

together

a national family magazine

PROGRESS

BUT WHY ARE SO MANY ON THE ROAD PROTESTING?



The History and Anatomy
of Farmers' Protest

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

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

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

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

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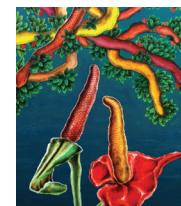


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The Polarity of Progress

Modern progress seems to be a cold-blooded creation of oligarchy. Creating a few on the top of the economic and control pyramid, who have all the powers. This irreversible concentration of wealth with the soulless corporates, who are right at the top of the economic pyramid, widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

‘What is progress?’ is the starting question of the mind expanding documentary called *Surviving Progress* (2011). In a world of 195 countries (may be a few more) with a planet with 7.8 billion people, this is a difficult question. Rightly so, the documentary does not answer the question; but unambiguously throws light on what is not progress. Modern progress seems to be a cold-blooded creation of oligarchy. Creating a few on the top of the economic and control pyramid, who have all the powers.

What does it mean on economic terms? A glance at the grand GDP deception may give some clarity. A country’s progress is calculated by its gross domestic product (GDP). India’s GDP is 2.6 trillion dollars; India has 1.38 billion people. India’s per capita GDP is calculated as ₹1,48,064. It is portrayed that every person in India has an annual income of ₹148064. But what is the truth? This 1.38 billion people are there only for the calculation; the income in millions per annum goes to only less than 1 percent; and income in billions per annum goes to top 117 people, with Mukesh Ambani heading the chart. India has 40 crore people just earning below ₹32 a day, around ₹10,000 a year.

This irreversible concentration of wealth with the soulless corporates, who are right at the top of the economic pyramid, widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots. In

this era of chronic capitalism, progress is what the corporates bring about for their advantage; a capitalist government makes the toiling masses believe that it is for the advantage of the masses. And the politicians are paid for it.

The Peasants’ War

I love Käthe Kollwitz for a few reasons. Firstly she being a woman artist who got noticed, or rather the world could not ignore her in the first half of the 20th century, a time when art was thought not of women’s realm.

Secondly, her regards and concern are for those at the bottom of the social scale. She made people; often labourers and mothers with children, suffering under severe social contradictions brought about as a result of Germany’s rapid modernization her subject for art. Perhaps it is more right to say that she made art serve the marginalised.

Thirdly, for me she was like finding of a treasure. I had never heard of her in art history classes; or in academic books of expressionism, where she actually belongs; or in religious circles when they go verbal about the option for the poor. It is another proof for the argument that history is written by men and the victors. It may soon be rephrased as ‘history is written by the corporates and the chronic capitalist governments’.

Fourthly, for what she contained. Her young son was killed in the battlefield during the First

World War. She never went after perpetrators of war. In all her other series, she portrays the emotional agony and resilience of the victims. Her work proclaimed loud and clear that a war perhaps has victors, but surely creates victims.

Kollwitz’s two great series concerned with social injustice: *A Weavers’ Revolt*, completed in 1897; and *Peasants’ War* completed in 1908, depicting a peasants’ uprising in 16th century Germany. The artist uses the historical setting to show the state of farmers and workers all along history. The peasants are always out. They, as their produces, are used; used to satisfy ones

bodily appetite to getting a political party into power. They never had power to themselves, to make decisions and to manage their businesses. Centuries later history repeats itself on Delhi streets. And the graffiti stands, “Every time history repeats itself the price goes up.”

Take over by the corporates

Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country—William Jennings Brain.

Käthe Kollwitz’s *Woman with Dead Child*



Why are the framers spending this biting winter on the roads risking everything? Plainly speaking, they are on a twofold mission; on the one hand they are fighting the corporates from taking over the country; and on the other hand, they are revolting against the government that is selling the country to the corporates.

Simon Johnson, former chief economist of International Monetary Fund, explains how this taking over by the corporates happen. People who got the economic power use that power to buy influence. With that power to influence the governments, they get more deregulations and more of the playing fields shaped in the way they want it; with no government interventions and restrictions. That allows them to make more money and with that they buy more political power and influence. That explains why our government and governments elsewhere are hostile and at times even violent to the civil society protesting and dissenting peacefully.

The farmers most often are in debts. The corporates and their banks willingly and with generous gestures lend to the farmers and the struggling middleclass. How much can they pay back every year? They can pay only as much they earn. Now with new Farm Laws their earnings will be controlled by the corporates who have lent them money. With the new Farm Laws 70 percent of people in India who depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood will lose their bargaining and purchasing power.

End of progress

Ronald Wright, the author of *A Short History of Progress*, has coined a phrase, 'Progress trap'. He defines it as human behavior that appears like improvement and seems like that there is no down side to it. But when they reach a certain stage they reach dead-ends or become traps. They ultimately lead to disaster because they are unsustainable. Going back to the Stone Age, when our ancestors were hunting animals, they reached a stage when their weaponry and hunting techniques had become so good; they discovered ways to kill two animals instead of one with the same weaponry. That was progress. But when they discovered that they could kill a whole herd of two hundred animals at once by driving them

over a cliff and they could have more than what they need, had fallen into, what Ronald Wright called as, the progress trap. They had made unsustainable progress. The result then was that many animals became endangered; and food eventually became less available.

Discovery of nuclear energy was one of the most promising discoveries of 20th century. It had prospects of contributing immensely to improve applications in the fields of agriculture, medicine, space exploration, water desalination and more. Nuclear energy was a discovery towards progress. Look at the happenings in 1945. It was a progress trap. On august 6th the first atomic bomb called the *Little boy* was dropped in Hiroshima, Japan; killing thousands of people, making thousands and thousands of people handicapped, and worse still, people come to know the fact, that their mothers will for years, thereafter, will live with the chances of giving birth to deformities and a mass of ill formed human flesh, because of the massive radiations. But what did the world learn from this tragic incident? May be they grew more confident of their power to kill. Thus few days after on the 9th of August 1945, a second bomb called the *Fat man* was dropped in Nagasaki: killing even more people, making more chances of deformities and abnormalities. When progress gets caught in a progress trap, progress becomes suicidal.

Overconsumption or overpopulation

If every person in every part of the world has to consume like the affluent of the world, the world can accommodate only one third, even less, of present population. The carbon footprint of those on the top of consumption pyramid is upsetting. Someone in the United States or Europe is consuming 50 times more resources than a poor person in places like Bangladesh or India, if China or India has to reach the level of consumption like the United States or Europe, it is very unlikely that the earth can support

Environmental scientists in every major summit on earth highlight the alarming increase of carbon in the air. In 2020, the carbon level in air is more than 400 parts per million (ppm). When the Industrial Revolution began, the carbon count in air was below 200 ppm. The

maximum possible level of carbon in air is 450 ppm. The distance between us and the end of breathing is less than 50 ppm.

Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in their report in early 21st century noted that if the earth is still inhabitable, it is because the third world countries are not developed as massively as the first world countries. Dr. Sunil P. Ilayidam in his speech on the World Environment Day gives further statistics: a person's average annual carbon emission per year in the US and in other super developed counties is 27 tons. Around 5 billion living in poorer countries has an average carbon emission of 1.5 tons per person. Imagine if this 5 billion hit the 'progress path' and begin to emit 27 tons carbon per person; that would be the end of the world. Dr. Sunil concludes humorously, it is not because of the massive developments of the first world countries that the earth is enduring, but by the non-development of the third world countries. The five billion of world's poor can boldly stand up to the two plus billion rich of the world, saying, "you live because of us". Yes, it is not the other way as we always think. The question comes back to us. What is the real

problem over consumption or over population? It's worth recalling the words of the Mahatma; "The earth has enough resources to meet the needs of all but not enough to satisfy the greed of even one person."

We make a road by walking

Our Farmers are on the road. What is our response? It is easy to be apolitical when we are the privileged section, when all our needs are met, and when we do not see beyond our nose. In the bible, Qoheleth, the preacher, begins his discourse with a pessimistic proverbial question, is there anything new under the sun? I would think it is a question of the privileged, who wants to keep the past going undisturbed. After about 200 years Jesus game the optimistic answer to that question. Yes, new is possible. And the new happens by we beginning to walk in a new direction.

The famous book that records the conversation on education and social change between Myles Horton and Paulo Freire is titled *We Make the Road by Walking*. Let this New Year be a year of fresh strolls and walks that create new roads of inclusive progress. **HAPPY NEWYEAR 2021.** ■

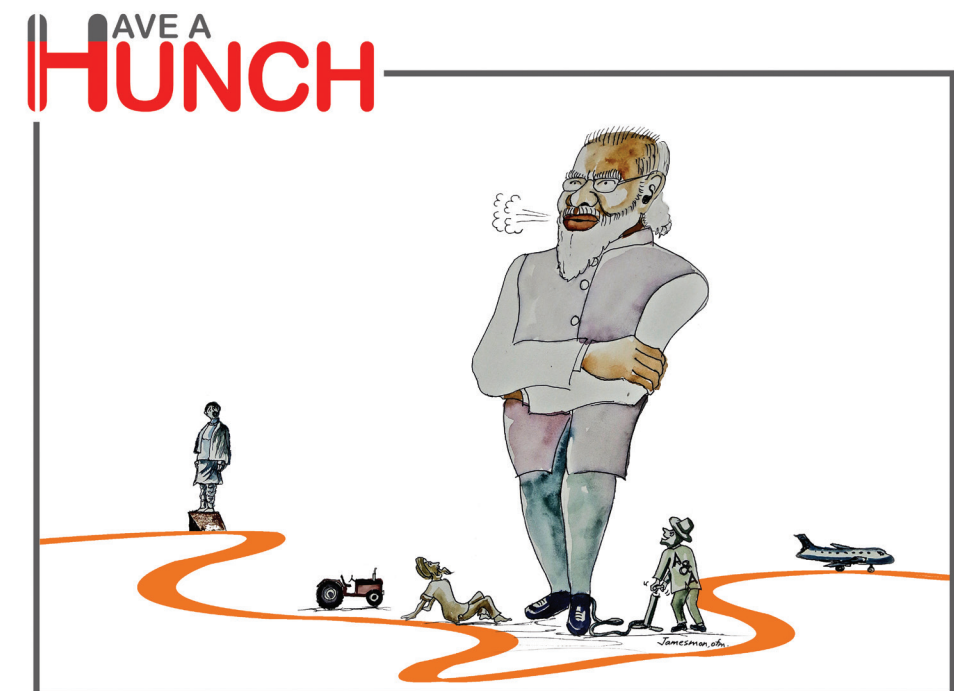




Illustration: Jameson PC OFM

PROGRESS

BUT WHY ARE SO MANY ON THE ROAD PROTESTING?

The PROGRESS propaganda has won elections, brainwashed the majority, silenced millions, built profitable consensus. The government makes promises of progress-for-all while addressing rallies, passing laws, and contesting elections. The Farm Laws were passed in September. But soon we see thousands of farmers on the street protesting. The numbers are increasing. Whose progress is this? Who is wrong? The government? The farmers? Why are the protesters pointing towards the corporates? Why are the government looking the other way?

COVER STORY

The History and Anatomy of Farmers' Protest

Between 1757 and 1766 the East India Company received 6,000,000 pounds from the natives of India as gifts. In 1769 and 1770, the English brought about a famine by buying up all the rice with the same money they had received from the very people, and by refusing to sell it again to them, except at exorbitant prices. Is the history repeating itself?

ALEX TUSCANO

Since the passing of the Farm Laws 2020 the farmers from Panjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and many other states are agitating in and around Delhi. One Sikh Baba gave his life in support of the agitation. More than twenty people died in the biting cold of Delhi. There is no slowing down of the agitation. The entire world is talking about this agitation as being the world's largest protest by the Indian farmers.

The farmers are protesting against the three farm laws the Modi government passed under the pretext of doubling the income of the farmers. The farmers are not convinced. They see a bigger and mischievous design by the government to hand over the farm sector into the hands of the India's largest corporate houses.

A historical perspective

Soon after the Independence, India had a massive food shortage. The Indian government was forced to import food grains. Indian farmers were cultivating land under tenancy system where the cultivators were not the owners of the land. The lands were owned by the zamindars, who collected tax from the farmers either in cash or in food grains. The landowners were not bothered even if a drought had made it

impossible for the farmers to cultivate the land. If a farmer failed to pay taxes then the landlord would take the land from the farmer and give to another more prosperous farmer who could pay taxes regularly. This led to a lot of farmers becoming landless and forced to work with other farmers for wages or migrate to cities to look for employment.

Indian agriculture moved from the feudal tenancy form to capitalist form of cultivation where the cultivators became owners of their land and they cultivated by employing wage labourers. This transformation of agriculture into capitalist agriculture did not solve the problem of low level of food production and the farmers continued to remain very poor and exploited.

To overcome the precarious situation of farmers and low level of food production, the Government of India undertook three programmes:

1. Building dams to improve irrigation.
2. Green revolution by modernizing agricultural production and introducing intensive farming in selected areas in the country, such as Punjab, Haryana, Mandya, Kuttanad, Tanjavoor.
3. Farmers' support programmes such as agricultural cooperative societies, minimum support price and Agricultural Produce Market

Uncluttering the three farm laws

1. Elimination of all subsidies and minimum support price for the farmers. Eliminate APMC, Agricultural Produce Market Committee and Mandies (APMC Yards). From now on the farmers can sell their product to private traders and corporate houses. This also means that any corporate house can procure food grains from the farmers and stock in unlimited quantity in their godowns. Earlier it was illegal for private people to hoard food grains.

The farmers will not get the benefit of the system of minimum support price. The government used to fix minimum support

price for several farm product to ensure that the farmers do not incur losses. Further farmers will not get subsidy on any input for cultivation.

2. Introduction of contract farming. This means traders and corporate houses can make agreements with farmers to produce food grains and sell to the corporation. In case of dispute the farmers cannot have recourse to the courts but some local government official can intervene to solve the dispute.
3. The corporations can stock any amount of agricultural produce (procurement in private hands). This could result in artificial scarcity and food prices to rise.



Committees (APMC). APMC is a marketing board established and operated by the state government in order to regulate the sale of agricultural products and eliminate the exploitation of the farmers by intermediaries, and to ensure remunerative prices for the farmers for their produce and timely payment.

In spite of these measures, the farmers were always in distress. Large number of farmers have committed suicides and there is no end to it.

More than 60% of the Indian population is involved in agriculture and 45% of the total labour force is in agriculture. High percentage of farmers is subsistence farmers who barely produce for their livelihood. Agriculture gives very low returns. The law of the country does not allow the owners of the land to change the land use for nonagricultural purpose. But when the government wants, it will throw the farmers out and snatch their land and give to the industrialists to build their factories.

The farmers' protest

The farmers' protest is against abolishing of APMC and Minimum Support Price. Farmers' agitation is an indication that the farming and the industry are in conflict with each other. It is an attempt on the part of the corporates and industrialists to gain control on the agriculture and subordinate it to industrial capital. The gist of the development that the present-day NDA government wishes to bring about is to allow the corporate capitalist to gain control of the agricul-

ture. The system of Mandis and the minimum support price is government's responsibility to regulate agrarian economy and to prevent it from going below the level of break even.

Conflict between industry and agriculture

The human civilization started with agriculture. All the non-farm products were produced by the craftsmen who were rooted in agriculture. Industry came up out of the womb of agriculture.

In the feudal society the only economic activity was agriculture. It was under the control of kings and feudal lords, as the peasants did not own the land they were cultivating. The entire wealth of the society was owned by the kings. People produced only for consumption and for paying to the kings, warlords and feudal lords. In the womb of agriculture, there existed craftsmen, carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers and oil press mills.

As the productive forces developed in agriculture and with the craftsmen, they started producing surplus. They began to exchange their product. They used to take their surplus product to the religious pilgrim centers to exchange or sell. Gradually, these places became permanent local markets. Gradually the craftsmen who did not need to remain in the rural areas in the midst of agrarian society to produce their goods shifted to the centres of market places and began to produce and sell in the markets. Gradually, these market places and towns became centres of production of non-agricultural goods. With

the industrial revolution the history witnessed emergence of large industries.

Gradually, the owners of these industries required large plots of land to established their factories. They began to encroach on the land of the farmers. The history saw the eviction of peasants from their land to make place for industrial development.

Up to this day we are seeing the process of eviction of farmers, Dalits and Adivasis from their land for the sake of industries, mega projects and urbanization. This is a slow process of extermination of farmers by the rising capitalism. The farmers were driven out of their land to make place for the emerging industrial capital. We can truly say that the capitalism was built on the graves of the peasants.

The Ultra-neo-liberal programme of the NDA Government

In the name of doubling the income of the farmer, the NDA government is making a way for the corporate companies like that of Ambani and Adani to enter into farm business. Once the corporate companies enter into agricultural production and start procuring food grains from the farmers, we might anticipate unregulated food grain market. These industrialists will be free to sell their stock anywhere in the world where they get maximum prices.

The programme of agricultural reform adopted since Independence have failed to bring about the required changes in the agrarian structure. One report by P.D. Ojha further brings out the truth that, "In no sphere of public activity in our country since Independence has the hiatus (gap) between the precept and practice, between

policy-pronouncements and actual execution, been as great as in the domain of agriculture."

Manmade famines of the past; and more in the making

I would like to quote an event that occurred in the 18th century. Between 1757 and 1766, the East India Company received 6,000,000 Pounds from the natives of India as gifts. In 1769 and 1770, the English brought about a famine by buying up all the rice with the same money they had received from the natives, and by refusing to sell it again, except at exorbitant prices. In 1866, in just one province of Orissa, more than a million Hindus perished of hunger. Nevertheless, an attempt was made to replenish the Indian State Treasury out of the price at which necessities of life were sold to the starving people. This is also very true about Bengal famine in 1942. Churchill did not accept the fact of famine as Mr. Gandhi did not die of famine.

The first most important change we are witnessing is that the state has abdicated its role in the market and in the economy as a whole. The government's understanding of the farmers' knowledge is not only flawed but also insulting. The December issue of the *EPW* articulates it well, "The major thrust of the protest suggests the government's steps are not in farmers' favour but in the favour of big business. Farmers understand the logic of the market driven by private interests." ■

Alex Tuscano is founder of Praxis Research and Training Centre. He began a school near Bangalore to empower the rural children to participate in nation building.

Convenience Is Not Progress!

For the first time in the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report, climate threats have universally topped the chart of global concerns for 2021. Scarily, the top five global risks according to these 750 leaders for 2021 are all environmental.

DR. MARIANNE FURTADO DE NAZARETH

If we look at the world around us in just this past decade - inventions which were hailed by us at the turn of the century, are now banned and in the dock to be phased out. Man who considers himself master of the universe, has had to understand that a number of his inventions which bring convenience to his life and living, do untold damage to the planet around us.

Fossil fuel and why we must stop using them

Take the first very basic example of the energy that we use, made from coal. We have hammered the planet using coal, which is a type of fossil fuel. This is a nonrenewable energy source whose extraction always damages the environment. Fossil fuels are made from decomposing plants and animals. The side effect of burning and the use of coal-fired energy is the cause of the ozone layer around our planet being depleted and Climate Change becoming a very real threat, not tomorrow or in the future - but right now this minute.

The difference between these two types

of resources is that renewable resources can naturally replenish themselves while nonrenewable resources cannot. There are four major types of nonrenewable resources: oil, natural gas, coal, and nuclear energy. These sources of energy are collectively called fossil fuels and scientists have educated us on why we need to move to renewable energy as against the use of these old dangerous sources.

Today, much of the world has realised the need to phase out fossil fuel usage and help heal our planet by using renewable energies like wind and solar which are freely available across the globe. Yes, they are expensive to invest in and yes there were hiccups when they were first installed, but today most of the world's leaders have realised that if their countries are to progress, it is in the direction of renewable energies.

The inconvenient truth about plastic

Another 'progressive' invention is plastic. It has seeped into every aspect of our lives. But now man is looking back at the horror he has created,

which does not seem to be going away, unless it is totally banned. Plastic is a material made to last forever, yet 33 % of all plastic - water bottles, bags and straws - are used just once and thrown away. Plastic cannot biodegrade; it breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces. Disposed plastic materials can remain in the environment for up to 2,000 years and longer.

Toxic chemicals leach out of plastic and are found in the blood and tissue of nearly all of us human beings. Exposure to them is linked to cancers, birth defects, impaired immunity, endocrine disruption and other ailments. There are thousands of landfills in our country and buried beneath each one of them, toxic chemicals from plastics drain out and seep into groundwater, flowing downstream into lakes and rivers.

Wildlife become entangled in plastic, they eat it or mistake it for food and feed it to their young, and it is found littered in even extremely remote areas of the Earth. Everything suffers: tourism, recreation, business, the health of humans, animals, fish and birds, because of plastic pollution. The financial damage continuously being inflicted is inestimable.

Finally the world is taking note

For the first time in the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report, climate threats

have universally topped the chart of global concerns for 2021. The report annually interacts with more than 750 global experts and decision-makers, who are asked to rank their biggest worries regarding the year ahead.

Scarily, the top five global risks according to these 750 leaders for 2021 are all environmental. These include extreme weather events, failure of climate-change mitigation and adaptation, environmental damage and disasters such as oil spills and radioactive contamination, major biodiversity loss and natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions.

Borge Brende, President of the World Economic Forum, said: "The political landscape is polarised, sea levels are rising and climate fires are burning. This is the year when world leaders must work with all sectors of society to repair and reinvigorate our systems of cooperation, not just for short-term benefit but for tackling our deep-rooted risks."

So, instead of blaming it all on politics, let us try and do our small bit, by cutting back on plastic usage with determination, and looking at solar panels for our external lights and water heating. ■

Dr. Marianne Furtado de Nazareth is former Assistant Editor of *The Deccan Herald*; and is a professor of media studies.





Camaraderie of the Kisaan

Here is the bleak picture of the journey of food on our plates. “About 53.37% of farm households earn income less than poverty line income. Bihar, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, Puducherry and Jharkhand had more than 60% farm households earning less than poverty line while Telangana, Sikkim, Gujarat, Lakshadweep, Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana, D&N Haveli, Meghalaya, Punjab, Kerala, Chandigarh and Delhi had less than 40% farm households earning below poverty line.”

MUSKAN RAJ

The son of the soil, whom we used so affectionately for every election campaign to favour populist sentiments, is now on the streets fighting laws that can single handedly shatter his livelihood. The recent Farm Laws have irked every Indian farmer, and rightly so, given the nature of the laws passed and its repercussions, which will only push the farmer into a deeper hole of poverty and starvation.

Disquieting statistics

According to a report by The Hindu, “Nearly 90% of India’s farmers have less than two hectares of land.” The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) says, “The average farm household makes less than Rs. 6500 a month from all sources of income.” Farmers survive with this meagre income, whereas a resident in a metropolitan city spends more on his gym membership. Adding to their strains, they have to find funds for seeds, pesticides, fertilisers, irrigation equipment, rent, electricity, and more. They find temporary solace with money lenders and end up paying heavy interests. According to a research conducted by Agricultural Economics Research Unit (AERU), “52% of farm households were under debt in 2012-13”.

“About 53.37% of farm households earn income less than poverty line income. Bihar, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, Puducherry and Jharkhand had more than 60% farm households earning less than poverty line while Telangana, Sikkim, Gujarat, Lakshadweep, Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana, D&N Haveli, Meghalaya, Punjab, Kerala, Chandigarh and Delhi had less than 40% farm households earning below poverty line.” This gives us a bleak picture of the journey of food on our plates.

The new farm laws

Despite this predicament the ruling government has made an open neoliberalist economic decision that favour the corporate conglomerates and the bourgeoisie. Karl Marx had indicated it when he said, “Capitalism teach a man to fish, but the fish he catches aren’t his. They belong to the person paying him to fish, and if he’s lucky, he might get paid enough to buy a few fish for himself.”

Removal of the minimum support price will give the control of farmers’ produce to the big sharks who are ready to make immense profits out of this opportunity which will be a cause of downfall of any poor farmer who owns less than 1 hectare of land. The new farm laws do not impose any levy or cess for sale of farm produce outside the mandi (APMC) and provides the authority to the centre to regulate farm produce

in the case of extraordinary circumstances. These laws will destroy the mandi system and a farmers’ life will depend on the whims and fancies of rich businessmen sitting in Starbucks. How can these poor farmers compete with corporate oligarchs? How can these farmers feed themselves and us? How long will a farmer suffer silently?

The protest

The farmer brethren are rising in resistance, they are organising themselves to persuade the government to take back these discriminatory laws. They are singing the ballads of struggle in unison. They have mustered the courage and every other resource available to make this a long-standing fight. The protest sites have had people from the national media clique who have accused the protestors of being funded by opposition parties, of being Khalistanis or Khalistani sympathisers, and last but not the least, of being anti-national.

We live in times where any dissent is depicted as going against the country’s ethos and considered to be insinuation of violence. We live in a country today where the ruling class considers itself as the embodiment of patriotism and nationalism. Even a poor farmer has to face the wrath of this jingoism propagated by our very own prime time channels.

The farmers remain undeterred from the agenda of the protest. They have a sense of clarity in their demands and continue to resist the attempts of compromise by the government. The protest has increasing support from all over the world: the working class, petty bourgeoisie, intellectual class and celebrities are standing alongside the cause of the farmers today. The camaraderie of the farmers is exhibited in how everything from bedding to food is arranged within the protest site to make this an enduring and stable struggle. “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries unite!” - by... you know who. ■

Muskan Raj is a student of media studies and engages with social and political conversations.

Myopic Vision of History, Skewed Narratives, and Legislations of Doom

Even though the protests for the CAA and NRC and NPR have lost its momentum due to the pandemic, to the relief of the state, it has only built the confidence of the state to push several more legislations against minorities indiscriminately. All of these laws emerged in rapid succession, especially during the pandemic, with hardly any challenge as people are unaware and more obsessed about a virus that will kill less people than communal tension and hatred.

SALOMI JACOB

The media seems to fan the fears of the majority of their own dwindling numbers against the swelling of the minorities. Facts point out otherwise. Christians have dropped in numbers and the Muslim community has marginally increased. However it's the latter that brings the ire of the public, failing to recognise their own communities specific numbers and proportions compared to the minorities in this country. In totality minorities make 16–17% and the Hindus 66% of the total population. There has been a steady drop in rate of growth of population of each community across decades, but those numbers are not factored in. So where is this unfounded fear stemming from of minorities taking over?

The growing narrative

A narrative has been carefully crafted with no or hardly any opposition. That narrative taken from the general Islamophobia is spreading globally. India just happens to harness those fears for its own advantage to keep up communal tensions. Media plays an essential role in maintaining and sustaining such fears. Sentiment seems to hold sway over facts. This disbelief in facts, the

isolation, and disconnect that we choose to live in come from the myopic vision of history we hold of each other's religion. The emergence of a highly skewed narrative of booming minorities is a very colonial insecurity which we have not shed decades after independence. A method of divide and rule prevails. Conjectural history erases histories of minorities who have been around in India for well over two millennia and have been peaceful settlers mixing with the locals. However, the dominant narrative of being labelled as marauders and colonisers prevail—a convenient narrative erasing a millennium and more worth of identity. The dominant narrative prevails and the 'enemy' marked. Victimhood narrative have willing takers amongst the majority.

This misconception has been amplified, especially with economic turmoil that happens periodically in the country. Economy is something we are unable to control; so, we direct our ire and frustrations towards marginalised communities and minorities as they are easy to be demonised and marked as outsiders. They become clear identifiable targets. When the economy is struggling we see the automatic rise of communalism. This



pattern has been consistent and building with vigour in the last few decades.

There seemed to be a rigorous proliferation of intolerance around the 1980s in this country and it coincided with the economic uncertainties of that time. That insecurity coupled with communal tension eventually led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992. Since then there has been a sense of unspoken uncertainty for minorities in this country. In the more recent past it has reared its ugly head. Idea of secularism seems to be on unstable grounds, particularly after the Prime Minister of the country laid the foundation stone for the Ram Mandir over a destroyed centuries-old Mosque. This is a person who is supposed to represent the tenets of the democratic constitution that upholds justice, liberty, equality and fraternity for all, yet willing to place foundation stone on a building which becomes a reminder of the precarious position of the minorities when none of these principles apply to them. A reminder that secularism is only on paper.

While the bulk of the violence is experienced by the Muslim community, it does not mean that Christians are untouched by these changes. They may have the protection of their brethren in the West, that would put social and political sanctions on India if India does nothing to prevent direct attacks on the Christian community. However, that is not good enough, especially if they live as

secondary citizens in this country because of their religion. If they live as equal citizens guaranteed by law, should they be living constantly looking over their shoulders? Direct attack may be sporadic and far in between to really get the international media's attention. Legislations, policy changes, orders have come about demeaning their status in this country. These attempts seem innocuous to draw international attention.

New legislations: Undemocratic in content and process

Demonetisation and the establishment of the GST knocked the economy to its knees. Just before we went into the lockdown, our economy was already suffering with high levels of unemployment and lowered industry growth rate. Around that time, we see the NRC, CAA and NPR being introduced by the Indian State, feeding into the majority's insecurity of growing numbers and pushing the minorities to a level of discontent that they came out onto the street to point out its constitutional invalidity and its clear intention of brewing communalism. If legislations like these can be easily passed with hardly any opposition, when will the Christian community be targeted similarly? 'Each for one's own' attitude can be highly detrimental. Even though the protests for the CAA and NRC and NPR have lost its momentum due to the pandemic, to the relief of the state, it has only built

the confidence of the state to push several more legislations against minorities indiscriminately. The show of dissent by the people was followed by a flurry of legalisations that reminds the minorities of their secondary status in a country that professes secularism but heading towards a theocracy. The vilification of the Muslim community by the media during the pandemic was for an obvious reason, especially after the spontaneous movement of citizens protesting against draconian laws of citizenship. The courts, in the Tablaqi Jammal case, eventually had to step in to change the narrative, but the damage was already done through trial by media. So, when laws have come out in direct attack of minorities in the last few months, the people's cavalier attitude comes from the narrative fed to us by the media during the pandemic.

Our complacency and willingness to give in to a narrative without question has snowballed into legislations that have been passed in the most undemocratic fashion. No debate, no discussion and hasty passing of the laws in parliament and legislature make these actions a challenge to democracy. While Christians may think that as a community they have been spared of such intolerance and hatred, they need to understand that they are not out of the waters and on safe land. The multiple legislations and ordinances and policy changes that have occurred in Karnataka recently should make us sit up and observe what is happening around us.

Karnataka, the vanguard of the South

Karnataka, seen as the model state enthusiastic to implement these provisions after Uttar Pradesh, has become the experimental ground of the South.

The New Education Policy clearly moving towards privatisation of education would have a direct impact on minority educational institutions across Bengaluru. A lot of them subsidised education for many communities. If forced to privatise, this assistance would be reduced considerably, alienating many from accessible quality education. If secularism is targeted, Article 29 of the Constitution that gives rights to minorities to set up educational institutions for the preservation of their own communities will become defunct. The targeting of the prestigious Jamia Milia Islamia

and Aligarh University during the CAA protests is indicative of what is coming ahead for minority institutions that does toe the line.

Funding for minority development from Karnataka has been slashed by 44% for 2020-21, and many welfare schemes for the minorities have been withdrawn.

The Minority Community Doctoral Student's Fellowship has been cut by 66%. Reducing their fellowship from Rs. 25000 to Rs. 8333 with the ultimatum to finish their PhD in three years or pay back the state at 12% interest. The State declared that these were measures taken as a result of the pandemic, which seems like a weak excuse.

The Prevention of Cow/Cattle Slaughter Bill pushed and approved by Karnataka State Legislature, with our representatives coming into the legislature adorning the saffron around their necks shouldn't be taken lightly. The bill completely interferes into our food habits and dictates what we should eat, disregarding our liberty and privacy which are constitutional guarantees. It deprives many of affordable nutrition as the most affordable meat is taken away. It impacts several who are employed in the abattoirs, meat dispensing shops, leather industries who are predominantly from marginalised Muslim and Christian communities, and a few castes from the Hindu fold. We are the second largest beef exporter in the world, however, that industry will not be impacted. It is the small and marginalised business that will be affected. The largest self employed community, the Muslims, become the easy target. Farmers are going to be impacted as they are unable to get rid of non-performing and non-productive cattle, adding to their already heavy burdens.

The provisions of punishment are greater than those given for grievous crimes against humans themselves. The bill states that those 'acting in good faith are free from persecution' thereby justifying lynching. If this does not raise your curiosity on who it is directed to we need to relook at our privilege and appreciate the security that we have. However, this is not the reality for majority of the population that is impacted by such a legislation. The persistence with which the present Karnataka State Government pushed this as an ordinance as last recourse should make us look closer at such intentions.

Women and Love Jihad

The Love Jihad laws or conversion laws seem to have piqued the curiosity of the people. However, they have deadly repercussions on women and children across communities. Women are now again reduced to the whims and fancies of a communal state. Liberty, Freedom and Human dignity somehow do not apply to women who make decisions independently as adults. Our lives as women will be micromanaged. Caste and religious rigidities will remain intact and more performative. Indignities against women will be continued with more fervour, all of this to maintain religious and caste purity of communities. When communal tensions are high, women and children will be sent back into private spaces with limited access to public life.

The contents in the bill, legislations, orders intend to stoke a fire and to create unrest which would lead to communal tensions. All of these seem to be needed to distract people from the State's huge and obvious economic insecurities, with the drying up GST funds from the Centre, the pandemic related regression and the general slowdown we have experienced since demonetisation and the implementation of GST. An incontrovertible connection of economic insecurity and communalism is the writing on the wall - a tried and tested method to distract people from the

economic insecurities that stares them in the face. This is one thing that could unite people, create a bloc of resistance. However, communalism is effectively used to break any sense of solidarity that can be built.

The idea of secularism has been battered and almost threadbare now.

With the Centre and respective state governments pushing for legislations that have ulterior motives to demean the idea of secularism, the minorities should be aware and resist back. All these legislations may seem innocuous to

many, but to the minorities it is a reminder of their secondary status in this country, a country that should guarantee liberty, religious freedom and human dignity. All these laws seem to have a domino effect and the fall has just begun. To prevent the unending cycle of destruction and hatred, we all need to acknowledge our frailty in isolation and learn to work together as communities to challenge the falsehood. All of these laws emerged in rapid succession, especially during the pandemic with hardly any challenge as people are unaware and more obsessed about a virus that will kill less people than communal tension and hatred. Our silence or willing ignorance will be at our own peril. ■

Salomi Jacob has her studies from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. She is a professor of sociology; and is a strong social critic.

To prevent the unending cycle of destruction and hatred, we all need to acknowledge our frailty in isolation and learn to work together as communities to challenge the falsehood.



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Right to Education During and After the Pandemic

Relegating education to the backbenches during and after the pandemic will have wider consequences than merely creating learning poverty and uneducated individuals in the world.

A FRANCIS OFM

At this critical juncture as the pandemic continues to rage on, the general rule of thumb is to focus on the essentials. It is a common-sense approach, which is by far the simpler, yet a practical strategy to cope with the shocks and the aftershocks of the day.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) upholds education as the fundamental right of all. UDHR promotes it as the single most essential right in realizing all other human rights. UNESCO, UNICEF and many other international human rights agencies advocate indefatigably for its realization throughout the globe. Hence, the question, “Did countries across the globe give due priority to this fundamental human right during the pandemic or has it been pushed to the backbenches?” cannot be sidelined. Most importantly, it should find its place of enquiry and reflection in our day-to-day political and civic conversations.

The disruption and the ‘new normal’

The ‘UN Policy Brief on Education During Covid-19 and Beyond’, released in August 2020, reported that COVID-19 disruption on global education systems is the largest in history. Cautioning about a series of ‘generational catastrophes’ looming in store for us, due to the closure of schools, the UN reported that nearly 1.6 billion learners from more than 190 countries across all continents were affected by the pandemic. Statistically, this includes 94 per cent of the global student population and most worryingly, about 99 per cent of it is from the low and lower-middle income countries.

Capitalizing on the innovative instrumentality of the modern technologies, many countries fast-tracked a series of viable alternatives to the existing learning approaches. A big shift occurred in an unprecedented speed, particularly, on the delivery modes of education, using the internet and smart gadgets. Virtual learning swiftly became the ‘new normal’.

The ground reality

The technology-driven learning mode, far from being the panacea for handling the disruption, created formidable challenges on the global education systems. Data collected in a survey conducted by UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank on the National Education Responses to COVID-19 confirms that 463 million students across the world are cut off from learning due to their lack of access to the required learning equipment and the availability of the necessary technology. This number equals to 31 percent of the total global student population! Unsurprisingly, three out of four who are cut off from learning are from poorer countries and poorer households. This, sadly, is the ground reality!

The question, “Are we giving adequate priority to education, during this pandemic?” does not cast any ambiguity as it gathers its answer with candid straightforwardness. Commenting on India’s response, Aparajitha Narayanan, a Legal Intern for the United Nations International Residual Mechanism from Criminal Tribunal (UNIRMCT) and for Global Rights Compliance, writes, “India has not ensured that its current education delivery systems are available to and accessible by all, this

educational disparity may lead to an upsurge in other endemic consequences like child labour and child marriage.” It indeed, is a shared saga in most countries of the Global South!

The present global crisis in education is not a temporary setback and will not wane when the vaccination conquers the pandemic. With all the required ingredients, it is heading towards creating a perfect storm of disaster on the global education systems and on humanity’s hope for education as a fundamental human right of all. As early as September 2020, Henrietta Fore, the executive director of UNICEF, alerted the world about the potential detrimental impacts of children missing school. Being out of school, they are driven to face the risk of getting exposed to a host of vulnerable living conditions such as child labour, sexual abuse, and all kind of emotional and physical violence. It could affect their mental and psychological health and integrity.

Validating Fore’s warning, on September 27, The Washington Post published an article exposing the surge in child labour, teen-pregnancies and forced marriages in poorer and developing countries. The article, “As COVID-19 closes schools, the world’s children go to work”, featured news from Asian and African countries, where children from poorer families are increasingly pressured to enter into illegal and hazardous labour arena.

Generational catastrophes

An estimate of 24 million students who will be dropping out of school due to COVID-19 is the projection of UN for the post pandemic era. As a vicious cycle, this is going to cast long shadows of generational catastrophes on the future of the world. In 2019, prior to the Pandemic, the World Bank highlighted an increasing phenomenon of learning crisis the world was getting into, namely the ‘learning poverty’, which implied that one is unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of ten. With the disruption on the global education systems during the pandemic, we could only imagine how bad the learning poverty will be in the coming years!

Relegating education to the backbenches during and after the pandemic will have wider

consequences than merely creating learning poverty and uneducated individuals in the world. It will horrendously impact on the fabric of our living as peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies, and will definitely ruin our vision for eradication of poverty, unemployment, homelessness and destitution. Most of all, it can create a stumbling block in preventing violence, abuses and discrimination along the lines of gender, sex, race, religion, caste, income, language and culture.

In case we have forgotten the promise of education, it is good to ignite our memories with a reminder from Nelson Mandela, “The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It can contribute to nation-building and reconciliation... Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation...”

Can we truly hope that the governments, policymakers and other stakeholders will stay vigilant to avert the projected exacerbation of the global learning crisis in the post pandemic times? Can we say that moving forward, the annual budgets of the nations will reflect sufficient funding to promote the education of all, with no exception to the socially and marginally poor? Can we expect that our annual celebration of the International Day of Education on 24th of this month under the theme “Recover and Revitalize education for the COVID-19 Pandemic Generation” will bind us all with a substantive promise and future of inclusivity, whether we live in the so-called Global North or in the Global South?

If governments and policymakers continue to envision matters of education as the way they envisioned it prior to, and during the pandemic, then there really is not much to believe that we are focusing on the essentials! ■

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■ Twenty thousand people gathered around Bangkok's Democracy Monument, the first public gathering on such scale for more than six years. Many of those present were not hardcore protest veterans but high school and university students. For them, this was their first battleground.

“We Want You to Be Under the Constitution”

IN PICTURES

SUPHATCHAYA SUETRONG

Although they may have different demands, the people of Thailand believe firmly that there must be major political change in Thailand. That common goal gave the Sunday protest (18 Oct, 2020) an atmosphere of hope that has been missing in the country since the military seized power in a 2014 coup.

The protest leaders were mostly young, their rhetoric filled with the internet jargon of their subculture. Toward the end, though, they reiterated clearly the three demands that have emerged from the growing youth movement for change: an end to the intimidation of pro-democracy campaigners and activists; the drafting of a new constitution; and the dissolution of parliament, including the



government-appointed Senate, followed by fresh elections. They also highlighted two key principles: opposition to military coups and so-called “grand coalition” governments, which have often been used to prevent change, and the desire for a truly constitutional monarchy.

The protest, by far the biggest since the emergence of COVID-19, took an unprecedented rally at Bangkok's Thammasat University at which students outlined a 10-point proposal to reform the monarchy - an action that places scores at risk of arrest under the lese-majeste provision of the constitution. Together, these protests amount to the breaking of a long-held taboo in Thailand: public discussion of the role of the monarchy in politics, coupled with calls for the institution to be open to public examination.

In the past, Thailand's young people have often been labeled docile, unquestioning, and apathetic. But that has changed, and support for the reform movement is spreading to other sectors of society. Why? Perhaps because the real message is “enough is enough.” Six years of the military-backed regime of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha have laid bare the militaristic

politics brought about by the coup he led, which have allowed the elite to appoint members of the Senate, control parliament and put a prime minister in power. The system has also facilitated judicial interventions to destroy opposition political parties, such as Future Forward. We are heading into a dead end, and people know that there is no way for them but to express their dissatisfaction except by taking to the streets.

In this turbulent time, courage is needed. Politicians, the media, and celebrities must stand with the Thai people and democracy, utilizing their influence. Protests must be bigger and held in more regions. There is a need to create international pressure on the government while learning tactics and strategies from successful protest movements around the world and spreading the values and ideals of democracy throughout Thailand. There is a well-known slogan among young people, and we stand by it: Let it end with our generation! ■

Suphatchaya Suetrong is from Thailand. She is a student of journalism and took part in the protests in Bangkok.



Biodegradation

The earth is called “womb and tomb” because all life is born of the earth and all life returns to it.

FR K M GEORGE

On a morning walk one is likely to see rotting bodies of animals like stray dogs and cats crushed by speeding vehicles. Not a pleasant sight, of course. Yet all living things, humans and animals, birds and plants all go through the decaying process as they return to the dust of the earth. The earth is called “womb and tomb” because all life is born of the earth and all life returns to it.

In the heyday of plastic, the word ‘biodegradable’ was rather detestable to many. That word refers to all that is susceptible to decomposition following death. Naturally one may not like to be reminded of death and decay. Yet as we began to realise the perils of plastic that never decomposes, ‘biodegradable’ became a cherished word. The new ideal is not the imperishability of things like plastic but the perishability or biodegradability of material products. Along with the word ‘eco-friendly’ the word ‘biodegradability’ has become the marketing key for any industrial product. We should not be surprised if one day they scribble these two words on nuclear bombs and missiles in the competitive international weapon market.

Human beings have always been seeking *Amrit*, the elixir of immortality. Although we humans call ourselves *Martya* or mortal we like to give names like Amartya or Amrita to our beloved

children! What a longing for immortality!

The legendary Upanishadic sage Yajnavalkya divided his material wealth between his two wives. One of them, Katyayani, was very pleased to get her share. The other one, Maitreyi, asked her husband: ‘Does this wealth bring me immortality?’ ‘No’, said the sage. ‘Then what should I do with things that do not give me immortality?’ quizzed the learned lady.

Nobel laureate Indian economist Amartya Sen says Maitreyi’s question had influenced his reflections on economic theory and practise. Remember the rich young man who earnestly asked Jesus how he could inherit immortal life, and the radically shocking answer Jesus the homeless gave him: ‘Go, give away all your wealth and then follow me.’ He went away sad, says the Bible. Armed with Artificial Intelligence, Genome sequencing, gene editing and biotechnology moves ahead

to create super humans and perfect designer babies out of ordinary mortals. Methuselah the legendary biblical giant who lived 969 years seems to be the target hero for our Enhancement technologies.

However, the Corona pandemic seems to drive home the immediacy of the perennial question of death and decay. It can’t be answered simply at the material realm only, but we need to get glimpses of what lies beyond - in faith, hope and love. ■



The Right to Exhaustion

We have a return of a Slave State logic which demands work with an enforced, coerced sense of gratefulness. We are called upon to make sacrifices, to compromise, to over-compensate, and to forego the natural consequence of this kind of strain: exhaustion.

DR SREEVIDYA SURENDRAN

In the fledgling days of the first lockdown brought about by the COVID pandemic—when the world still imagined a quick recovery, and the phrase “the new normal” was actually new—something that was erstwhile unfathomable came to pass. For the first time in a very long time humanity was forced to take a sabbatical. Work stopped. Offices shut down. That meeting that could never be cancelled? It got cancelled. In the competition between life and work, the living seemed to have leaned towards staying alive. Or so it seemed.

Work from home and its spill-over

It did not take very long for us to realise staying alive—living—came at a cost; one which most of us are not quite able to pay without mortgaging our safety and health (a concept that women everywhere have been very familiar with for a very long time: only our risks are not restricted to viruses). We woke quickly to the realisation that economics, not good sense, decides the risks that we are willing to take. The first casualty in the attempt to win the war against work-inertia was the home front. The advent of the work-from-home era led to an almost manic-level demand on the productive and creative capacities of the work force. The already narrow isthmus separating work and a life besides work, was now engulfed in a deluge of spill-over from which there was no escape. Literally.

The common outlets for unwinding were no longer feasible. There was nowhere to go, no one to meet, and the camera might still be running. Coming from a work culture that already valorises workaholism and treats burn-out as either martyrdom or weakness, this new format spelt

exacerbated levels of over-work. As the internet (that wonderful double-edged sword) began to collapse time and space through virtual assignments across the planet, caregivers came under infernal pressure and unpaid labour went further unacknowledged at a time when everyone had eyes only for a screen. Let us not even get started on the subject of attempting to use a single system across multiple demands and workers—if you can get/afford a system that is. Coupled with the permanent sense of surveillance and the near constant shadow of work, was the ever-present threat of exposure and infection: a winning recipe for mental and physical anguish. Senior level high performers were required to perform even more. And fresh recruits lived with the possibility of lay-offs hanging above their heads like the sword of Damocles.

Essential workers were left with no choice

While the gloom of zoom cast shadows of distress on the milling populace privileged enough to work/study from home, the story of those without the advantage of a safe, cocooned work space is far more fraught. Essential workers like health-workers, sanitation workers, household helpers, maintenance staff do not have the dubious luxury of choice. These essential workers are required to do function within high-risk, stressful environment for compensation that is ingloriously unequal to their task. Furthermore, they have a Schrodinger's cat existence in terms of social acceptance—they are simultaneously portrayed as brave heroes and carriers of contagion. Their work is invaluable, yet they carry the stigma of exposure and possible transference. The number of incidents where health workers were

attacked or evicted from the home space especially in the early months of the lockdown are symptomatic of a deep rot of distrust and entitlement that seems to have seeped into the fabric of productive

(utilitarian)society. Overriding all the rhetoric of heroic bravery is the fine print that states without a shadow of doubt that the employment is subject to terms and conditions, and any worker is dispensable. Consequently, we have a return of a Slave State logic which demands work with an enforced, coerced sense of gratefulness. They are required to risk and to be grateful while they do so. This is particularly relevant in the case of household help and daily-service providers. These individuals need their employment to stay financially solvent. They are required to choose between risking their lives or dying of poverty. Or walking miles and miles to a home they may not reach to a future they cannot imagine.

The natural consequence

These facts are self-evident to any individual that has to earn a living in 2020/21. But what we need to pay attention to, is the fact that we treat these as ‘facts’. This is a choice, made carefully. The massive restructuring that the pandemic mandated has curiously resulted in a work-life format designed to dress exploitation in clothes of social responsibility. In the essay *In Praise of Idleness* written in the early 1930s post World War I, Bertrand Russell writes with eerie prescience of a brilliant social critic, “The old chaos was restored, those whose work was demanded were made to work long hours, and the rest were left to starve as unemployed. Why? Because work is a duty, and a man should not receive wages in proportion to what he has produced, but in proportion to his virtue as exemplified by his industry”. “These troubled times”, the favourite catch phrase of work emails, are used as a justification for the excessive demands placed on the physical and mental capacities of the individual worker. We are called upon to make sacrifices, to compromise, to over-compensate, and to forego the natural consequence of this kind of strain: exhaustion.

Which part of the work force actually gets to call for a break? If they choose to step back,

The massive restructuring that the pandemic mandated has curiously resulted in a work-life format designed to dress exploitation in clothes of social responsibility.

where will they go? What is the social price to pay for declaring that one is too tired to work harder? Or that one is too scared to step out to work? The rhetoric of productivity/profit equals

existence/validity has been a recipe for self-destruction in the COVID era, especially when paired with self-righteous abnegation that is being demanded as the pound of flesh for the privilege of employment. While leisure or idleness (what Russell championed), are seemingly out of reach, the least we can expect should be an acknowledgment of the bone-deep weariness that living and laboring with the fear of death can bring about. Where is the logic in prioritising anachronistic deadlines, while actual death lurks in every errant handshake? The absurdity of prioritising the material paper-trail of targets met over physical and mental fatigue cannot be exaggerated

The right to be tired

There is value in being tired. It is a reminder of work done and an acknowledgment of the rigours that you have put yourself through. Though it is usually portrayed in a negative light, we can all agree that to be negative in the age of Corona may actually be a good thing. We are living in traumatic times which requires an unhealthy level of repression to carry on a semblance of accepted normalcy. Sacrificing the few signs of our continued humanity in pursuit of a false image of resilience and creativity will result in an emotionally stunted, mentally desiccated work force incapable of actually taking ownership or innovating—ultimately counter-productive and generally sabotaging.

Everyone has a right to be tired. Especially those of us who have had to work harder just to stay alive or to keep alive. Humanity is at a moral cross-road where it must take stock of what it means to ‘survive’ and what it means to ‘live’—and what it demands of the living as a justification for living in the name of creative employment. ■

Dr. Sreevidya Surendran is a sound academician and versatile artiste. She is a professor of Literature.

Spirituality and Social Movements

RICHARD ROHR OFM

I think there are three basic levels of social ministry, and none is better than the other. I believe all are the movement of the Holy Spirit within us for the sake of others. I like to imagine a river flooding out of control—symbolizing the circumstances and injustices that bring about suffering—overflowing its banks and sweeping those in its path off their feet.

At the first level, we rescue drowning people from the swollen river, dealing with the immediate social problem right in front of us: someone hungry comes to our door and we offer them some food, or invite them inside. These are hands-on, social service ministries, like the familiar soup kitchen or food pantry. Such works will always look rather generous, Christian, charitable, and they tend to be admired, if not always imitated.

At the second level, there are ministries that help people not to fall into the swollen river in the first place, or show them how to survive despite falling in. In general, these are the ministries of education and healing. Most of the religious orders in the Catholic Church in the last three hundred years went in that direction, filling the world with schools, hospitals, and social service ministries that empowered people and gave them new visions and possibilities for their lives.

Finally, on the third level, some ministries build and maintain a dam to stop the river from flooding in the first place. This is the work of social activism and advocacy, critique of systems, organizing, speeches, boycotts, protests, and resistance against all forms of systemic injustice and deceit. It is the gift of a few, but a much-needed gift that we only recently began to learn and practice. It seeks systemic change and not just individual conversion.

I don't think most people feel called to activism; I myself don't. It was initially humiliating to admit this, and I lost the trust and admiration of some friends and supporters. Yet as we come to know our own soul gift more clearly, we almost always have to let go of certain "gifts" so we can do our one or two things well and with integrity. I believe that if we can do one or two things wholeheartedly in our life, that is all God expects.

The important thing is that we all should be doing something for the rest of the world! We have to pay back, particularly those of us born into privilege and comfort. We also must respect and support the other two levels, even if we cannot do them. Avoid all comparisons about better or lesser, more committed or less committed; those are all ego games.

An American case study

The deeply spiritual foundation of the Civil Rights movement is often underemphasized. The movement that sought political and legal equality for Black Americans was grounded in faith. The devout Christian commitment of virtually all its leaders, from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Fannie Lou Hamer to John Lewis, inspired them to work for the dignity and equality of all. Rosemarie Freeney Harding (1930–2004), the wife of civil rights leader Vincent Harding (1931–2014), recalls the power of the Holy Spirit working in the movement during that time.

One of the most exciting things for me about being in the freedom movement was discovering other people who were compelled by the Spirit at the heart of our organizing work, and who were also interested in the mysticism that can be nurtured in social justice activism. We experienced something extraordinary in the freedom

movement, something that hinted at a tremendous potential for love and community and transformation that exists here in this scarred, spectacular country. For many of us, that "something" touched us in the deepest part of our selves and challenged us in ways both personal and political.

There was an energy moving in those times. Something other than just sit-ins and voter registration and Freedom Schools. Something represented by these signal efforts but broader. As I traveled around the country in the sixties, it seemed to me that the nation—from the largest community to the smallest—was permeated with hope; the idea that people can bring about transformation; that what we do matters. . .

Martin and Coretta [King] and Anne Braden and Ella Baker and others like them had a beautiful effect on people who spent time with them. Living and working in their presence hastened changes in your own thoughts, your reactions, your priorities; even if you weren't always cognizant of the shift. . . Being constantly in the presence of people who lived so fervently in the power of nonviolence, who believed and acted from the understanding that love and forgiveness were essential tools for social justice; being surrounded by people like that fed those commitments in me, in many of us. And it infused the nation. . .

For a lot of people in the Movement, our participation gave us a craving for spiritual depth. . . Sometimes not knowing what was right or wrong in a situation, they had to be quiet about it. Had to go somewhere and just meditate about it. Pray on it. . .

Contemplating anger

So many works of social justice have been undone by people who do all the fighting from their angry selves. Today's practice invites us to deal with our anger contemplatively, not just for ourselves but for those we seek to help and even those with whom we are in conflict. Teacher Dan Edwards writes: The gift that contemplative practice brings to our emotions is awareness, the mental space to confront our emotional state in

The important thing is that we all should be doing something for the rest of the world! We have to pay back, particularly those of us born into privilege and comfort.

a safe way. . . Anger is the dominant emotion for many activists. . . Anger is not a bad or negative thing; it is actually the fuel that feeds our quest

for justice. It is when we let anger lead to hateful actions that we lose its beneficial potential. . . It is imperative that we realize that often the injustice or wrongdoing isn't personal but rather a societal ill and will always coexist with the peaceful lives we work hard to live.

Practice: Stop, breathe, reflect and respond

Once I am aware that anger is arising, I stop. I breathe in and out, and I pay attention to my breath, so that I can come back into my body and ground myself. I breathe until the dominating voices of anger dissipate and my focus rests comfortably on my breath and the current moment. I can now begin to reflect on the situation from a grounded place.

I then reflect on my personal ties to this wrongdoing and examine the reasons why it is affecting me so. . . Most of the real work is done here, and this is where contemplative practice will become an invaluable tool. It is your contemplative mind that puts up signs like highway markers that point right back to you and encourage you to heal yourself from anger before healing others.

Take as much time as you need to reflect. In the end, I respond after I have reflected for some time on the act or situation. If the situation requires an immediate response, I may not respond at all—not because I am being passive or ignorant but because I am aware of how connected I am to the situation and how deeply personal my response may be. If I feel that I am not able to react from a grounded place, then I won't. This method has helped keep me out of heated debates and actions that I would later feel the need to apologize for. So if your reactions are heated, give this method a shot. It may work for you. ■

Richard Rohr is a revered speaker and bestselling author. He is founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The Nyishi Identity

We were never taught to speak our tribal language in our homes since childhood. Now Hindi is the lingua franca in the state. Many of the tribal languages can revive only if we learn it and make effort to learn more about our roots.

BENO PANGYA

Arunachal Pradesh is inhabited by various ethnic groups and tribes. Each one of them has a distinct culture, tradition, faith, belief and a social pattern. It was then referred to as a 'hidden land'; and now as 'The land of the rising sun'. The state was earlier known as the NEFA (North East Frontier Agency), and it was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh on 20 January 1972.

Out of the many tribes, the Nyishi is the largest tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. Genealogically the Nyishi is a descendant of the great ancestor Aabhu Thanyi. I would like to tell you about my culture and my tribe, Nyishi. Our celebrations are an amalgamation of family beliefs and cultural traditions. My parents raised me with a number of beliefs that have had an impact on who I am today.

Nyokum, our festival

Our biggest festival is Nyokum. The term 'Nyokum' is composed of two words: 'Nyok' that means land and 'Kum' means togetherness. This could be the reason why celebrating this festival is considered no less than inviting all the Gods and Goddesses of the Universe. Nyokum is celebrated every year from 26–28 February. On these



days, Nyishi men and women gather at an open ground with their traditional attires, forming a big circle and holding hands. They sing the song 'Nyokum Bo Tapa Debe', while moving around in circles and performing traditional dances.

Our attire

The traditional attire of Nyishi women is a full or half-sleeve red blouse, and a top with a cream-coloured plain cloth, which is tucked tightly over the breast and envelops the body from the armpits to the centre of the calves, on top of the red blouse. A red cloth is then tied at the waist like a ribbon. A girdle consisting of round metals and cane is worn around the waist on top of the red cloth.

Without heavy ornaments our traditional attire is never complete. The ornaments comprise multicoloured beads, which are called 'tashang' that symbolises superiority of an individual in the society. Silver or bronze coins fixed with red beads are also worn as a choker on the neck, with heavy earrings and bracelets made out of various metals.

Men's attire consists of either a plain cream cloth or black and white stripe cloth that is worn the same way a woman wears the red cloth by the waist. Heavier tashang with thick beads are worn on their neck as accessories. They carry a sword as well known as 'aryok' covered in a bamboo sheath. The men wear a hat made out of dried bamboos and finished with a hornbill's beak and feathers.

The great Indian hornbill

Meanwhile, the great Indian hornbill is the state bird of Arunachal Pradesh. In recent years, it has been found that this bird is on the verge of extinction. The hornbills are now under preservation in sanctuaries. During traditional rites and rituals including weddings, however, Nyishi men still wear the hornbill hat.

Mithun

One of the main integral parts of Nyokum is animal sacrifice. Usually, a mithun is tethered to a structure called 'yugang' made up of bamboo. Mithun is akin to gold because it commands the highest value in the barter system. For that matter, this bovine—believed to be a symbol of peace and communal harmony—is sacrificed in many other religious ceremonies including wedding. At wedding it is compulsory for the groom's family to offer it to the bride. There has been a decrease in the number of animal sacrifice these days, but mithun still is sacred to the Nyishis and many other communities of the state just as how the cow is to many in mainland India.

Abandoned native tongue

In Arunachal Pradesh, each tribe including Nyishi, Adi, Apatani, Galo and others have their own languages but these are mainly used only in villages or amongst the elderly. To many people's surprise, Hindi is the lingua franca in the state. We were never taught to speak our tribal language in our homes since childhood. Many of the tribal languages can revive only if we learn it and make effort to learn more about our roots. Personally I have had difficulties in communicating with the elderly who can give us so much knowledge about our culture. I believe our language is a part of our culture and our identity.

These are beliefs that come straight to me from the values of my family. Cultural practices are a way of celebrating life. It constitutes norms and traditions which are exclusive to different regions and religions. Fortunately, the existence of these vibrant cultures is what makes the country rich and diverse. ■

Beno Pangya is from Itanagar, she loves to go back to her roots to understand and to preserve it.

The Toilsome Case of Domestic Workers

It is officially estimated that in India more than four million people are employed as domestic workers with wages below the statutory minimum wages. However, the unofficial figures put it as 50 million with nearly three-fourths of them being women and teenage girls.

DR VASUDHA MC

Domestic workers

Modern lifestyle, leisure and growing participation of women in the labour market have resulted in growth in demand and dependence on domestic workers in urban areas. In India, domestic work falls under the category of unregulated and underpaid work. Most of the domestic workers do not have any legal contract with their employers. This leaves them at the mercy of the employer who may choose to pay or deny paying when they are on leave.

It is officially estimated that in India more than four million people are employed as domestic workers with wages below the statutory minimum wages. However, the unofficial figures put it as 50 million with nearly three-fourths of them being women and teenage girls. These domestic helps are first and second generation mi-

grants mainly from rural areas living in extreme conditions of poverty in slums and transit shelters. With rise in the number of women gainfully employed, the dependence on domestic helpers has become an integral part and feature of urban middle and upper class psyche and culture.

Plight of domestic workers

But these families had to manage without the help of maids, cooks, nannies, drivers, gardeners, launderers and personal attendants once the COVID-19 lockdown began. These domestic helpers were virtually rendered jobless overnight, for which they were utterly not prepared. These maid-servants are married to auto drivers, construction workers, taxi drivers, street vendors, petty shopkeepers, industrial workers, security guards and the like who were also rendered jobless; putting their families in a crisis situation.

When the lockdown was announced, several housing complexes had banned domestic help; even where they were partially allowed to serve the old, sick and disabled, there was instruction not to share domestic workers owing to need to minimize the chance of wider transmission of the corona virus to multiple households in the complex. The sharing of maids helps domestic workers to earn more and it makes the domestic help affordable for the employer.

During the lockdown, being out of jobs, many migrant domestic workers reportedly left cities and returned to their natives. Not having

anything to live on, there has been a reverse migration of workers in huge numbers to cities in all parts of the country. Although the pandemic has affected all sections of society, the domestic helps are perhaps among the worst hit. They hardly have any savings to support them in the absence of work, and whatever little they had has been used up during the pandemic.

Fewer legal protections

The surveys reveal that in most of the metropolitan areas, these women get a monthly salary ranging from ₹ 3000–6000 per household per month, and each woman works in three to four households on an average. Young girls join their mothers to work as maids and look after children of families where both husband and wife are working. Though employers were mandated to pay their workers during the lockdown period, most of them were not paid, rendering it hardly possible to meet their expenses on food, shelter and clothing. Therefore, they were dependent on the goodwill and sympathy of their employers as none of the legislation has any way of holding the employer accountable. Over the years there have been several attempts to enact laws to ensure their rights such as minimum wages, regulating the number of working hours, mandating regular holidays, and addressing physical and sexual harassment, but nothing has been formalized.

The need of the hour is that we must stop looking at them as the carriers of disease. Secondly, domestic workers are equally vulnerable to the virus from people in the homes that they work, as they will need to move about in many different homes. These women also have children and elderly in their homes and need to stay healthy and work. And it is also time to recognize the value of their work in the lives of middle-class and upper middle-class households. They should no longer be viewed as “helpers” but recognized as workers and should have all the rights and privileges of workers as defined by our labour laws. It is unfortunate that despite being in such large number and being indispensable for their services they continue to be in the unorganized sector, which represents 90% of workers in India and are not being covered under the

labour laws relating to payment and welfare.

Though there are a few legal provisions that give them some degree of protection, such as the Unorganised Social Security Act 2008, Sexual Harassment against Women at Workplace Act, 2013, and some minimum wages provisions at the State level, there is no comprehensive legislation to address this sector. The Government directive to treat the workers, like government employees, factory workers, as being on duty during lockdown period, was not made applicable to them, rendering them more vulnerable to hardships and untold miseries, and they continue to be dependent on the goodwill of their employers.

Incomplete efforts

On March 31, 2020, a public interest litigation on the woes and miseries of migrant workers came up for hearing before the Supreme Court of India. The petition sought protection and relief for millions of migrant workers fleeing cities during lockdown seeking government intervention to provide basic necessities like food, shelter and medical help. Although the PIL included domestic workers in its petition, when problems relating to the migrants came to be addressed the domestic workers were conveniently left out.

In 2019, the Government had proposed to bring forth a draft National Policy on Domestic Workers which seeks to recognize domestic workers as representing a profession and thereby making provisions for certain basic rights to these workers like right to minimum wages, protection from exploitation and access to grievance redressal mechanisms. Though it was announced in June 2019, it may take quite some time to come in operation as an enforceable legislation. Had it been handled expeditiously the domestic workers would have had far more easier days during the unprecedented lockdown period. Hope the breakout of the pandemic would act as a catalyst and a reminder to the Government to take up this legislative initiative as a priority to uphold the dignity of their services and protect them from miseries and exploitation. ■

Dr. Vasudha MC is a professor of sociology; and a keen observer of social structures and dynamisms.



What Is Life Like? A Free Flowing River? Or An Orderly Built Rail?

BOBBY JOSE KATTIKAD OFM CAP



Express yourself completely. Then keep quiet. Be like the forces of nature; When it blows, there is only wind; When it rains, there is only rain; When the clouds pass, the sun shines through.

- Lao Tzu

Lao Tzu was talking about natural way of life. 'Tao' literally means the natural way. He opened up such a creative and natural way of life that even his contemporary Confucius could not bear it. Confucius was a man of rules and regulations. Assuming that life is full of unexpected twists and turns, Confucius believed that preconceptions, speculations and

conclusions will not help anyone. They were talking about two ways of living. Life was like a flowing river for Lao Tzu. The flowing river finds its way naturally. But for Confucius life was like a railway track, arranged and orderly; a built-in rail. Go through it and reach the goal smoothly without any significant crises. These two represent two types of attitudes that are common to humankind. Nobody is expected to determine whether one is greater than the other. Find the way that suits your speed, the particular rhythm of your soul, your psyche and make your life beautiful.

Only a Lao Tzu can say that the so-called-useless too has its usefulness. In a certain village, except for a single tree, everything else was cut down and Lao Tzu inquired as to the cause of leaving it. The answer was, 'The carpenters abandoned it because it was useless.' And they explained further: "It doesn't even catch fire...it just keeps smouldering". Then there are some uses for being useless,' he said with a little smile. The disciples' hearts were enlightened at those words. Those words were filled with the echoes of living most simply, without comparisons and coercions, without cut throat competition or one-upmanship.

What Jesus was trying to say was the same; about a supernatural life. The words 'I give you one commandment - love' have hidden in them the seeds of a great storm, which, in a sense, can be described as 'anarchy', against the Canons and the orderly. Because love is the language of the heart, living that way, as the heart inspires, will end up uprooting the traditional religious systems and canons.

But the irony is sooner or later, time and tide will destroy that natural way, engulfing it with a variety of rituals and routines. ■

Orphaned Parents

DR VEENA ADIGE

Orphaned parents is a term coined by an active social worker, Shishir Joshi, during the Covid-19 lockdown period when he came across so many elderly people living alone, desperately wanting their flesh and blood with them. Shishir Joshi of Project Mumbai helped hundreds of elderly people in Mumbai during the lockdown. Orphaned meaning parents whose children have settled away from their parents, whether in our country or far far away. He recalls parents who tell him, 'We do not need groceries; we need cooked food and someone to take care of us and be with us.'

It is not only during the lockdown that these were noticed; they have always been there. Many Old Age homes have seniors staying there indefinitely because their educated rich children do not want them. Children send money; arrange for helpers, and hospitalization when necessary; but it is not just enough. These orphaned parents need emotional support, someone of their own to talk to and sympathise. They have given their whole lives and their earnings to educate and support their children but when they are in most need, the children are not there.

This is the case of millions of parents. All have tried to find solutions. Some have formed their own organisations like NRIPA (Non-Resident Indians Parents Association) and support each other. Some families have their own senior members forming groups and living near to each other. The elderly parents come together and stay nearby so that in times of need they can help each other. And since they are related, they understand each other and their common needs and problems. The children are at peace that the elderly have company; and the parents are also happy. This perhaps is a method wherein orphaned parents can be happy and comfortable. In the times of joint families, if the younger members went away, there were in-laws, nieces, nephews and other relatives to give emotional support and also physical one.

In Vashi where I live and in Nagpur where I

have lived, I came across whole families living in their own building complexes. The parents live on the ground floor and each subsequent floor having their sons and daughters with their families. The kitchens are separate and their flats are separate, but when necessary they can always be together. The Patels of Navi Mumbai and also the Shahs have reserved the ground floor for their parents while they live on the first and second floors. This way even if one of the children goes away, the children of the others are there with them. So they have independence and emotional support.

It is not always that the youngsters settled abroad do not want their parents there. The main problem of seniors going to stay with their children abroad is the loss of independence and the societal rules. The seniors cannot drive on their own; they cannot go anywhere alone except for walks and have to depend on the children for everything. The children are busy during the week and have only weekends to look into their parents' needs or even talk to them.

I recall an old man who had gone to live for a short while with his son, being taken to court. He had raised his hand to discipline his ten-year-old grandson who had promptly dialed police helpline! He went into a trauma and did not know what crime he had committed in disciplining the youngster. Then there was case of an Indian parent who was hauled by the society in a foreign land for force-feeding his child, a common practice in India. We feel that children should eat properly and the amount has to be regulated by us and if they do not eat, they will not grow properly.

Though the earth has shrunk, and it is possible for anyone in the world to reach their parents within twenty-four hours, there are times when the orphaned parents feel the need to have someone when they want. Just for comfort. ■

Dr Veena Adige is a researcher and an author; lives in Navi Mumbai.

Maradona: *El Pibe de Oro*

JOHN RALBIN



Maradona (1960–2020)

The Golden Boy is not just an icon but is an impulse. Diego Armando Maradona enchanted fans all over the world in his two-decade long career with his bewitching elegance of skills. Short and stocky 5 feet 5-inch man was not a typical athlete, but he ruled the football world as king with his bold vision, agility, unpredictable mastery of attack, ball control, accurate passing, dribbling skills, unprecedented pace and most of all his devastating left-foot. The football world called the man by the name ‘El Pibe de Oro’ – The Golden Boy.

“The scorching sun may set, but the heat never subsides.” I believe that he was the inspiration for many young Indian soccer aspirants, including, Indian Black Pearl, I. M Vijayan. Though Maradona was often paired with the Brazilian great Pele, many admit that, ‘Maradona is the Greatest of All’. The Argentine who scored 259 goals in 491 matches was honoured by FIFA as the greatest player of 20th century. The number-10 jersey he worn was iconic as it accords a stature of something best. “Everything he was thinking in his head, he made it happen with his feet”, said one of his team-mates.

Maradona made his Indian debut in 2008 at Kolkata at the inaugural pomp of a private football academy but undetected by the populace. Four years later the golden boy returned to India, this time to another passionate spot of football, Kerala; the impromptu moments of kicking and heading ball with I.M Vijayan before the cheering multitude was undoubtedly overwhelming.

Maradona has described India as a ‘Sleeping Football Giant’ when he foretold the coming of a new Indian era in football. While he has been one of the motives of India’s love towards football, it’s evident that we need to make giant leaps to be anywhere closer to the best.

“Today I say goodbye to a friend and the world says goodbye to an eternal genius. One of the best. An unparalleled magician. He leaves too soon but leaves a legacy without limits and a void that will never be failed. Rest In Peace, ace. You will never be forgotten”, said Cristiano Ronaldo on Maradona’s untimely death. Even if the all-time great has bid farewell prematurely, his impact will endure for decades to come. ■

John Ralbin is a sports master and a physical trainer; and had once travelled 2,350km to see Maradona in Kolkata.



Kim Ki-duk: Uncompromised, Raw and Unapologetic

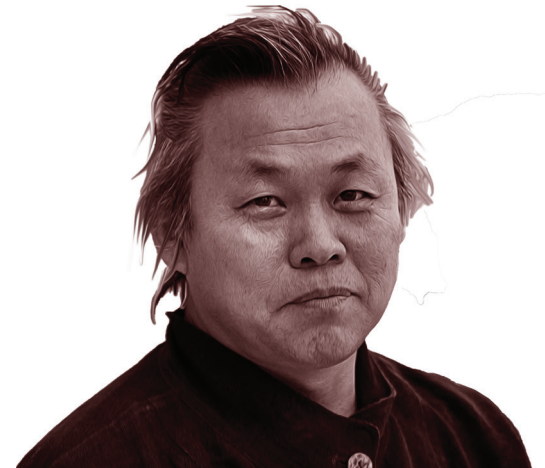
NITHIN G TOM

It was a ‘gentle’ reminder that got me working on this article; but I should say there aren’t many things ‘gentle’ in a Kim Ki-duk film. Being a student of cinema I am always fascinated with the kind of stories that Korean cinema comes up with. It is sometimes awe-inspiring and sometimes outright bizarre. Some of the visuals can make you cringe and Kim Ki-duk has a dubious distinction of being a ‘master’ at it.

Although my first exposure to Korean Cinema was Park Chan-wook’s brilliant neo-noir thriller *Oldboy* (2003), I gradually came to know about Kim Ki-duk. *The Isle* (2000) which gained notoriety for its gruesome scenes was my first experience of the twisted world that Kim Ki-duk can create on screen. Although the movie has some disturbing content, the composition of shots tells you something about the abilities of the film maker. It’s an odd combination of brutal and beautiful imagery. To be honest I wasn’t much impressed with *The Isle*.

But then came *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* (2003) which is considered by many as the best work of Kim Ki-duk. Now, this movie is truly spiritual, almost zen-like. The journey of a young monk through the different seasons of his life is captured stunningly. The film teaches you many things on a philosophical level but never becomes didactic. Kim Ki-duk’s characters never preach on screen in fact they barely talk. It is their actions and the situations they encounter which tells you a lot of things. This is easily one of the greatest Asian movies ever made after 2000.

Even though his filmography consists of more than 20 films, some of them were just



Kim Ki-duk (1960–2020)

there to put in the numbers and didn’t do much justice to his talent. After suffering through depression because of the untoward incidents that happened during the filming of *Dream* (2008) he made a comeback with the documentary *Arirang* in 2011. He was back to his best (or ‘worst’ as aesthetic movie-goers might believe) with the ultra-violent *Pieta* (2012) which had its share of controversy because of the violence and the Oedipal relationship between the two main characters.

Unfortunately, his reputation suffered a blow because of the sexual assault allegations against him. Many Koreans believe that Kim Ki-duk shouldn’t be considered as the face of Korean Cinema but there’s no denying the fact that it is he who brought the new wave in the Korean Film Industry and ended up inspiring a generation of film makers. What Kim Ki-duk leaves behind as his legacy is an unbridled passion for cinema where sometimes ethics and traditional values were side-lined. His cinema was uncompromised, raw and unapologetic. ■

Nithin G Tom is a film enthusiast and a professor of commerce and management by profession.

The Great Silence Makes Us More Alive

The unexpected paradox of *Into Great Silence* is that the overpowering quiet has the effect of intensifying any and all sounds, making the smallest noise seem pregnant with meaning.

DR. SUNIL JOSE CMI

Into Great Silence is a transcendent, transporting experience, a trance movie going deeply into a monastic world that lives largely without words. A German documentary filmmaker Gröning tried for 15 years to gain admittance to the Grand Chartreuse monastery in the French Alps near Grenoble before the intense, white-robed Carthusians, on site since 1084, and known as the most rigorous and ascetic monastic order in the Western world, let him inside the walls. The resulting film is nearly wordless and relies solely on natural light and ambient sound to convey the daily routine of the monks, their work and their individual prayer sessions.

In the hands of filmmaker Philip Gröning, it becomes clear that silence is not the absence of sound, it's a physical place, a destination with value and meaning in a chaotic world, arrived at with difficulty and departed with regret.

Gröning stayed at the monastery for six months, living the life of a monk as well as serving as writer, director, producer, cinematographer and editor on this two-hour and 42-minute film that has played successfully across Europe.

Into Great Silence intends not to observe or provide information. It wants to completely immerse the viewer in the monastic experience, to enable you to feel what it is like to live the life, showing rather than simply telling what being there was like.

All movies are about transformation, in a sense, as we focus—almost reverently—on the glowing screen before us. But we are accustomed to our emotions being marshalled along with music, snappy editing, special effects. *Into Great Silence* subjects us, instead, to a sort of sensory deprivation - echoing the ascetic lifestyle of these monks, who are bound to a life of near-silent contemplation aside from weekly conversational breaks. Not surprisingly, the first instinct with this film, as it would be with a life of meditation and devotion, is to resist, to feel that not enough is happening to keep us interested and involved. When you add the fact that the monks almost never speak, it's hard to imagine what the fuss is about.

Gradually, however, Gröning's unobtrusive, respectful camera work draws you into the rhythms of the monastic life, into both the time spent in solitary prayer and the various subsistence occupations the monks take on. At first, the silence feels imposing—practically deafening—as we watch the documentary and the monks of the Grand Chartreuse monastery praying, reading the Bible or simply sitting in quiet contemplation. But as we become acclimated to this muted atmosphere something extraordinary happens: our senses sharpen. The whispering of snow outside, the clanging of a bell that summons these Carthusians to prayer reach our ears with a resounding purity.

Into Great Silence allows us to feel as if we're



INTO GREAT SILENCE

A FILM BY PHILIP GRÖNING



partaking of a contemplative, life-out-of-time experience. The brothers are mostly seen in isolation, but there are scenes showing them together at a service or at a meal, or during the rare periods when they are permitted to speak. Three of the men in particular seem to have caught Gröning's eye: an African novice, an older monk who is seen performing a variety of jobs and a blind brother who talks about his experience of God in simple but deeply moving words.

To provide a hint of what motivates these men to such an extraordinary life, Gröning occasionally cuts to title cards with quotations from the monks' prayers or from the Bible, some of them repeated for emphasis: "Unless a man gives up all he has, he cannot be my disciple." To emphasize the centrality of Catholic worship to the monastic experience, *Into Great Silence* periodically puts biblical texts, for instance Christ's pointed admonition that "anyone

who does not give up all he has cannot be my disciple," up on the screen. Especially poignant is a quote from *1 Kings* that explains that, although God was not to be found in earthquake or fire, "after the fire came a gentle whisper."

Worship also plays a key part in the monastery's soundscape. The ringing of bells divides the day and calls the monks to their frequent prayers, and the only time a monk is seen to rush is when the bell ringer is late to his task. Especially haunting are the night time worship services featuring Gregorian chants that are positively hypnotic coming out of so much silence. For a film that's effectively "about" silence, what we hear plays a powerful role, as simple sounds of a monk walking down a corridor or ringing a prayer bell - or even the sound of dripping water in a brother's cell - take on a resonance that will surely touch even the most nonspiritual men.

The unexpected paradox of *Into Great Silence* is that the overpowering quiet has the effect of intensifying any and all sounds, making the smallest noise seem pregnant with meaning. Whether it's the turning of pages, the ticking of a clock or the rustling of fabric, that great silence makes us more alive to what is going on around us. To be aware of the world, the monks would likely say, is to be aware of God's munificence in creating it for our benefit.

Into Great Silence is finally a film where nothing seems to happen but everything comes to pass. Though it likely will not persuade people to join the ranks, experiencing life behind the walls has an undeniable effect. We've been allowed a glimpse of eternity. And who would not be changed by that? *Into Great Silence* reveals itself to be about nothing less than the presence of God. So many spiritually aware films — *The Seventh Seal*, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* — are about God's absence or silence. Here is a film that dares to explore the possibility of finding God, of a God who is there for those who seek him with their whole hearts. ■

Dr. Sunil Jose CMI is a well-known poet, artist and a professor of Malayalam literature.

The Anthurium Series

SUSANNA CORREYA



Ebey Edassery's *Anthurium* series masterfully marries the real to the surreal, the natural to the imitation and art to science. With their tangles, tufts, starbursts and blazes, the works set off the interconnectedness and the sacred geometry of nature. The steady, intricate patterning on the spadices are a testament to the artist's heightened ecological sensibilities. They also signify the powerful mutual imprints of the plant on the painter and vice versa. Interestingly enough, the anthurium is called "painter's palette". The syncretism of art and botany does not stop there. Anthuriums are perennials both in nature and in the paintings. Edassery's series comprises at least 18 works with the anthurium as a motif. They are epiphytic: just as they grow on other plants and derive nutrients from their surroundings, they grew on the artist who derived his inspiration from them and the wider natural world. These are mixed-medium works; Edassery has used acrylics, watercolors, charcoal and glass marking, hereby entering form and content into dialog. As each work convenes different mediums, the natural world convenes different forms of

life. This is also reminiscent of the painter's palette where different colours merge. The interconnectedness is further exemplified in the works, which subject priestly vestments to reticulate venation. Priesthood is one of many aspects of the artist's life that inform one another. The bottom line: art, life and nature feed into one another like the network of veins and veinlets on a leaf blade. One of the works appears to be loosely inspired by fractals. There is a central midrib and veins whose interstices are packed with leaves which again bear these structures. This self-similarity characterizes the universe to a great extent: the part contains the whole and the whole contains the part. The anthurium highlights the creative principle that is operative in art and in nature. The contact between the paintbrush and the palette to create art on a canvas is similar to the union of the masculine and the feminine principle to create new life. The heart-shaped spathe of the anthurium underlies its apt association with hospitality. We thus infer that the plant is not only close to the heart of the artist, but also a warm welcome into his world. ■

Susanna Correya is a student of literature; and is interested in art and expressions of all kinds.

Music Raises Us Beyond Forms

Music counter intoxicates those intoxicated with strength, wealth, power, and knowledge.

CHARLES DOMINIC



try. Pure music does not make any object appear before us.

For some, who follow the path of inner spirituality, music is very essential for their spiritual journey. The reason is that the soul seeking the truth is in search of the formless god. Art, no doubt, is most elevating, but it contains forms; poetry has words and names suggestive of forms, paintings have pictures and so on. Only music has the beauty, power, and charm; and at the same time can raise the soul beyond form. This maybe the main reason why in ancient times the greatest prophets were musicians for instance, Narada, the Hindu prophet was a musician, Shiva is supposed to be the inventor of the Veena, Krishna is always pictured with a flute, Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning is always pictured with a veena. David, a biblical king and leader, played and had recourse to music at times of pain. The Greek legend Orpheus, the knower of the mystery of tone and rhythm, through his knowledge had the power over the hidden forces of nature. The universe has its essence in music.

My experiences with the mysteries of sound and music is at least partially attributed to the teachings of the great Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan. Music is called as a "Divine Art", because sound alone is free from any sort of "form". Even every word of poetry forms a picture in our mind; in religious perspective in every other art form there is idola-

Music is movement

The principle expression of life in the beauty that is visible before us is movement or motion. In line, in colour, in the change of seasons, in the wind and the storm, in the rising and falling of waves, in all the beauty of nature there is constant movement. It is this movement which has caused day and night and changing of seasons.

Movement has given us the comprehension of what we call "time". All things we love and admire, observe and comprehend have movement.

I feel out of all arts, music is considered to be divine or sacred because it is the exact miniature of the law working through the whole universe. For instance if we look at ourselves we can find that the beats of our pulse and our heart, the inhaling and exhaling of breath and the whole mechanism of the body is the work of Rhythm. Breath manifests as voice, as words, as sound. Our voice is continuous and moving. This also shows that there is music outside and within ourselves. Music inspires not only the soul of the great musicians but every infant as it comes into the world, it begins to move its little arms and legs to the rhythm of music. Therefore it is no exaggeration to say that music moves the world.

Music counter intoxicates the intoxicated

Music intoxicates those who hear it. According to thinkers of the east, there are four different intoxications, they are the intoxication of beauty, youth and strength; the intoxication of wealth; the intoxication of power, of command, the power of ruling; and the fourth intoxication is of knowledge and learning. But all these four intoxications fade away in the presence of the intoxication of music. Music counter intoxicates those intoxicated with strength, wealth, power, and knowledge. The reason is that it touches the deepest part of our being. Music reaches farther than any other expression the external world can reach.

Music is the source of creation

Music is the source of creation and the means of absorbing back to it. The Bible says, "in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God". Word is essentially sound, voice, music. The Hindu culture has "the Damaru (drums)" in the hands of lord Shiva, which looks like an hour glass and it is attributed to the lord's famous dancing posture – the Nataraja, it is believed

by many that this Damaru produced the first Dhvani (sound), it was born in the void and Shiva danced to the rhythm of this drum which lead to the creation of the universe.

Religious traditions also indicate, that on the last day there will be sound of the trumpet before the end of world. Music is not only connected with the beginning of creation, but with its continuity, and with its end.

Music is the first art

Even before an infant is capable of admiring colour or form, it enjoys sound. If there is any art that can charge the youth with life and enthusiasm, with emotions and passion, it is music. If there is any art with which a person can fully express his feelings and emotion, it is music.

The mystics of all ages have loved music the most, in almost all circles of the inner journey, in whatever part of the world they are in; music seems to be the centre of their cult, ceremony or rituals. Those who can attain perfect peace, which is called "Nirvana" or "Samadhi" can do so more easily through music. Therefore the Sufis in the ancient times have taken music as a source of their meditation and they seem to benefit more from meditation with music than those who meditate without the help of music.

Music touches different people in different ways; the same music may hit different people differently. Therefore whatever means we choose to bring the different minds of people together, there cannot be a better means of harmonizing them than music. It would be no exaggeration if I said that music alone can be the means by which souls of races, nations and families which are today so apart, may one day be united. The more the musicians be conscious of their mission in the world, the greater will the humanity be. ■

Charles Dominic is a musician. He spends most of his time playing music, and plays for bands, events, and wherever possible. He is a professor of computer science.

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

May they all be one.
JOHN 17:21



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