous with all dimensions of freedom in varied spaces: be it community, educational systems, political institutions, cultural groups, and others. The question that comes up is, 'Are we independent'?

India has a multiparty liberal government that lead to the rise of rules that discriminate people. It has new policies of development which exploits minorities whose voices are unheard of. Marginalisation remains a constant phenomenon. In the independent India I am confronted with new policies leading to the removal of posts about negative feedback for governmental institutions that failed to deliver during the pandemic; elsewhere laws stopped inter-caste marriages, calling it a step towards conversion. An 84-year advocate for Adivasi rights lost his life inside the prison walls with charges of terrorism. Farmers protests were forcefully done with; and many still lack education due to lack of insufficient income. I perceive my country as my comrade who is residing within the tattered walls of a university struggling to receive a stipend due to his Dalit origin and working extra time to just survive.

The pattern of lowered mental health is a way of life in families. The new National Education Policy 2020 highlights the value of nurturing the early childhood period. Foundational literacy has been highlighted as a predictor of learning. It emphasized the need to curb the dropout of students and guide every learner towards accessibility. Teaching and learning should be holistic,

cooperative, blended, and most importantly, enjoyable for all learners. Social inclusion needs to be imbibed among all irrespective of any ethnicity by regularisation of local resources.

As a stakeholder of the higher education system, the practice of human and social well-being in developing social consciousness, humanity, equality, and justice for all learners has been the objective of this policy. India is striving towards becoming a knowledgeable system where more students should aspire for higher education. The question is why then more of our youth population are still unemployed? Why educational facilities are given to few and for some it's luxury? Why learning is more textual even now than skill-based? In this 21st century era, India claims to create cognitively oriented youth who are holistic beings with values of deep knowledge, service, and creativity. There is an urgency to develop personal capacities so that the young can engage themselves and emerge as important contributors to society. India is standing at the pedestal looking tall and majestic but has its institutions able to reflect on both its strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the essence of integration needs to be blended with multiculturalism and innovation. Our faculties should unlearn the conventional methods and adopt the ways that our children and youth have adapted during the pandemic. Urban institutions, both staff and students, need to adopt rural institutions and instill the principles of mentoring that would teach social accountability to all. ■

Social Media: It's Not Just for Kids Anymore!

Social Media is often on the receiving end of negative attention, but it is also a potentially valuable tool that can help men and women over 50 stay connected with their communities.

Dr MARIANNE FURTADO DE NAZARETH

Perhaps due to the popularity of social media among a generation of young people, who grew up with it. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are associated with people born in the 21st century. However a 2018 study from the PEW Institute found that 65% of adults between the ages of 50 and 64 use Facebook and 68% use YouTube.

Social Media is often on the receiving end of negative attention, but it is also a potentially valuable tool that can help men and women over 50 stay connected with their communities. That's not always easy for adults who no longer have children at home. And its name suggests, social media can help users connect with others who share their interests. Such connections are potentially hard for adults who are over 50.

Adults over 50 may be more comfortable with social media now than they were a decade ago. But it's important for both men and women to brush up on basic safety measures to protect their privacy as they use these platforms like Face Book, Instagram and Twitter.

No Social Media user has the right to access your personal information which includes your address, date of birth or other details unique to you. Avoid interacting with anyone who requests personal information. There is a facility to block the person from connecting with you. It is also important to keep information about travel

plans private. For example, sharing information about an upcoming vacation can be noticed by potential criminals that your house will be vacant, making it a susceptible target for burglars.

One should aim for quality of friends rather than quantity when building social media networks. Avoid accepting friend requests from all you don't know. Cyber criminals gain access to victims via social media, so limit your network only to those you know and trust.

One should turn off location information. The technology behind social media is impressive and even makes it possible to determine where users are when they Tweet or post to other platforms. But many users concerned about their privacy don't want to share location information with anyone, much less strangers. Turn off location information and check frequently that it remains off.

Always discuss others privacy concerns before posting to social media. Social media is not for everyone and so check before posting pictures and text with your friends. Prior to posting anything, it's important to be sure if your family if are ok with your posting pictures and information about them and their kids too.

Social Media is gaining popularity with all age groups, especially with the older age group of users, however it's still best to keep various social media safety protocols in place. ■

Around the Country, on a Bike

How shall we celebrate 75 years of Indian Independence? *Together* suggests taking a journey through India. Here are two free travelers to motivate you.

NANDABALA

Before the pandemic brought the world to a standstill, Rajath Ramachandran, an MBA student, and Niranjan Kumar, a colourist, decided to go on a trip to explore India on their motorbikes. Their adventurous and fun filled experiences and stories honestly make one want to grab their motorbike and set off to explore the country.

At Gokarna, they had slept on the beach, by pitching their tents and laying out tarpaulin. As fun as it may sound, Rajath and Niranjan did not have a peaceful night at Gokarna; they were constantly disturbed by the dogs on the beach and were woken up by one in the morning.

They stayed at the outskirts of Goa, exploring the beautiful state for a few days. From Goa, they headed to Maharashtra. After entering Maharashtra, they searched really hard for a place to stay; but their efforts were in vain. As a last resort, they went up to a stranger's house and asked them if they could stay there. The residents of the house were very warm and kind to the travellers and invited Rajath and Niranjan to sleep at their farm.

Then they were off to the city of dreams, Mumbai. Considering the expense involved in staying in a hotel room, they came up with the most spontaneous plan ever—they decided to cover the entirety of Mumbai in a single day and push off. They had only one mischievous regret that they could not see Antilia, the residence of the Indian billionaire Mukesh Ambani and his family.

Another iconic destination they missed was the Rann of Kutch, Gujarat. Gujarat was one of the toughest places to find sleep, due to the constant business atmosphere of the industrial state. Gujarati food was a revelation to them, and they enjoyed it thoroughly.

After travelling through Gujarat, they entered Rajasthan. They explored Rajasthan and its lovely forts and palaces. They had explored Udaipur, Ajmer, Jaisalmer and many other places. Rajath and Niranjan were taken by surprise when they came across a lakeside in Rajasthan, for they were expecting the state to be very arid and dry. The duo decided to stay at the lakeside for a while, but a

local family brewing alcohol told them that they could not stay there. They did not know the way towards the main road, the family offered to help. They were taken through highly forested and isolated regions to the extend of being so frightened of what is going on. All went well and after reaching the main road, they set off to the national capital.

At Delhi, they explored all the major tourist destinations. But their stay went slightly longer than expected. They had to get their phones repaired and get other necessary stuffs organised before setting off to Haryana and Punjab.

In Punjab, they experienced the kindness of a gurdwara for their food and accommodation. The ambience at the Golden Temple at Amritsar touched them deeply and they decided to extend the trip for a few more days, to bask in the peaceful atmosphere. Due to the Covid restrictions, they were unable to watch the parade of the defense personnel at the India-Pakistan border; Niranjan and Rajath were really looking forward to watching the parade.

They explored Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir. The cold weather was quite different from the weather they were used to in the South. They had some beautiful memories made there too—and one of them was sleeping in a sunflower garden. What a sight it must have been in the morning! They explored the places in Kashmir like Gulmarg and Pahalgam, and had to face rains at Gulmarg. In Himachal Pradesh, they trekked through a lot of places and enjoyed a local festival too. They also spent a lot of time in the Garhi village of Kasaul, spending time along a riverside. And then they began their return home.

The nature of their trip was very different, says Niranjan and Rajath. They covered a very minimal range of distance a day, and enjoyed every little moment on the way—they stopped when they felt like and stayed at dhabas. There was no urgency in the trip; and it was more of a retreat and soul-fulfilling journey. And the memories of this trip would surely have helped them survive the lockdown blues a little better than the rest of us. ■

The Great Salt March

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Travelling through Vedaranyam, Nagapattinam, at the eastern coast of Tamil Nadu, I was suddenly taken aback by the sight of the vast expanses of salt evaporation ponds. A salt evaporation pond is a shallow artificial saltpan designed to extract salts from sea water.

I could not drive on. Seeking permission from my co-traveller, I took a walk through the salt fields. I met Bala, a worker at the salt fields. He spoke to me about the salt fields, owned by large companies; though working for them for years, and for meager wages; he had no much idea about the company that gets the benefit of his hard toil. Bala was very articulate about the tough nature of their work. The hardest is the heat. Scorching sun is beating on them directly; adding to it the white salt fields reflect light and heat back to them: like getting cooked in a slow fire.

It is the year of *Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav*. My thoughts went back to Gandhiji, his companions, and the great Salt March to Dandi, also known as the Salt Satyagraha, which was an act of nonviolent civil disobedience in colonial India. The twenty-four day march lasted from 12 March to 6 April 1930 as a direct action campaign of tax resistance and nonviolent protest against the British salt monopoly.

In 2022, in the independent India, would Bala or others be able to take a march of dissent to uphold their rights and dignity? ■





Listening and Relationship

Opposition gives us a sense of standing for something, a false sense of independence, power, and control. Compassion and humility don't give us a sense of control or psychic comfort.

RICHARD ROHR OFM

I want you to be honest: Would you rather have a friend who is always right or one who is in right relationship with you? I think I know the answer: We'd rather have someone who's in right relationship with us. In fact, someone who's right all the time can be pretty obnoxious. Would we rather have a friend who's always correct or a friend to whom we're always connected? Of course, we'd rather have the second.

Remain in Relationship

So why did we in the West seemingly change the rules for God? Many of us grew up thinking God wanted us to be right, to be correct, even to be perfect. Jesus said, 'Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing... As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love' (John 15: 4–5, 9). What this passage in John's Gospel is saying is that God wants people who are in right relationship, which means that we are open, and that we can listen to others with understanding and compassion. It means that we can admit when we're wrong, which is almost every day for most of us. It certainly is for me. And yet we keep condemning ourselves and others for not being perfect, for not being right, for not being correct. This parable, really one of the most beautiful in all the gospels, tells us what God desires—simply that we remain connected, a branch on the vine, which is the love of God.

Everybody seems to be trying to prove that they are right. We have almost a collective incapacity to admit failure, to ever admit that we are wrong, which makes us liars most of the time. Jesus is calling forth a very different kind of human being. People who live the vulnerable life of connection and relationship will bear much fruit. These are the people we trust, like, and admire. And yet so many of us are afraid to be the very thing that we admire the most. How foolish human beings are! None of us can be or need to be correct, but we can always be connected.

Compassionate Listening

Can we take responsibility for the fact that we push people to polarised positions when we do not stand in the compassionate middle? I think of how often, during my talks, someone raises a hand and says, 'I disagree with what you just said.' Often, they did not hear or understand

what I said, and they don't have the humility to ask, in a non-accusatory way: 'Did I hear you correctly in saying . . . ?' or 'What do you mean when you say . . . ?' Of course, sometimes I am wrong, but such a mentality does not encourage dialogue or mutuality. Unfortunately, my response also often suffers because of the negative energy generated. I am then defensive or biting my tongue to control my own judgments or desire to attack back. The result is a half response, at best, because the environment is not safe and congenial.

Responses of this sort are usually full of assumptions: 'I did understand you. I know your motivation. I know what you're trying to say. Therefore, I actually have the need and right to attack you.' Normally, neither person grows or expands in such a context. The truth is not well served, because neither individual feels secure, respected, or connected. Unfortunately, this has become the state of our public discourse.

Fortunately, there will always be people who have the grace and the ability to engage in reflective listening, to ask, 'Richard, did I understand what you were saying?' and repeat back to me their perception of what I said. Normally then I can clarify, or perhaps admit that I have communicated poorly or am, in fact, incorrect. When we can listen and respond in that way, each person is treated with the respect and dignity they deserve as children of God. Each person feels heard, and misunderstandings are clarified compassionately.

Unfortunately that is not the way the ego likes to work. Opposition gives us a sense of standing for something, a false sense of independence, power, and control. Compassion and humility don't give us a sense of control or psychic comfort. We have to be willing to let go of our moral high ground and hear the truth that the other person may be speaking, even if it is only ten% of what they are saying. Compassion and dialogue are essentially vulnerable positions. If we are into control and predictability, we will seldom descend into the vulnerability of unde-

fended listening or the scariness of dialogue. If we are incapable of hearing others, we will also be incapable of hearing God.

Courageous Listening

Sikh activist Valarie Kaur has made a commitment to listen to those with whom she disagrees. Here she describes some of the practices that make it possible: Deep listening is an act of surrender. We risk being changed by what we hear. When I really want to hear another person's story, I try to leave my preconceptions at the door and draw close to their telling. I am always partially listening to the thoughts in my own head when others are speaking, so I consciously quiet my thoughts and begin to listen with my senses. The most critical part of listening is asking what is at stake for the other person. I try to understand what matters to them, not what I think matters. Sometimes I start to lose myself in their story. As soon as I notice feeling unmoored, I try to pull myself back into my body, like returning home. As Hannah Arendt [1906–1975] said, 'One trains one's imagination to go visiting.' When the story is done, we must return to our skin, our own worldview, and notice how we have been changed by our visit.

Kaur understands the complicated nature of listening to those we see as our religious, cultural, and political 'opponents' and the emotional toll it takes: It turns out it is extremely difficult to draw close to someone you find absolutely abhorrent. How do we listen to someone when their beliefs are disgusting? Or enraging? Or terrifying? An invisible wall forms between us and them, a chasm that seems impossible to cross. We don't even know why we should try to cross it. In these moments, we can choose to remember that the goal of listening is not to feel empathy for our opponents, or validate their ideas, or even change their mind in the moment. Our goal is to understand them.

When listening gets hard, I focus on taking the next breath. I pay attention to sensations in my body: heat, clenching, and constriction.

I feel the ground beneath my feet. Am I safe? If so, I stay and slow my breath again, quiet my mind, and release the pressure that pushes me to defend my position. I try to wonder about this person's story and the possible wound in them. I think of an earnest question and try to stay curious long enough to be changed by what I hear. Maybe, just maybe, my opponent will begin to wonder about me in return, ask me questions, and listen to my story. Maybe their views will start to break apart and new horizons will open in the process. Then again, maybe not. It doesn't matter as long as the primary goal of listening is to deepen my own understanding. Listening does not grant the other side legitimacy. It grants them humanity—and preserves our own.

The Gift of Deep Listening

Kay Lindahl, an author and founder of The Listening Center, writes of the inherently sacred nature of reflective listening: Perhaps one of the most precious and powerful gifts we can give another person is to really listen to them, to listen with quiet, fascinated attention, with our whole being, fully present. This sounds simple, but if we are honest with ourselves, we do not often listen to each other so completely.

Listening is a creative force. Something quite wonderful occurs when we are listened to fully. We expand, ideas come to life and grow, we remember who we are. Some speak of this force as a creative fountain within us that springs forth; others call it the inner spirit, intelligence, true self. Whatever this force is called, it shrivels up when we are not listened to and it thrives when we are.

The way we listen can actually allow the other person to bring forth what is true and alive to them. Sometimes we have to do a lot of listening before the fountain is replenished. Patience is required to listen to such a person long enough for them to get to their center point of tranquility and peace. The results of such listening are extraordinary. Some would call them miracles.

Listening well takes time, skill, and a readi-

ness to slow down, to let go of expectations, judgments, boredom, self-assertiveness, defensiveness. I've noticed that when people experience the depth of being listened to like this, they also begin to listen to others in the same way.

Lindahl believes that the skills for deep listening share the same foundation as contemplative practice: Over the years I have discovered that there is a basic context that nurtures and develops the practice of listening as a sacred art. Three qualities that are essential to this deep listening context are silence, reflection, and presence.

Silence creates the space for listening to God. It provides time to explore our relationship to Source. The practice of being in this silence nurtures our capacity to listen to others.

Reflection gives us access to listening for our inner voice. The practice of taking a few breaths before responding to a situation, question, or comment gives time for your true wisdom to reveal itself. It's a slowing down, waiting, practicing patience.

Presence is the awareness of listening to another, of connecting at the heart level. The practice of taking a mundane, ordinary activity and giving it your full attention, for example, washing your hands or brushing your teeth, trains your concentration and your ability to be in the present moment with another.

Heart communication happens when we slow down, when we quiet down, look, and listen. Stop to take a breath. Become fully present with the person we're with. Listen with all of our being. At this point, communication can occur without words. Being present is a gift that fills our hearts and spirits. We are in communion.

Listening to the Voice of God

We must receive all words of God tenderly and subtly, so that we can speak them to others with tenderness and subtlety. I would even say that anything said with too much bravado, overassurance, or with any need to control or impress another, is never the voice of God within us. If

any thought feels too harsh, shaming, or diminishing of ourselves or others, it is not likely the voice of God. Trust me on that. That is simply our egoic voice. Why do humans so often presume the exact opposite—that shaming voices are always from God, and grace voices are always the imagination?

One holy man who came to visit me recently put it this way, 'We must listen to what is supporting us. We must listen to what is encouraging us. We must listen to what is urging us. We must listen to what is alive in us.' I personally was so trained not to trust those voices that I think I often did not hear the voice of God speaking to me or what Abraham Lincoln called the 'better angels of our nature.' Yes, a narcissistic person can and will misuse such advice, but a genuine God lover will flourish inside such a dialogue.

We must learn how to recognize the positive flow and to distinguish it from the negative resistance within ourselves. It can take years, if not a lifetime. If a voice comes from accusation and leads to accusation, it is quite simply the voice of the 'Accuser,' which is the literal meaning of the biblical word 'Satan.' Shaming, accusing, or blaming is simply not how God talks, but sadly, it is too often how we talk—to ourselves and to one another. God is supremely nonviolent, and I have learned that from the saints and mystics that I have read and met and heard about. That many holy people cannot be wrong.

If we can trust and listen to our inner divine image, our whole-making instinct, or our True Self, we will act from our best, largest, kindest, most inclusive self. There is a deeper voice of God, which we must learn to hear and obey. It will sound like the voice of risk, of trust, of surrender, of soul, of common sense, of destiny, of love, of an intimate stranger, of your deepest self. It will always feel gratuitous, and it is this very freedom that scares us. God never leads by guilt or shame! God leads by loving the soul at ever-deeper levels, not by shaming at superficial levels. ■

A Heap of Plastic Waste

FRANCIS XAVIER OFM



I'm writing this with much pain in my heart! About a year ago, I was living in Mysore. I noticed a dead Jersey cow lying on the side of the road about 100 metres away from our campus. It was a fully-grown cow. The cow must have been about eight or ten years old. The stomach was fully bloated—un-proportional to its body size. The owner must have just dumped it on the roadside and driven off.

By next morning, I noticed that much of its flesh had been devoured by scavenging dogs and foxes. Many street dogs with full-stomach were lying nearby—resting after a huge meal. Two days later its body was full of maggots eating the remaining flesh. This feast went on for a few days. After a week I noticed the scavengers had even torn its skeleton and pieces of it were lying here and there.

What remained of that innocent cow was a huge pile of plastic waste! It would weigh not less than 10 kgs. Only then I understood that the cause of its death! The cow had eaten plastic while eating left-over food from bags. Cows and bulls do not know how to break open a plastic cover and to eat what is inside. They just swallow these left-over food packets. It occurred to me just then what would happen to several other cows and bulls that were always found near the city garbage-bins along the road rummaging through city's garbage bin. Will not this be the

end of all those cattle we see in the vicinity of markets, restaurants, roadside eateries? Certainly! Only that we do not know how their carcasses are disposed.

Whom to blame? Of course, the dairy farmer is guilty of throwing his dead cow on a public road. But he hasn't killed it. He is guilty of using the cow only for obtaining its milk and when it is dead, he shoves it away with no gratitude or respect. But I'm guiltier than him for having played a part in killing that innocent animal. I too have disposed food waste or food materials plastic bags.

The first creation story in the Bible (Genesis 1:1–2:3) names human beings as masters of creation to rule over it while the second creation story (Genesis 2:4–10) assigns them as care-takers. Thus, we are to be accountable and responsible masters over creation. 'Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another,' says Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* #42.

India is a spiritual country that worships cows; addresses them as Lakshmis (goddesses) or at least treats them as mothers. Let's not dispose of food wastes in plastic bags and the slay innocent animals. An anonymous author has once said, 'I respect animals more than people—we're the ones messing up this world, not them.' ■



By next morning, I noticed that much of the cow's flesh had been devoured by scavenging dogs and foxes.



The Art of Listening

The head of the family or a leader having an authoritarian attitude is a major block to listening.

MONICA FERNANDES

It is unfortunate that, with the advent of messaging via different media, we are losing the art of listening. Listening forms an essential part of communication as we get to hear the other person's point of view. Just like any other skill worth having, we need to hone and practice our listening skills.

Active Listening: Active listening plays an important part in resolving conflicts and in counseling. It is important to maintain eye contact with the speaker as this indicates that you are paying. The listener should maintain an open, relaxed posture with legs and hands uncrossed. Do not interrupt the speaker but do nod at times to indicate that you are listening. Your voice and tone when interacting with the speaker should be modulated and take care of your facial expressions. A

good listener picks up the body language of the speaker. Repeat what he/she says after a pause in order not to create a misunderstanding. Avoid talking too fast.

Blocks to Listening: We are unaware of some of the mental blocks which prevent us from listening attentively. We add our own interpretation to what the listener is saying and chances are that we are completely wrong! Sometimes we are so busy rehearsing our answer that we do not listen. Another human tendency is to filter out what we choose to ignore.

'Of all the skills of leadership, listening is the most valuable—and one of the least understood. Most captains of industry listen only sometimes, and they remain ordinary leaders. But a few, the great ones, never stop listening. That's how they get word before anyone else of unseen problems and opportunities.' —Peter Nulty, *Fortune Magazine*.

Being judgmental, harbouring pre-determined ideas about the speaker being 'stupid' or 'uneducated' should be avoided. For instance, the head of the department in an office may have excellent managerial skills but a worker on the shop floor may be able to pinpoint exactly a fault in the machine design that needs to be corrected, thus saving the company a lot of money.

In a group, expert advice by non-experts is free but will not be appreciated by the speaker who may be very knowledgeable on the given subject. It is our ego that is talking. We crave for attention and believe that our views are correct. We have a closed mind. Sometimes it would appear that we are out to win a popularity contest when we try to placate the speaker and agree to everything he or she is saying. Another pitfall to avoid is when we immediately start identifying with our own experience instead of listening attentively to the speaker.

'You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time' says, M. Scott Peck, author of *The Road Less Traveled*. Multitask-

ing is another block to listening. For instance, if Anita is busy cooking and simultaneously chatting with her friend on the phone, not paying hundred% attention, it is okay. But if her daughter has had a rough day at school and wants to air out her frustration, Anita should stop cooking so that she is able to give her daughter full attention. In this way she would also build a good rapport with her daughter.

Another block to listening is the convenient excuse of not having time. This excuse comes handy when we do not want to spend some quality time with an elderly relative at home reminiscing about the stories of the good old days. Strangely we have the time to spend hours watching a movie but do not have the time to listen to the elderly. We have the time to listen to the cute prattle of a child but not to the lonely aged at home.

The head of the family having an authoritarian attitude is a major block to listening. Joe's father is a doctor and insists that his son follows in his footsteps. He turns a deaf ear to Joe's pleas that he wants to be a musician instead. This kind of an obdurate attitude will result in Joe being unhappy and drifting away from his father.

Relationships in a group are fostered when there is attentive listening to each other's point of view. Members of a group are able to collaborate towards problem solving instead of competing with each other.

We are doing a disservice to our speaker when we are wool gathering instead of paying attention. A good listener is aware of his/her own abilities and prejudices in order to remove them. A genuine listener works towards building trust, maintain confidentiality, setting aside his/her emotions, responding sensitively and assisting the speaker to express his/her true feelings. ■

The Art of Boredom

Boredom is probably not as bad as you think it is.

SINCHANA SHETTY

Have you ever stood in a long line at the grocery store and your predecessor has 17 packets of Maggie? As any sane person does, I pull my phone out, tweet about it and find myself spiralling down the rabbit-hole of retweeting all the ‘Lana Del Rey is to 21st century what Mozart was to the 18th century’ posts until I hear the cashier yell, ‘Madam! Madam!’, only for me to look up and have him roll his eyes all the way up to the Tropic of Cancer. It was the sort of incident that made me think that perhaps amnesia is not so bad after all.

That was only the second day of my four-week-long summer holiday. I remember the jitters about all things to cross off my bucket list. From finishing *Crime and Punishment* to quite seriously learning French to be able to say more than just ‘baguette baguette’ in class, I had set some high bars for myself and was adamant to come out of the holidays like a domesticated version of Steve Jobs (with the exclusion of a black turtle-neck of course).

Not immune to the necessities of life: food, water and memes; I started my day scrolling through Discord. Watching the video of a true-crime podcast on YouTube with breakfast and continuing to finish the series I had started the day before, I locked myself in my room and emerged only when it was time for dinner. I didn’t notice the hours go by. It was as if the sand glass was soon turned upside down by an invisible hand when I clicked the Next-Episode button.

Days turned to some more days and my to-do list rusty as ever, I felt unproductive. With one more season to finish, I could tell the next day would look the same too. So I decided to reduce my screen time and read in the evenings. Two

pages down of Raskolnikov’s strenuous monologue, I was bored (Sorry, Dostoevsky). Naturally, I watched some more reels on Instagram. These 15-seconds long vertical videos lured my attention and the works of world’s finest literature bored me. It seemed that I’d squeezed all the lemons life gave me into a pie that wasn’t even mine to begin with.

Every time I felt the slow train of boredom make its way to the life station, I hit snooze on all things exciting by doomscrolling from Instagram and Pinterest to Tumblr, Discord and whatnot. The world a click away from my fingertips, why was I so adamant about not feeling bored?

The neutral stimulation of boredom is just as appealing as a red pill the size of a T.rex to swallow. The eternal call at the sight of my sad little phone all alone with no fingers stomping on it? Sigh, one caves. But one would be none the wiser if they didn’t anticipate that. My Lilliputian task of reducing screen time is up against tech giants that have perfected persuasive design techniques—the same technique that keeps you rolling the dice at casinos.

To remedy this, I turned off the mobile data, muted my notifications and buried my phone under two pillows in another room. I would not bring my phone out at the slightest chance there was when I found myself alone and bored. This also extended to when I was at a café and my friend excused herself to the restroom. At the metro and quite sometime before I’m home? You guessed it, no phone. When the urge to grab my phone came about, I usually buried my phone in the bag and muttered ‘I’m better than an algorithm’ four times. At the cost of looking ludicrous, it worked.

Although it was hard at first, I persisted. Even if it was five minutes at a time before I took hold of my phone like there was no tomorrow, it was enough. Slowly, but eventually, I found that I could go on for quite a long time without the white glare of a screen.

While it may seem like I was helicopter parenting myself, it allowed me to cut down around 30–45 minutes of screen time. Several studies show that it is necessary to take some time off the screens to balance the mental strain caused by disproportionate amounts of activity online. As it turns out, scrolling away your boredom will make you addicted to the constant surge of dopamine, the feel-good hormones and in turn your brain will need to surf for more stimulation to keep the boredom at bay, altering our tolerance for it.

This time off was essential because if there was such a thing as a refresh button for brains, mine was pressed a dozen times over. Slowly, I ticked off the tinier things in my bucket list like cleaning my room and trying out a new recipe. The time I wasn’t mindlessly stimulated through content called for deep introspection. I was looking into myself and finding things to work on. Boredom, it appears, was allowing me to feel more creative. In fact, a study in the *Academy of Management Discoveries* found that boredom helps increase productivity, too.

Alicia Walf, a neuroscientist, says that being bored can improve social connections. I found this to be true! I was reconnecting with my family for those snippets of conversations with mum on what the new neighbour is like, dad on why WhatsApp forwards were just as trustworthy as my reasoning for why I’m late home and brother,

well, to reiterate that he indeed was adopted.

The best thing I ever got from training myself to be bored is that I have rediscovered the lost art of connecting to nature and observing. Noticing the most minute details: a droplet on a leaf, two identical laugh lines when my friend cracks up at her own joke, and a ladybug on a cat on a ledge. Bottom line: You’re nothing short of a Miyazaki protagonist!

According to several researchers, connecting with nature can have a multitude of benefits: better mental health, improved concentration and induces positive emotions. Dare I say, the glass does seem half full.

A Sisyphean task, it certainly is not easy. The idea is to understand that overstimulation will eventually lead one to feel chronically bored. From five minutes with no phone on Day 1 to perhaps 50 something minutes on Day 75, resisting the urge to be stimulated is better for overall health. Give boredom a go because wasn’t Newton bored when he sat under the apple tree only to have the discovery of the century—gravity? ■



Do Catholics Worship Idols?

There are simple, misguided, misinformed, or willfully ignorant people who consider statues the be-all and end-all of Christian devotion, adorning and admiring them to a fault and for all the wrong reasons.

SUSANNA VAS



If you've visited a Catholic church, you've doubtless seen someone thumbing a rosary before a Marian statue, garlanding St Sebastian, lighting candles for St Anthony, or kissing the feet of a crucifix. Idol worship is an evergreen charge against the Catholic Church. Non-contextual and one-sided readings of certain biblical verses can impeach the use of statues, sacraments, and relics. Do Catholics need a refresher on scripture or do they have solid grounds for using and endorsing graven images for worship?

What Are Idols?

Idols are material representations of gods or deities that people use for worship. Idols are also people who receive excessive love and adoration from admirers.

What Does the Bible Say About Idol Worship? Let's deconstruct a clutch of verses that pop up in the idolatry debate.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous god. — Exodus 20:4–6

Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the Lord your God. — Leviticus 26:1

In Leviticus 20, heaven, earth, and water refer to the physical realms of the world. Hebrew uses the same word (*shamayim*) for 'heaven' and 'sky'. Here, heaven is the sky, not the dwelling place of God.

When God liberated the Israelites from slavery under the Egyptians, He commanded rigid distinctions in terms of food, clothing, and worship to preempt syncretism. Yahweh did not want the Israelites worshipping humans, animals, human-animal hybrids, celestial bodies, and forces of nature; eroticising worship; or performing abominable acts like ritual infanticide.

The dramatis personae of the Old Testament knew the Word, not the Word Incarnate. Therefore, figuring a likeness of God would have been inconceivable, impossible, and presumptuous because no one knew what God looked like and there was nothing else worthy of being fashioned into an image. Any graven image people appropriated as a god before the arrival of Christ would have been false and fanciful.

To understand God's jealousy, let's consider a spousal relationship. A wife wouldn't get offended if her husband keeps and admires a picture of her. However, she would be devastated and furious if he ogles at images of another woman whose affections he is not entitled to. Similarly, if she points out her spouse in a picture to someone saying, 'This is my husband,' she is not dishonouring or reducing him to something he is not.

Moreover, you do not have a relationship with the image but with the person depicted. Feeling something when you gaze at the image of your spouse is not inappropriate because you share a personal, intimate relationship. This is unlike blushing or drooling over a celebrity poster where there is no real relationship—only fan-

tasy and speculation—between the admirer and the admired.

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them. — Psalm 115:4–8

Those who trust in engraved images, who tell molten images, 'You are our gods,' will be turned back. They will be utterly disappointed. — Isaiah 42:17

One may cry to it, yet it cannot answer. It cannot save him out of his trouble. — Isaiah 46:7

Without an intimate, personal relationship with God, we compromise true prayer and worship. There are simple, misguided, misinformed, or willfully ignorant people who consider statues the be-all and end-all of Christian devotion, adorning and admiring them to a fault and for all the wrong reasons. This is equal to neglecting your spouse because you are obsessing over a picture of them. Such practices are unhealthy and, as Psalm 115:4–8 says, senseless (pun intended). Proper education and instruction from clergy regarding the nature and purpose of statues and sacramentals can nip or avert idolatry.

There is a saying: 'What is beautiful leads to what is good, and what is good leads to what is true.' Therefore, the beauty of an object of worship rests not only in its aesthetics but also in its spiritual effects. For instance, a massive crucifix behind the altar reminds us that although we pay attention to the priest (like we ought), he is a humble servant while Jesus is the master; he is a man while Jesus is God. In Tridentine and Byzantine masses, except during blessings, the priest faces the crucifix/tabernacle or iconostasis, not the congregation. When we gaze upon a crucifix, are we absorbed by the skill of the craftsman—'the work of human hands'—or the passion of Christ? If you are concerned with the beauty of the crucifix rather than its immanence, '[you] will be utterly disappointed'.

Jesus said to the woman at the well, '...God is Spirit and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.' — John 4:23–24

How do we justify the use of visual aids after

these words from the mouth of the Word Incarnate Himself?

In the New Testament, Jesus assumes flesh. This kenosis was a choice of supreme humility, not a descent into baseness. Fr Casey Cole OFM points out that 'even after the resurrection, Jesus maintained His physical form and human nature. They remained a part of who He was... At no point in any of the gospels does it ever say that Jesus discarded His body.' He did not go on to become 'some disembodied spirit, a hologram, a ghost.' While Jesus said that God is Spirit, He also instructed us to honour His body and blood during the Last Supper.

Statues are parables in art. Jesus spoke parabolically so that people would meditate on His words and probe them deeply enough. He could have handed his listeners categorical answers and explanations on a silver platter, but He didn't. If we look, think, work, and seek hard enough, crutches from the material world can become springboards that transport us into a spiritual experience.

What About the Makers of Statues?

David, Solomon, and Asaph could have sung about anything under the sun, but they chose to sing about and for God. Similarly, there are artisans who can depict anything in the world, but choose to depict God and His saints, offering the best of their talent to Him.

To answer the titular question, yes, some of us do—consciously or unconsciously. However, the Catholic church's position on statues and sacramentals does not violate or defy biblical proscriptions. Instead of sweeping generalisations, we must consider the particular idols (Baal, Molech, Ashtoreth) and the practices (lewd rituals, macabre appeasement sacrifices, superstitious and cultish behaviour) that elicited criticisms from rulers and prophets and commandments from God. ■

Susanna Vas is a 23-year-old literature postgraduate with a restless curiosity about all things Christian.

IN STAMPS

21 August

World Senior Citizen's Day

We celebrate the World Senior Citizen's Day on 21 August every year. This day is dedicated to all senior citizens and aims to promote awareness about elder abuse and age deterioration. On this day, we also appreciate and acknowledge the contribution of senior citizens to the betterment of society.

It was initiated in the US; and later, other countries also adopted the day to pay respect to the senior citizens.

Tom John OFM



The Ringing Rings

Have we humans got any internal markers of the life we live?

Fr KM GEORGE

At middle school what the science teacher told us about the annual growth rings formed inside the trees still rings in my ears. Showing us a picture of the cross section of a big tree she told us that one could determine the age of trees by counting the concentric circles on it. She advised us to visit a timber mill and count for ourselves the rings and the age of trees when they sawed them down. While the class listened to her with rapt attention one boy suddenly asked: 'Can we see our growth rings if we cut open a human body?' The teacher was aghast. 'No, no, no you cannot do that...', she said with obvious fear on her face. Unanswered the question still rings. Have we humans got any internal markers of the life we live?

Scientists tell us that tree rings reveal a complex body of information about past climatic conditions—temperature, drought, rainfall, diseases, forest fires, flood, sunlight, and pollution. Disciplines like Dendrochronology (from Greek *dendron*=tree; *chronos*=time) and Dendroclimatology claim to be able to study environmental changes occurring even thousands of years ago by examining intact tree fossils. Trees are thus keepers of a great memory.

We humans have many more modes of memory. Associated with our brain cells or neuronal



network we have a neuro-psychological memory that is subjective, personal, patchy, vulnerable and subject to forgetfulness. We may not be able to compare our subjective memory with the comprehensive memory of trees objectively registered in the growth rings. We remember in our conscious mind. But our conscious mind seems to be a screen that hides rather than reveals, something like a television or computer screen that reveals images, but hides the complex technical processes spanning huge spaces and time behind the

screen. The conscious mind constantly sweeps away its experiences to the subconscious zone and finally to the hard disk of the unconscious. We try to retain collective memories of our race in mythology, music, dance, storytelling, folk arts, rites and rituals, language and literature.

We have a social and historical memory. Dig up historical memory by means of archaeology and various paleo-sciences. We write volumes of history and erect monuments.

We have a genetic memory of the human race that we now begin to understand scientifically. According to researchers our diverse environmental experiences can make an impact on human sperm and ovum and it can eventually be transmitted to our DNA and our behavioral patterns. So they talk about a 'trans-generational epigenetic inheritance' that can be transmitted to successive generations.

We can talk about several other domains of memory. For example, what we may call the Eco-cosmic memory or the memory of our rootedness in planet earth, the solar system, the Milky Way galaxy and so on. We have a psycho-spiritual memory arising from our ability for transcendence and abstraction beyond physical material categories.

Through these multiple forms of memory like neuro-psychological, socio-historical, phy-

lo-genetic, eco-cosmic, psycho-spiritual, we try to generate meaning by weaving the connecting threads of our life and its past environment. However, we seem to lack the sensitivity of trees to register the environment in its totality.

We human beings, however, have a qualitatively different concept of memory because we have the unique gifts of self-awareness and capacity for self-transcendence, freedom and creativity, power of speech and intellect, imagination and insight. So the innocent question of the impulsive little boy returns: Can we see human growth rings if we cut open the body?

No amount of the analytical dissecting of our psyche, no interpretive intervention into our social history, no sequencing of our human genome will exhaust the mystery of human consciousness and memory. We can make useful inroads into it, but never grasp the whole in our present condition.

That is perhaps why great teachers of our human race always pointed to the necessary mutation of our self-seeking awareness itself into enlightened self-awareness. We then become leading lights to the world for healing and wholeness, for love, joy and peace.

The growth rings of memory are hidden deep within us. The little boy's quest was in the right direction. ■



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A Reminder of SELF-FORGIVENESS

A FRANCIS OFM

‘Is this really of any worth?’ The left hemisphere of his brain frequently provoked him, ever since he had received the birthday gift from Hazel, his director. ‘This time she actually made a lackluster show’, he said to himself taking one more look at the gift, probably for the hundredth time.

He knew it well that her gift did not carry much worth, but he didn’t want to accept the fact.

He was cognizant that his director valued his service. If she didn’t, why should she promote him as her protégé among her professional circle? Some of her colleagues openly told him about her appreciation for him, quoting her words: ‘He is a new lease of fresh breath in my department.’

She herself had confided to him frequently that without his managerial skills and loyalty, it would be difficult to run the department.

Basing on his experience of receiving expensive gifts that she bestowed on him as tokens of her appreciation in the past, he expected a topper at this time. A costlier one, such as Giorgio Armani, his favourite cologne, Louis Jadot Gevrey-Chambertin, a shiny-cherry red classy French wine, or at least a gift card from the Hudson Bay where he shopped week in and week out.

‘After all, this is a milestone birthday of mine’, his inner soliloquy continued endlessly as he attempted to preen himself for a last time in front of the mirror, before leaving for work.

True to his instinct, the first enquiry his director made at the one-to-one operational meeting was about the birthday gift. As a rule of thumb, he never lied to her, even on questions pertaining to his personal life. Following the same principle, he said to her candidly: *‘I am not an artist, but a pencil is very useful for me because I use it regularly to underline the books I read. I appreciate your thoughtfulness, thank you.’*

Strangely, after uttering those words, he felt that he was not very comfortable about what he had said. His own words seemed to betray him, as they sounded surreptitiously diplomatic. He didn’t like the tone of it, particularly, the touch of alienation it highlighted between what he felt and what he said.

Noticeably, she seemed to tune into his discomfort. After remaining silent for a little while at the underlying shadiness his words projected, she began to speak: ‘I gave you a pencil with an eraser!’ Drawn by the precision of her words, he felt he was being instantly filled with a mixed bag of emotions, both bewilderment and curiosity.

His emotions revolved primarily around the name she had used for the gift. He had been calling it as a ‘pencil’ but she thoughtfully called it ‘a pencil with an eraser!’

‘Wait a minute, I know what a pencil with an eraser is,’ his rebellious voice of self-talk sneaked out fitfully. ‘I know the history of its beginnings too! On 30 March 1858, Hyman Lipman, a Phila-



Dumfounded by the surprising candour of her words, he sat with her in the solace of silence, in the absolute absence of words.

delphia-based inventor, patented it. But whether it is called a ‘pencil’ or a ‘pencil with an eraser’, how does it add any worth on my birthday gift?’

His director’s voice once again abruptly broke the flow of his self-talk as she continued speaking, ‘I must confess that it is an inexpensive gift. But this was the same gift my dad gave to me on my eighteenth birthday. And it changed my outlook towards life!’

He observed her face all of a sudden beaming with a shade of glow.

After a short pause she continued: ‘Like you, I too, initially mistook it for its worth. But my dad had a different intention, altogether, in giving it to me. As a young woman I was oversensitive about my words and actions. I struggled with my shortcomings and failures. And I still do! My hypersensitivity altered myself to be overly judgmental and less self-forgiving. By giving a pencil with an eraser, my dad taught me a valuable lesson: I don’t have to be very critical and unforgiv-

ing of myself in life. His gift continues to remind me that making mistakes is part of being human. But what is equally human is also that we erase our mistakes by truly forgiving ourselves. The secret of life lies in our ability to start fresh again.’

Her voice took an intimate tone, as she continued: ‘I see a reflection of myself in you. You struggle, I know, with self-forgiveness, particularly, when you fall short of being perfect. I thought that a reminder of self-forgiveness would be a great gift for you on your fortieth, milestone birthday. So, the pencil with an eraser!’

Her voice faded abruptly with unbounded silence. She said nothing more!

Dumfounded by the surprising candour of her words, he sat with her in the solace of silence, in the absolute absence of words.

His gaze, though, seemed to make a silent but a more powerful non-verbal communication: ‘Nothing more significant, valuable and expensive than this, could anyone have gifted to me!’ ■

I Was Wounded in the Tent of My Friend

BOBBY JOSE KATTIKAD OFM CAP



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

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

A Sister of St. Joseph of Tarbes (SJT) is called to:
Gather the scattered; Unite the divided with the motto: 'GOD ALONE'

In and through: Prayer, through her service to the young—in schools and colleges; to the sick—in hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation of leprosy and HIV/AIDS patients; to the aged, orphans, women in distress, the poor and the needy—in and through the social-service ministries.

Dear friend, do you hear this call to reach out?

The Lord Jesus is calling you dear friend, to be part of the SJT family.

Do you hear the call of Jesus? COME AND SEE!



**CONGREGATION OF
THE SISTERS OF ST.
JOSEPH'S OF TARBES**

**The Lord is inviting you, dear
friend, to be part of our family.**

There is an observation that cats never forgive. Most living things clash with each other, but they also have a method of transferring messages that they are ready for reconciliation and friendship. Even among non-primates there are signs of forgiveness and reconciliation. Most animals do, but cats seem to be an exception.

Whether this observation is scientific is something to be debated. But as a metaphor it contains certain lessons. The same cat that purrs around, rubs around your feet and always rolls over and makes sure to be in love is the one that holds a grudge until the end. It is quite a frightening prospect. The most harmonious people are the ones who distance farther than those who live at the two poles. The deepest nail bites come from the most loved. There is a biblical saying, 'I was wounded in the tent of my friend'.

But there's a problem. The moment you verbally or through body language reveal that you're not ready to forgive, the world stops—you've begun a process of euthanasia. This is how the gates of redemption are closed all over the world. There is no other path in front of humanity except forgiveness. That is what Nelson Mandela tried to say when he came out after a long imprisonment: 'If I am not ready to leave my bitterness and hatred inside that wall, even if I am

on the street tomorrow, I will still be in prison.'

The forgiveness project thus becomes a favorite term for the New Age. As mentioned at the beginning, the potential or possibility for reconciliation exists in all living beings. All the more powerfully its springs are hidden deep within each of them like a subterranean river. All of us have the responsibility of taking each other to that river. When the forgiveness project began in 2004, the political meta-religious orientation was conceived by those behind it to awaken that virtue all over the world. They felt that an important tool was to create conditions for listening and telling the stories of people who have gone through severe tragedies and unconditionally forgave the people or events that caused it. The light that is created from such storytelling is beyond imagination. Marina Cantacuzino happens to collect and author such stories from the background of the Iraq war.

Readers will also have a memory of being forgiven unconditionally. The homework of this day for all is whether such a story with extraordinary transformative potential can be told to the children during our dinner. The sense that reconciliation and not revenge, will make this blue planet we live in nobler. That is why He is constantly telling us to forgive. ■

**May they all be one.
JOHN 17:21**



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