

# together

a national family magazine

**ALL  
RACES AND ETHNICITIES,  
RELIGIONS AND CASTES,  
STATES AND TERRITORIES,  
GENDER IDENTITIES,  
SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS,  
ABILITIES AND DISABILITIES,  
LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS,  
AND AGE GROUPS  
FEEL SAFE HERE.  
INTO THAT HEAVEN OF FREEDOM  
MY FATHER LET MY COUNTRY  
AWAKE.**

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Shadow of Tense Manipur

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Rethinking  
Independence

GERRY LOBO OFM



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

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

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

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

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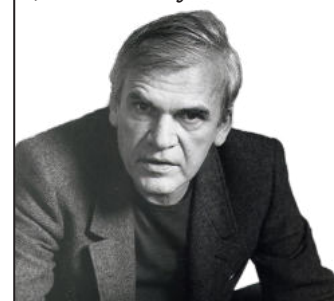
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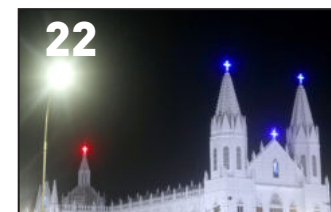
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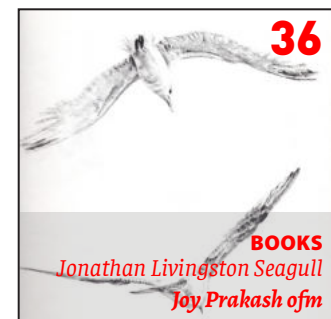


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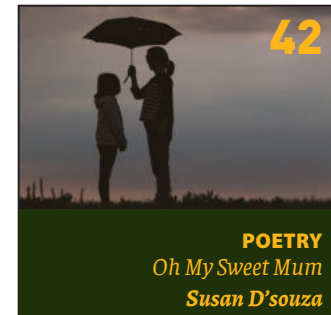
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**Note:** The text on the cover is inspired by *We Welcome Sign* by Lisa Mangum and Jason Levian; and *Geethanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore.



## MANIPUR GROWS TENSE BY ULTERIOR AGENDAS, FAKE NEWS, AND APATHY

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Put a hundred red ants and a hundred black ants in a bottle with sufficient facilities and provisions to live their lives. Nothing untoward happens, they would live peacefully, with their usual interactions, cooperation and conflicts that any living together would cause. But if someone shakes the bottle, the ants would start killing one another. Red ants would begin to believe that black ants are their enemies; black ants would begin to believe that red ants are their enemies. But in truth, the real enemy is the one who shook the bottle. In real time no ant realises or understands it. By the time ants realise it, if they ever realise, they both would have lost the battle and the bottle. A close reading of history would make it evident that this is the kind of social experiment many rulers and establishments of the past had put into motion before they forced people of a certain race or religion to leave an area or country, or drove people - who hitherto had lived amicably - into armed conflict, or executed a systematic ethnic cleansing. It is cruel to fish in troubled waters; but it is cruel still to trouble the waters to catch fish.

Manipur is on the edge. Perhaps the tipping over is already on. Has it reached a point of no return? Issues here are deep seated: Kukis on the one side have been in constant mistrust of the Manipuri government, accusing it of being of the Meiteis, by the Meiteis, and for the Meiteis; and the government on the other side, has been quite suspicious and hostile to the activities and undertakings on the hills by Kuki people. The Kukis are

heckled by the government and establishments as outsiders, often destroying their homes and worship places in the name of forest protection. Most legal and governmental facilities are politically and geographically far from the Kukis because they exist in the valleys dominated and controlled by the Meiteis. These and grueling poverty makes the Kukis vulnerable; and they get relegated to a second-rate social status. There have been illegal intrusions and settlements by the Kukis from neighbouring political entities to Manipur, which the Meiteis look at as a cause for a future demographical imbalance, by which the Meiteis might even lose their majority and majoritarian advantages and precedences. The state, for reason, in recent times have been tracking down drug plantation, processing, and trafficking, which is rampant in the hill areas near international borders. All sound reasonable till we hear the other person's story.

Journalists, people who have visited Manipur, people on the either sides of the conflict say, though the Meiteis and the Kukis knew their difference and shades, had lived amicably in neighboring villages, even in same village at times. But now they are vying for one another's blood. What immediate reasons did trigger this persistent conflict and bring Manipur to this state of affairs?

### Disgusting Violence Erupts with Fake News

The directive of the Manipur High Court to the state government asking it to recommend to the Centre to give Scheduled Tribe status to the Meiteis made the Kukis, who were already fighting a battle against government's eviction drive to clear reserved forests off Kuki farmers and other tribal settlers, angry and fuming. The Kukis in solidarity with the Nagas called for a 'Tribal Solidarity March' against the order of the High Court. The march turned problematic and violent.

Things like these are common in these regions; but it does not go to the ugly extent of showcasing rapes and public violation of women, and of killing the other as an exhibition. How did matters reach there? We get a clue in the slogans shouted by the Meiteis as they gleefully paraded

and groped naked women on the street, that this is revenge for the Churachandpur case. Kuki women began to be systematically targeted in revenge attacks. They were referring to the fake photograph which spread like wildfire on the third and fourth of May before the internet was suspended in Manipur, with a caption saying, this is the photo of a Meitei nursing student who is raped and killed in Churachandpur Medical College. This was fake news; that photograph is of a girl who was killed in Delhi in 2022. But the snowball had started rolling. And no one cared to educate the Meiteis for the longest of time that it was false information that is deliberately created and spread to deceive people. And even if some did make efforts to inform there may have been fewer takers for truth is less attractive, less profitable, and less virulent.

### Agenda and Apathy of the Rulers

Even as the violence intensified and worsened, the response from the central BJP government was notably insignificant. The BJP state government—dominated by the Meitei community—is inactive and in hiding, allowing more violence to happen, and do it with impunity. Prime Minister Narendra Modi maintained an almost three-month long public silence on the conflict and has yet to visit Manipur since the violence broke out. It was only after the May-4 viral video caused outrage across the country that Modi made a brief comment on the issue. This is total apathy by the ruling class. Looking at the deep-rooted nature of the matter, the root causes of the conflict would need longer engagement in the region, with education, economic upliftment, and plenty of conversation; but the brutal violence and ugly attack on one another, which had severe causalities, could have been definitely contained. On the contrary, the police stood in silence, they refuse to help or file FIR, and at times even handed over victims to the angry mob.

The silence and apathy of the government gives room to think that there is a larger Hindutva agenda, which drives the Hindu nationalist Modi government to take no step to protect the Kukis, who are predominantly Christians, from the Meiteis, who are predominantly Hindus.



### Non-inclusive Thinking and Reporting

The 'Global Village' prediction of Marshal McLuhan hasn't come about. On the contrary there is more of distancing of lands and thickening of borderlines between peoples. People feel entitled and have a false sense of security to hold on to a single narrative and are not equipped to listen to other's stories; and become emotionally attached to a particular narrative, and are reluctant to let go of it, even if there is evidence that it is not accurate. Thus people seek out information that confirms our existing beliefs and ignore information that contradicts them. This lack of empathy for the people who are telling different stories lead to intolerance and engage in violence to silence the other.

The media coverage of the Manipur violence has been criticised for being non-inclusive. Exempting a few, there is clear separation between the Meitei media and Kuki media locally and nationally. National mainstream media highlights the Meitei community, while giving less attention to the experiences of the Kuki community. Alternative media, especially by the minority communities like the Christians, bat for the Kukis and the Christians. This leads to further polarisation of the situation, and make it more difficult to find a lasting solution to the violence.

### Stop Shaking the Bottle

Manipur is ethnically a very sensitive region. The need of the hour is to build trust and bridges between the conflicting sides. Ethnic and religious identities must be subordinate to human dignity and life of the very people in enfold. We want to outdo the other in pretending to believe that our gods are the best, and to lay claim to the most splendid ethnic past. We easily accept and live with lies when delving into our own spiritual domains and ethnic concerns. In my guess, the reason for it is lack of free speech and democracy in religious or ethnic structures and institutions; even in the modern and educated societies people are expected to just obey and live. Thus the one who has the power to create narratives and change rules control the society. They scare

people away from conversations and meeting points into amplified and exaggerated sensitivity and danger. They keep the bottle and shake the bottle at their will.

Shaking the bottle is the weapon of the fascist. We have seen it in Germany in early 20th century. Someone has aptly differentiated between the versions of fascism that was in Germany and the fascism that is brewing in India.

In German fascism it was the military acting at the orders of the ruler. In Indian version the perpetrators are one's very own neighbours, colleagues in workplace, and brother's or sister's friends. Among the mob that accompanied the woman who was raped and paraded naked in Manipur, there were neighbours and friends of the family. In the German version the leader stopped giving orders, and the fascism came to a grinding halt. In the Indian version it will keep continuing because it is rewiring the conscience of our nation. The Indian version is indeed dangerous.

### Happy Independence Day

*How Democracies Die* is a 2018 comparative politics book by Harvard University political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt talking about how elected leaders can gradually subvert the democratic process to increase their power.

The book reminds us that in modern times, democracies don't die bleeding on the street. There is no need for revolutions, or a military coup; instead clever rulers and establishments would lawfully use the institutions and instruments of a democracy to defunct it. It is like in a game, someone buys the referee, debar good players, and changes the rules of the game, thus predetermines the winners. In the name of religion, people, culture and ethnicity, divide people. If we treat people differently, they begin to think that they are different. Make each other look like a bundle of differences with the potency to destroy one another; and it is only matter of time that each will compete in wielding weapons to get rid of the other. Is our democracy, claimed as the mother of all democracies, dying? ■



COVER STORY

## An Independence Day in the Shadow of Tense Manipur

ALEX TUSCANO

This year the festivities of India's Independence Day on 15th of August will not be the most pleasant one. We are living in difficult times. The Manipur situation had made international headlines and even the European Parliament has expressed their concern about it. I will not be exaggerating if I say that Manipur is being used as a laboratory for implementing Hindutva Rashtra by launching violence against the minority. Since the Muslim population in Manipur is insignificant the Christians become the soft target. We are in such a situation in our country that we need to bring to our mind the history of independence. The history of independence is probably most aptly narrated as the history of India's struggle for independence. What we look for in our society what we can pass on to a younger generation about a country is

this story namely the struggle for independence. The narration of the history of the struggle for independence contains in it the vision for India, the kind of nation that the founding fathers of our nation wanted to build. We have already completed 75 years of our independence. Looking back to it, we will discover that here are many things that we will be proud of and there are many more things that we have to be aware of and protect ourselves from.

### Let Us Remember How It All Started

The history of India's struggle for independence was also the struggle between different ideologies and different visions for the nation. There was a major struggle between the theory called two nations theory, and the other theory called one nation theory. The Two Nation theory was propagated by the Muslim league under the leadership of Mohammed Jinnah and the Hindutva people, represented by Golwalkar. Both these conflicting movements proposed that India should be based on the religious ideas, Islamic State and Hindu nation. This theory is entailed in the idea that religion should be defining characteristic of the nation. Mohammed Jinnah proposed that the religion of the state should be Islam and it is on this ground that he demanded the formation of Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The Hindutva propagators wanted India to be a Hindu nation. According to the propagators of Hindutva nation, India belongs to the Hindu people.

There was a third idea of India propagated by Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and many other great leaders and members of the Indian National Congress freedom movement. These leaders believed that India should be a secular country, democratic and socialist state. State should be independent of any religion. Neither religion should interfere in the state affairs nor the state should give direction to the practice of religion by the people.

There has been a history of struggle (communal conflicts) between the Hindus and Muslims. This was propagated and promoted by the colonial rulers. It was the policy of the British Raj to divide and rule. This attitude of the

British saw India not from the point of view of the welfare of the people, citizens of India, but the benefit the Britishers can gain from India. The peace, harmony and well-being of the people of India were not the concerns of the colonisers.

Mahatma Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai Patel, Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad mobilised people to fight against the divisive forces of communalism. Gandhiji and the founding fathers had understood that if we have to succeed in gaining independence and build a prosperous and peaceful nation, communalism would be the greatest evil that would make the job impossible. Apart from the two major religious groups India also had many religious groups. Buddhist had been there from 300 BCE. Christians have been there from year 50 CE, the Sikh, Jain, and even Jews have been there for centuries. The Adivasis have their own religion. India comprises of people belonging to different cultures and religions.

Keeping in mind the diversities in the Indian people the founding fathers fought for India as a secular state. Keeping religion and state apart from each other Mahatma Gandhi was a Hindu. He was a deeply religious Hindu.

### Four Personalities on the Horizon of Freedom Struggle

Mohammad Jinnah, Mahatma Gandhi, VD Savarkar/ Golwalkar and M. N. Roy represented different visions and ideologies and wanted India according to their visions.

**Mohammed Jinnah** came to India in 1906. He had finished his degree as barrister and returned to India. He was a hardcore secular, liberal nationalist, follower of Dadabhai Naoroji, who was a co-founder and president of the Indian National Congress (1886-1887; 1893-1894 and 1906-1907). He was also a member of the second Communist International. Initially as a staunch secular person, he was a strong opponent of the Muslim league. But gradually he began to change towards Muslim communal person. When there was a demand for separate electorate for the Muslims, he did not support the move. But as time passed and the demand for the separate electorate gathered momentum, he began to support this move. In 1924 he fully supported it. He became so convinced that the

## The proponents of the Hindutva ideology demanded to implement two-nation theory, the nation state of Hindutva, as against the Islamic State of Pakistan.

rights of the Muslims could be violated by the majority Hindus that he demanded for the separate electorate for the Muslims. He had noticed the rise of Hindu Maha Sabha and demand for Hindu nation. He began to believe that the Muslim community will not be safe in India with the majority Hindus. He had stated that in the majority Hindu state the Muslims will not enjoy any rights and hence he propounded his two-nation theory and was for separate statehood for the Muslims, the Islamic State of Pakistan. When we talk about the theory of two-nation, which was propagated by Mohammed Jinnah. He claimed that the independent India would contain in itself two states based on religion, Muslim state or Islamic State of Pakistan and Hindutva state of India.

By the way there was also an element of the ambition of Jinnah to become a Prime Minister of India and going by the climate, Gandhiji did not support this idea. Instead, he wanted Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, given his strong secular credentials and clarity of vision.

**VD Savarkar and Golwalkar:** In the light of the Islamic communalism the Hindu communal leaders advanced their communal agenda. Madan Mohan Malviya along with others founded the Hindu Maha Sabha. While initially it was a liberal communal movement it had gradually taken a turn into a fascist force under VD Savarkar. He was of the opinion that Hindus would become humiliated and dominated by the Muslims. They believed that their principal enemies were the Muslims and only then came in second the British Colonial rule. Mr. Golwalkar the main ideologue of Hindutva codified the RSS doctrine. In 1939 declared "we have allowed ourselves to be duped into believing our old and bitter enemies and foes (the Muslims and other minorities) to be our friends. He demanded that the minorities must adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in

reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of glorification of Hindu race and culture. They must live fully subordinated to the Hindu nation,

claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizens' right. Mr. Golwalkar propagated the idea of unitary form of the state, where all governing power resides in a centralised government: one nation, one party, one language, and one religion.

In this context, there was clear support for the apprehension of Mohammed Jinnah. While Mohamed Jinnah demanded separate state for the Muslims, Islamic State of Pakistan, the proponents of the Hindutva demanded that India should be a Hindutva state, leaving second-class citizenship to the minority Muslims and Christians. The proponents of the Hindutva ideology demanded to implement two-nation theory, the nation state of Hindutva, as against the Islamic State of Pakistan.

**The socialist group led by MN Roy:** There was another group of people under the leadership of MN Roy, who wanted India to follow the socialist path of development. MN Roy was the member of the third international of the Communist. He had known Lenin and was educated, socialist idea and a Bolshevik leadership in Russia; their idea was to oppose capitalism. They wanted to socialise the means of production and equitable distribution of wealth among all the citizens. The movement for the socialist form of society would be led by the working class in alliance with the peasants. Communist movement was totally opposed to the role for religion in the formation and functioning of the state

*The fourth group was the leaders of the Indian national Congress. The main leaders of this party were Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Muhammad Abdul Kalam, Subhas Chandra Bose: Mahatma Gandhiji advocated the path of nonviolent satyagraha*



through which India should gain independence from the British rule, Indian national congress was united in their resolve to drive out the colonial British rule from India. Along with the anti-colonial worldview, an ideological element constituted the broad socio-economic-political vision of the Indian National Movement. It was capitalist (bourgeois) independent economic development and a secular republican, democratic, civil libertarian political order, both the economic and political order based on principles of social equality. The national movement was fully committed to Parliamentary democracy, representative form of government on the basis of popular elections, civil liberty and freedom of association respecting even the assemblies of people who want to discuss revolutionary projects; and propagated nonviolence.

At the beginning all these different factions Mohammad Jinnah's Muslim League, Hindu Maha Sabha, the Communist party were part of the congress party. The communist party did not question the major tenets of the National movement. The Communists did not believe in Gandhi's concept of Swaraj and the capitalist character of economic order. They wanted to have a socialist state led by the working class and the peasants. The Congress party did not treat the Communist party on par with the Hindu Maha Sabha and the Hindutva. Nehru believed that the greatest danger to the country was not from the communists but the people from Hindutva group. Nehru had the dream of building socialist, democratic and secular country.

The Communist party was a secular party. The Communist party wanted to abolish capitalism and establish socialism. The idea of socialisation of wealth was staunchly opposed by the capitalist members of the Congress party. The congress party believed that the path for the development of India should not be the communist path of development. While Mahatma Gandhi believed development should start from the rural Gramin Swaraj. Nehru believed that industrialisation is the only path that will help India to develop and abolish massive poverty that was found in almost all parts of the country. Nehru was very much influenced by the socialist ideas of the Soviet Union. He had visited

Soviet Union under Stalin and was interested to introduce socialist path of development in India. He wanted to adopt the 'five years plans' for achieving the development. While believing in socialist path of development Nehru believed that the capitalist class, which has emerged as a strong force in India was very much essential for the growth and development of the country. Nehru proposed a mixed economy, Private sector and Public sector. Mixed economy means while there will be the capitalist class running their private capital. There will also be a strong role for the state that run the public sector. He had demarcated the areas where the private sector should not enter into the public sector economy. He also believed that the public sector should create foundation for the growth of private sector industry. He believed that infrastructure, roads, railways, minerals and natural resources should be in the hands of the state.

#### The Consensus

When India gained independence the British handed over the power to the representatives of the people of India. It was the achievement of the Indian National movement. "It was one of the best example of the creation of extremely wide movement with a common aim in which diverse political and ideological currents could co-exist and work and simultaneously continue to content for overall ideological and political hegemony. While intense debate on all basic issues was allowed, the diversity and tension did not weaken the cohesion and striking power of the movement. On the contrary, this diversity and atmosphere of freedom and debate became a major source of its strength"(Bhipan Chandra and his team).

The consensus under which India stands united was built in the constitution of India. Every citizen, every political leader, judiciary, members of bureaucracy, military will adhere to and protect this constitution. The parliament is guided by and is protector of the constitution. I think the weakness of our society is that the tenets of the constitution have not sufficiently percolated down to the last citizen of the country. This is a task of all education institutions and actors in the name of the state. ■

# RETHINKING INDEPENDENCE

Whither Independence and what sense does it make to hoist the flag to mark the freedom event when one of Mother India's daughters—Manipur—is passing through the darkest moment in her seventy year old history?

GERRY LOBO OFM

Independence is a condition of a nation or state exercising self-government and assuming sovereignty over its territory from all forms of colonialism, which then is free to build a country without any interference from other nations. It is a state of being free of the control of some other person, country or entity. One reads the histories of nations obtaining independence by way of revolutions or freedom struggles. Originally the term 'independence' meant "not hanging from" which describes how countries are thrown off from their colonisers. This exactly what Independence of our nation has all the way meant for Indians about which discourses and speeches are delivered from the podiums and from the Red Fort in Delhi on August 15 in a special way, and lessons are taught about the historical event to children in schools by their teachers proudly. I have no dispute about it or disagreement about the practice. We, the people of India, the children of Bharat Matha, have comfortably settled with the glorious narratives concerning the freedom struggle from the Britishers led by Mahatma Gandhi and other stalwarts, narratives delivered by our revered 'head-gears' of the country in the presence of foreign dignitaries, letting them swallow a lot of pious platitudes as the flag of the nation is unfurled each year. Obligated by the rule of the game, devoutly and with discipline, the nation's citizens complying with norms and practice, have mechanically



**Since Independence in 1947 our country has come a long way flourishing in various fields, if not 'shining' as the Party that rules today promised the voters.**

performed the ritual of celebrating the Independence Day for seventy five years, and we are approaching the

seventy sixth. We have, undoubtedly satisfied our obligation by fulfilling it and encouraging our children to do the same without fail. Hurling a lot of bad feelings about the British rule on this auspicious day has delighted many, including those who stand at the helm of affairs and lead the country as political personalities. Without a dint of regret or an acknowledgment about the miserable failure on their part in processing the Independence of the nation with an atmosphere of freedom and peace where the citizens could live, our leaders have aggrandised sovereignty over the territory but not over the citizens who form the nation. Indeed, these front-runners in political affairs have been largely responsible for all the hurt and pain the Mother bears on a daily basis by way of violence witnessed almost on every street.

Since Independence in 1947 our country has come a long way flourishing in various fields, if not 'shining' as the Party that rules today promised the voters, and keeps reminding about that 'shine'! Progress in various fields is undoubtedly a merited reality which this vast nation experiences today. Energy and talent, commitment and dedication of thousands has enhanced Independence to be "independence" in the sense of exercising human rights and free expression, although in the recent past years the country has witnessed gross violation of all that a human being requires for an honorable existence. Systematic placation of peace, not only the physical but even the interior gift, has been taking place, particularly since the religion-dressed government began its pharisaical worship disregarding the presence of any other, and with a façade to appease overseas nations and those who benefit materially from its governance. However it must be acknowledged that even with the masqueraded environment, the Independence of the nation has been realised

by citizens who, placing the country first, have sacrificed their energy for the growth of all. Our intellectuals, never

allowing any partisan politics to enter into their thinking and discourse or permitting any kind of ulterior motive to direct them, have been firm in their resolve by enlightening minds that would eventually make the nation transcend all pettiness and vengeance. Our sufferers, including women and children most of all, setting aside their poverty and pain, are leading the nation by their simple and dedicated faith in human reality. The right sense of Independence, not merely a freedom from foreign hands, has prevailed over people up to now in some measure, which speaks positively about the land of million faces, thousand languages and of numerous colours and shades. Certainly viewing the enormous kind of changes and processes, nuances and inventions, India still strives to live its Independence on its streets, markets, homes and institutions as best as it can. However, is it truly respected, sincerely promoted and heartily encouraged? The reality on the ground looks contradictory—silenced, pushed, hammered and buried without any witness!

Whither Independence and what sense does it make to hoist the flag to mark the freedom event when one of Mother India's daughters—Manipur—is passing through the darkest moment in her seventy year old history? Since the beginning of May this year violence, leading almost to genocide, as the Rwanda-Burundi story is still fresh in our minds, has ravaged the beautiful land of greenest hills and gifted people of various tribes of the hills and mountains, rivers and fountains, mountains and valleys. Deep seated anger between tribes has erupted to such an extent that the wild fire of flames has devastated the land with thousands of lives, leaving no space for peace. In the "Independent" India, the government of Manipur has played with fire and has kept stoking it till the whole valley and the hill

would keep burning and burning. Reports keep informing the world that guns and fire arms are stolen from the government armory at the behest of the interested party that is leading the state of Manipur. Hence, violence and killing of innocent people are a given in an Independent nation, so it seems. Weaponizing the identity of the indigenous people of the North East with sophisticated armaments has generated a lot of hatred among them. All this is done by the political master-minds who only want to usurp power and not serve those human beings. As the learned statements reveal, for seventy years the North East is mishandled by the powers at the centre and has let the game go on to suit one's political agenda. In the "Independent" India Manipur is almost allowed to go the way of brutal killings, while the Prime Minister utters not a word, leave alone visit the violent and war ridden State. Perhaps remaining silent and indifferent to the crisis devouring human lives is what Independence means for our leader, in spite of the repeated remarks on his silence which have been thrown out at his face by persons of different standing. For the prime leaders at the centre stage, the Karnataka elections were more valuable than the human life of families in Manipur. Is this what we call the Independence of our nation? Well, power politics is certainly more valuable than the human cry. Did human life matter to Hitler?

While on a State visit to America in June of this year, the Prime Minister of India informed the world that he was sharing the "democratic values" of our nation with the host nation. What an irony! What a lie! While it was urgently and absolutely necessary to share the "Independence" of our country with its "democratic values" with the ongoing suffering people of Manipur, the Prime Minister found it necessary to teach America our democratic values! Continual targeting of Christians by the saffron clothed fringe groups has almost a permanent approval from the ruling government. With the Congress winning the elections in Karnataka, the religious communalism has been aggravated, fanned by the aggrieved party, with hate mongering

and hate speeches leading to dis-harmony and violence. The question, whither Independence, is still valid. The spectacular inauguration of the new Parliament House manifested in clear terms if at all "Independence" is a reality for the citizens of this nation. With a strong smell of "religion" spread into the new Parliament on that day, the incumbent government perhaps hopes that henceforth all parliamentary discussions and deliberations will be dominated by one religious feeling and one civil code. Vande Bharat may be increasingly running across the country having been proudly flagged off by the Prime Minister alone, while the safety of the passengers might be less attended to. This too is India's Independence? Pettiness and vengeance is consistently shown in the removal of any institution that bears the name of Jawaharlal Nehru, as the case with the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. It might be recalled that in a speech Mr. Vajpayee delivered in the Parliament Hall, he narrated who Nehru was and how his portrait was hanging on a wall which the former used to see every day when passing by; and when it disappeared suddenly, and he asked who removed it, no one answered. However, immediately the portrait was back in its place. This was to indicate that Nehru might have been a strong opponent on the political ground but a dignified human person existentially, which was a more important factor in life than mere politics. Perhaps, that is what "Independence" signifies. Pettiness plays no role in political discourse; dignity and honour and respect, yes.

The "Independence" of our nation is more than freedom from colonisers. It is the lived expression of dependence which the citizens of a country show in their daily affairs by a responsible civic sense, honest justice and sincere respect towards one another. Do not ask for whom the bell tolls. If Manipur is burning because of the hardness of heart, no one, not even the Primed Minister can maintain a stoic silence about it. If Manipur is burning, India is not "Independent" yet! ■

# Indian Freedom Fighters, Freedom, and Their Vision

PRADEEP ANTHONY L OFM

After 76 years it is very important to still keep in mind that for our freedom many patriots gave their lives. As citizens of India all of us have a duty to pay our homage and know what our freedom fighters did for our country. Some of the prominent freedom fighters and their contributions in gist are as follows.

Vallabhbhai Patel is remembered for his heroic contribution at Bardoli Satyagrah. Jawaharlal Nehru was highly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, became the first Prime Minister of India, known for his love for children and young minds. Mahatma Gandhi showed the path of non-violence to the entire India with his salt march and other resistance. The rebels of Indian Mutiny like Mangal Pandey, Nana Shaheb and Tatya Tope showed a great vigor for India's freedom. Lal Bahadur Shastri was a silent person, yet active freedom fighter in all civil disobedience moments. Subhash Chandra Bose was triggered by Jallianwala Bagh massacre, he formed Indian National Army (INA) and Azad Hind Government. Rebels like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Shivaram Rajguru are to be remembered for their heroic bravery and courage. Kunwar Singh defeated British with guerrilla warfare tactics. Rani Lakshmi Bai for her courageous and fearless bravery. Bal Gangadhar Tilak stirred the nation with the slogan: 'Swaraj is my birthright.' Lala Lajpat Rai died during the brutal lathi charge in 'Simon Commission' protest. C Rajagopalachari is a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, recipient of Bharat Ratna for his contribution for India's growth. Dadabhai Naoroji established Indian National Congress, and joined the non-violence independent

movement. K.M. Munshi established Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, participated in all the quit India movements. Bipin Chandra Pal is a part of the Indian National Congress, his association with Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a Lal-Pal-Bal trio made several revolutionary moments of that time. Chittaranjan Das was famously known as Deshbandhu, a friend of the nation, for his deep patriotic ideal for serving the country, contributed much to the country by being a lawyer. Abdul Hafiz Mohamed Barakatullah has used his pen as a weapon, wrote many articles from overseas in England's daily magazines to instill the fire of independence for Indians. In Indian Mutiny of 1857, Hazrat Mahal, an empress daringly defended her regions from the attacks of Britishers.

## Freedom

It is said: in order to do the right thing in the present, there is a need to know the past, thus the future could be good for the future generation. The definition of the word 'freedom' taken from Collier's Encyclopedia is a state of liberty—personal and social, and metaphysical elements to enter into the connotation of the word. There is always a swing between 'freedom from' and 'freedom to' in every life of the individual, community, state, and country by keeping in the framework of moral responsibility. French revolution gave heed to the cry of the people for freedom from dictatorial policies of state to ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. After UN was formed, freedom is defined to the wider dimension of human faculty besides, having basic amenities like food, shelter and house.

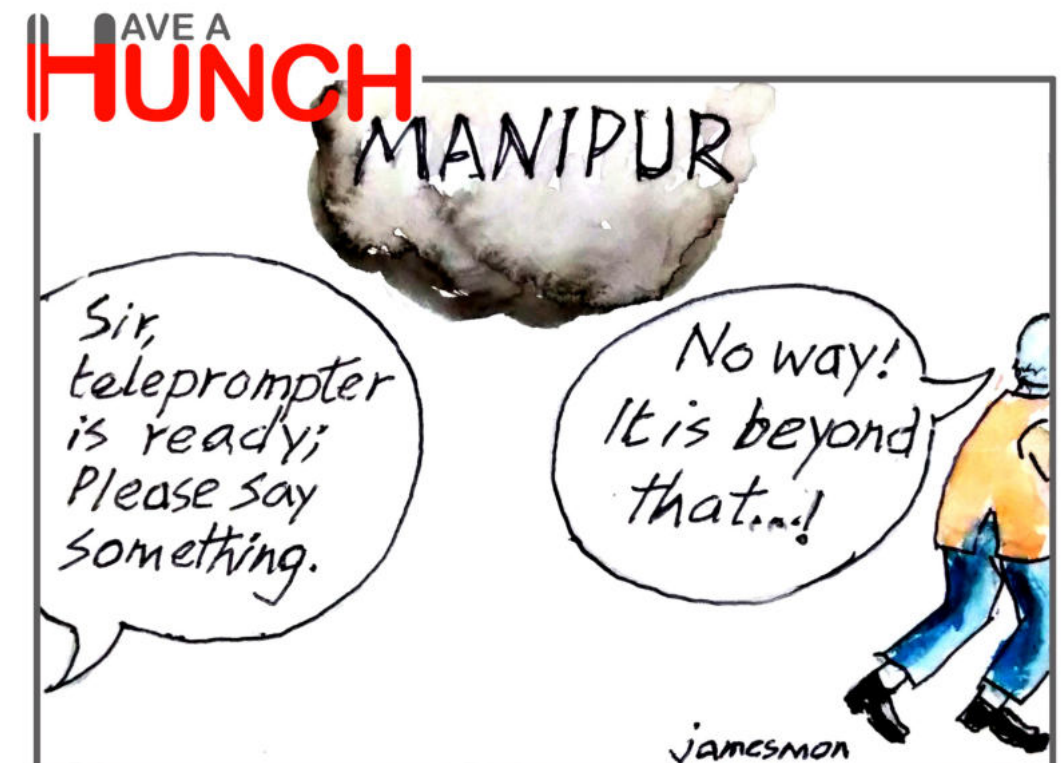
## The Vision of Freedom Fighters and the Reality Today

The freedom fighters of India had their vision for India, which is written on the preamble of Indian constitution. It is, "We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens: justice, social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. We have placed it on ourselves, saying, in our constituent assembly this 26th day of November, 1949, do hereby adopt, enact and give to ourselves this

An editorial article named *Loot, intransigence, and the darkening of a colonial blot* written by Shashi Tharoor on 13 July 2023 in *The Hindu* newspaper demands from colonizing country for moral atonement and to return precious stone of Kohinoor

Diamond to India. His book on *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India* gives his elaborate explanation of the damage caused by colonisation. I would like to mention that it is very important not to take our freedom for granted, our nation leaders have earned to make our lives more beautiful and happier.

It is very sad to see, having one of the best constitutions for a country; the growth of the India is still a great dichotomy in reality. There are greatest intellects, elite rich people, business people, and scientists on the one side but on the other side majority of Indians are still very poverty. World economic forum in 2020 declared that about 220 million people live their daily lives with the expense of less than ₹32 a day. Sadly, due to this many rural people migrate and work mostly in the city for a very less income. The war between bourgeoisie and proletariat still continues, in an invisible way. May this celebration of 76th year independence of India renews our spirit to work for a better India. ■





# Lessons from India's Freedom Struggle

ELIAS REDDY OFM

India's Freedom Struggle is a story in which we can detect commendable lessons applicable to modern political and business management. First of all, the common characteristic of all the freedom fighters was that despite their differences they managed to share a common awareness of British Colonialism. Secondly, they resisted British Colonialism in an ethical manner. Gandhi's ethical way of fighting captured the imagination of the people of India. People got inspired by this man's honesty and way of life. Similarly, a person with an honest attitude and innovative way of thinking can make a difference in modern management, which is essential for the growth of the Nation.

Another dimension of our freedom fighters relevant to modern management is the close relationship between leaders and people. India's freedom fighters had placed their faith and trust in the people of India, which in turn galvanised the people for meaningful action. People listened and flocked to them, since they saw determination in what they spoke and trusted in what they said and did. As a result, India gained freedom by the leader's trust in the people and the people's trust in their leaders.

Further, the attitude of dialogue was a component of India's march towards freedom, especially in the figures of Mahatma Gandhi, Vallabhai Patel, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Sarojini Naidu and others; they stressed the importance of dialogue in keeping the teams and the people alert and alive. It is through dialogue between freedom fighters and the people were able to make right decisions. For instance,

Gandhi's execution of non-cooperation and Quit India Movement symbolises relevance of decision-making and planning through cooperation between leaders and the base.

In addition, freedom struggle created an atmosphere of unity among the people, irrespective of color, religion, caste or creed. The Mother Land was seen as the home of people of every religions and culture. They felt empowered to fight in unison for the Motherland. This atmosphere of involving all the people in the freedom struggle shaped India into a country of tolerance towards diverse religions and cultures. Gandhi said, "A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people." This should remind us that, in political management and in business management, respect for the diversity of cultures can only result in greater creativity in one's work for empowerment.

To conclude, India's Freedom Struggle has noteworthy attitudes and values that are relevant in modern management of companies and Nations. Firstly, leadership in any company or nation should have trust in the people and earn the trust of the people whom they lead; without placing trust in people it is impossible to build up, rise up or reach the goal. Secondly, every leader of a country or business should be in dialogue with the people to conceive innovative methods and ways to build up the society or group, just as the Indian freedom fighters were finding innovative ways to tackle issues. Thirdly, leaders should find ethical ways of tackling issues and not succumb purely to expediency. ■

# Milan Kundera

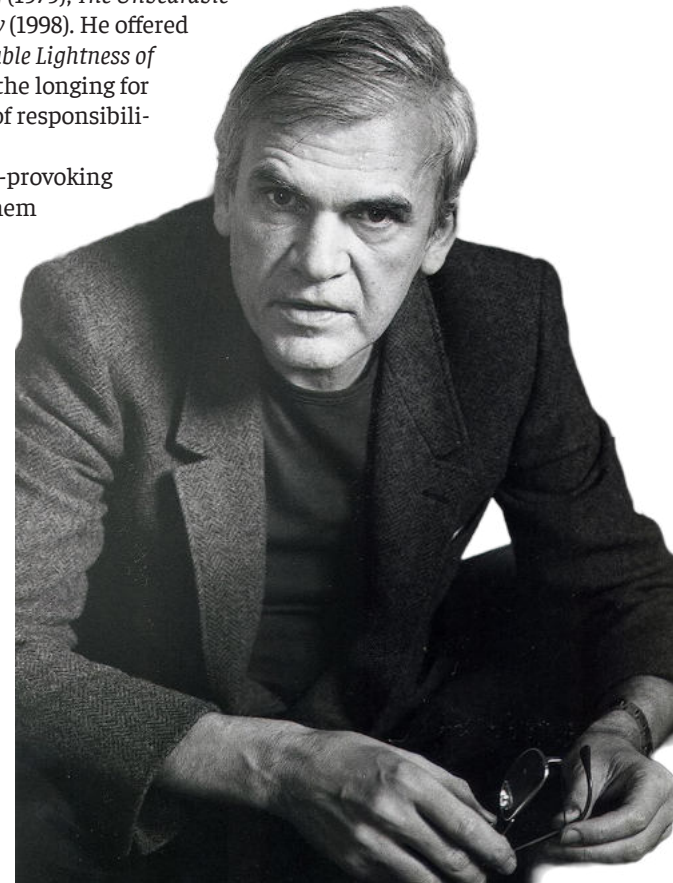
## The Author of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* Is Dead

JAMESMON PC OFM

Milan Kundera, the Czech-French novelist, passed away on 11 July at the age of 94. He was a rare genius who could blend his literary talent with deep philosophical and political thought through novels, maybe in the line of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus or Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He was a man who loved to keep a low profile. He shunned personal publicity by all means and was one of a kind. Though he loved to keep a low profile he had a great readership across languages and countries. On his passing, many had taken to social media to express their sorrow and appreciation of his great and insightful works and also to acknowledge how he had inspired them profoundly. His major works were: *The Joke* (1967); *Life Is Elsewhere* (1973); *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979); *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984); *Immortality* (1990); *Identity* (1998). He offered through his novels especially through *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* rare insights into human struggle, between the longing for a care free, feather-like existence and the burden of responsibilities, commitment and loyalty.

Milan Kundera was well known for his thought-provoking and insightful statements he made and most of them have strong political, cultural and humanitarian bearings. Once he wrote that "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." and "The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history." His quotes wouldn't be appreciated by people in power especially, autocratic and fascist regimes. What he said seems to have an everlasting relevance for countries that struggle against such powers.

Though Milan Kundera believed in communism in the beginning, the turn of events in his home country made him distance himself from it. And ultimately, he was stripped off his citizenship for his political stand and had to flee to France in 1975. He was given French citizenship and till his last breath, he refused to return to his home country, though his Czech citizenship was restored in 2019. ■



# We Create Exclusion or Belonging

When religion remains at an immature level, it tends to create very violent people who ensconce themselves on the side of the good, the worthy, the pure, the saved. They project all their evil somewhere else and attack it over there.

RICHARD ROHR OFM



Everything belongs. No one needs to be punished, scapegoated, or excluded. We cannot directly fight or separate ourselves from evil or untruth. Evil becomes apparent when exposed to the Truth. “Everything belongs,” both the good and the bad, and it takes discernment to learn how to hold the paradox.

The spiritual gift of discernment shows how seemingly good things can be recognised as sometimes bad things, and seemingly bad things can also be seen to bear some good fruit. Darn it! This kind of discernment invites people into yes/and thinking, rather than simplistic either/or thinking. This is the difference between merely having correct information and the true spiritual gift of wisdom.

Once we have learned to discern the real and disguised nature of both good and evil, we recognise that everything is broken and fallen, weak and poor—while still being the dwelling place of God: you and me, our countries, our children, our marriages, and even our churches, mosques, and synagogues. That is not a put-down of anybody or anything, but actually creates the freedom to love imperfect things. As Jesus told the rich young man, “God alone is good” (Mark 10:18). We cannot wait for things to be totally perfect to fall in love with them, or we will never love anything. Now, instead, we can love everything!

Jesus uses a number of mixture images to illustrate the tension of our own mixture of good and evil. They seem to say this world is a mixture of different things, and unless we learn how to see, we don’t know how to separate; we

get lost in the weeds and can’t see the wheat. In one parable, servants ask, “Should we pull out the weeds?” Jesus responds, “No. Let them both grow together until the harvest.” Then, at the end of time, he will decide what is wheat and what is weed (Matthew 13:24–30). But we are a mixture of weed and wheat, and we always will be. As Martin Luther put it, we are *simul justus et peccator* [at once justified and a sinner], each of us simultaneously saint and sinner. That’s the mystery of holding weed and wheat together in our one field of life. It takes a lot more patience, compassion, forgiveness, and love than aiming for some illusory perfection that usually cannot see its own faults. The only true perfection available to us is the honest acceptance of our imperfection.

If we must have perfection to be happy with ourselves, we have only two choices. We can either ignore our own evil (deny the weeds) or we can give up in discouragement (deny the wheat). But if we put aside perfection and face the tension of having both, then we can hear the good news with open hearts.

## Oneness with Everyone

If “everything belongs,” then no one needs to be punished, scapegoated, or excluded. Author Lerita Coleman Brown considers the mystic Howard Thurman’s (1899–1981) insistence that everyone is a child of God. The understanding that I am a holy child of God contains within itself often unrealised consequences. If I embrace this notion about myself, I must accept its corollary: that is, if I am a holy child of God, then so is everyone else. This sentiment is echoed in an interview in which Howard’s daughter, Olive Thurman Wong, bemoaned the fact that people didn’t fully comprehend the importance of oneness in her father’s life and work. “Oneness’ is an easy enough thing to bandy about,” writes Thurman scholar Liza Rankow, who interviewed Wong. “It is even an easy thing to profess, until we realise that it must include not only the people we like and agree with, not only those to whom we are sympathetic, but also those whom we view as

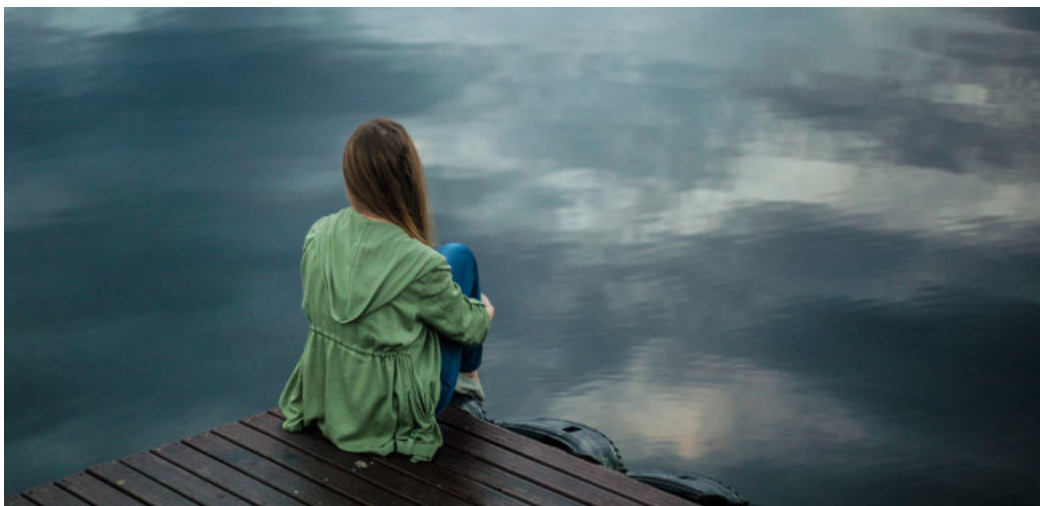
abhorrent (whatever side of a political position we may hold). We don’t get to choose who we are one with—it’s everybody.”

Sometimes the faces of the people I detest flash across my mind and heart... How can they possibly be holy children of God? Howard Thurman answers this question in the final chapter of *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Pointing to the centrality of the love ethic in Jesus’s teachings, he observes the types of people Jesus befriended who, by all accounts, should have been absolute enemies. Thurman points to the necessity of extinguishing bitterness within the heart in order to recognise adversaries as holy children of God.

Thurman emphasises Jesus’ teaching to love our enemies as a radical challenge to love as if everyone belongs. Jesus, however, approaches life from the point of view of God. The serious problem for him had to be: Is the Roman a child of God? Is my enemy God’s child? If he is, I must work upon myself until I am willing to bring him back into the family... If God loves them, that binds me. Can it be that God does not know how terrible my enemy is? No, God knows them as well as he knows himself and much better than I know them. It must be true, then, that there is something in every human that remains intact, inviolate, regardless of what he [or she] does. I wonder! Is this true? Is there an integrity of the person, so intrinsic in its value and significance that no deed, however evil, can ultimately undermine this given thing? If a person is of infinite worth in the sight of God, whether they are saint or sinner, whether they are a good person or a bad person, evil or not, if that is true, then I am never relieved of my responsibility for trying to make contact with this worthy thing in them.

If our egos are still in charge, we will find a “disposable” person or group on which to project our problems. People who haven’t come to at least a minimal awareness of their own shadow side will always find someone else to hate, fear, and exclude. Hatred holds a group together much more quickly and easily than love and inclusivity, I am sorry to say.





The longer we gaze, the more we will see our own complicity in and profitability from the sin of others, even if it's the satisfaction of feeling we are on higher moral ground.

Sadly, the history of violence and the history of religion are almost the same history. When religion remains at an immature level, it tends to create very violent people who ensconce themselves on the side of the good, the worthy, the pure, the saved. They project all their evil somewhere else and attack it over there.

Something has to be sacrificed. Blood has to be shed. Someone has to be blamed, attacked, tortured, imprisoned, or killed. Sacrificial systems create religions and governments of exclusion and violence. Yet Jesus taught and modeled inclusivity and forgiveness!

As long as we try to deal with evil by some other means than forgiveness, we will never experience the real meaning of evil and sin. We will keep projecting, fearing, and attacking it over there, instead of “gazing” on it within ourselves and weeping over it.

The longer we gaze, the more we will see our own complicity in and profitability from the sin of others, even if it's the satisfaction of feeling we are on higher moral ground. Forgiveness demands three new simultaneous “seeings”: I must see God in the other, I must access God in myself, and I must experience God in a new way that is larger than an “Enforcer.”

### Nothing Is Excluded

Francis, like Jesus, refused to exclude things from the garden of grace; there is no exclusionary instinct in either of them—except toward exclusion itself! Francis had a genius for not eliminating the negative, but instead using it, learning from it, and thus incorporating it. He goes to the edge and the bottom of society, he kisses the leper, he loves the poor. He doesn't hide from his shadow self but advertises it. So much of our religion has taught us to deny or hide our shadow, which forces us into a fatal split from foundational reality.

Just as we grow by ultimately accepting and forgiving our own failures, conscious people, like Jesus and Pope Francis, are able to say about others, “Who am I to judge?” (Luke 12:14). That's quite the opposite of religion as exclusion! In my fourteen years as a jail chaplain, I met people who had done things that are wrong, sinful, immoral, or “bad”; yet when I drew close to a particular life, I found that the human heart is most often either sincere, mistaken, or afraid. From that place, they sought apparent good but not the true good. It made them do some stupid things; they're suffering for that now because evil is its own punishment. But when

we draw close to it, the human heart has a kind of tenderness, sweetness, and littleness, even in its fragility and fear. As Scottish minister John Watson (1850–1907) stated, “Be kind, for everyone is fighting a hard battle.” Remember, sisters and brothers, Jesus is really saying that we are punished by our sins rather than for our sins. None of us know the wounds that every human being carries or why they do the things they do. Human sin, failure, and imperfection are to be wept over and pitied, not something to be abhorred.

Franciscan spirituality puts a big exclamation point behind Jesus' words, “The last will be first and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:16; Luke 13:30) and Paul's words, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). Upside-downness is at the heart of our message, always prompting us to look more deeply and broadly at things. This opens our eyes to recognise God's self-giving at the far edges where most of us cannot or will not see God, such as in other religions, in any we define as outsiders or sinners, and even to the farthest edge of our seeing, toward those who fight us and oppose us—our so-called enemies.

We must grow up to our full stature to find the full stature of God (Ephesians 4:13). Small souls are incapable of knowing a great God, and great souls are never satisfied with a small or stingy God. Once we become fully conscious ourselves, all things will be beautiful.

### Living from the Larger Mind

At the level of contemplative consciousness, we move beyond dualistic, either/or thinking. At this point, life and death, goodness and badness are not opposites. The one does not cancel out the other. There is enough spaciousness for everything to belong, a return to an elemental innocence, some kind of radical “okayness.” Our dualistic, logical minds keep coming to offer us the satanic temptation to eat again of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but this time we refuse.

It is only the first level of consciousness that needs that kind of security system and

explanation for everything. That is what it means to be like God: I will be the decider. So many Christians are absolutely sure they know who is going to heaven and who is going to hell. What a strange and horrible comfort that must be! Why would anything except the tiny mind want that? The great mind hands that back to where it belongs, with the only mind where everything does belong—which is, of course, the mind of God.

Every bit of resistance to this contemplative consciousness comes from some previous mental explanation of how things should be, or what we want or expect them to be. If we start our day with ten expectations, we have just set ourselves up for an unhappy day. When we live out of our minds, it just creates expectations and reasons to be disappointed. Don't do that! We've got to choose God here, in this moment, and whatever happens, happens. I don't care how crowded or late the bus is or even if it breaks down three times. It's okay. We don't always succeed at this, but when we do, we know that everything belongs. We know that God can use even this and that maybe the experience really was all right.

It seems that simply allowing ourselves to be here, to recognise the sacrament and the grace of the present moment, is enough to allow God's loving gaze to happen. What we are doing in the allowing is returning the gaze. That's it. We are completing the circuit and saying it's okay.

I am not advocating for some kind of cheap universalism. We don't want to become people who glibly say “everything belongs” in the face of suffering and injustice. I hope you don't hear me saying that. It might sound like I am contradicting myself, and our calculating minds may be saying, “Come on. It can't be that simple.” I think that is why the diabolical, beguiling mind keeps confusing us and trapping us in head trips, instead of surrendering to the naked now that God always inhabits. This is the place where the incarnation is always taking place, and where God is mysteriously present in every moment, perfectly hidden and at the same time perfectly revealed. ■



## Velankanni, Full of Grace

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

**T**he Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health, also known as the Velankanni Church, is a Roman Catholic church located in Velankanni, Tamil Nadu, India. It is one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Christians in India, and is also known as the “Lourdes of the East”. The church is said to have been founded in the 16th century after a series of Marian apparitions: the apparition of Mary and the Christ Child to a slumbering shepherd boy, the curing of a lame buttermilk vendor, and the rescue of Portuguese sailors from a violent sea storm.

What first caught my attention is the large and imposing church structure, built in the Gothic style. It is decorated with intricate carvings and statues. As I spend the entire day in the church premise, the pilgrim centre began unfolding itself: the huge statue of Jesus in blessing posture, people hastening to the sea shore, some after getting their head shaved as a sign of surrender and consecration, to have a pardoning dip in the holy waters of Bay of Bengal, and so on. For me the most edifying was devotees walking a 600-metre long sand path on their knees in the scorching sun of coastal Tamil Nadu. What reaches the other end of the 600-metre stretch is metal tested in fire. ■







# Are There Different Styles of Thinkers?

**Have you ever raised your hand to say something at an event and suddenly realised that you have no idea what you planned to say?**

Dr MARIANNE FURTADO de NAZARETH

I run a book club called Book Bound where an author of a new book is hosted and I introduce the audience to the book. So why do you need to make the effort of running a book club could be a question that some may ask. My reason is pretty down-to-earth—to bring the topic into focus and get differing points of view. In that hour so many views get thrown up and everyone present is exposed to different points of view. It's a wonderful way to get people to interact and get differing points of view on the topic, as each of us have a different opinion on a topic.

So how do these thought processes happen? Some people say their thought takes place in images, some in words. But our mental processes are more mysterious than we realise. Visual-Spatial Identifier, a yes-or-no test designed by the psychologist Linda Silverman helps to divide verbal people from visual ones:

Do you think mainly in pictures instead of words? Do you know things without being able to explain how or why? Do you remember what you see and forget what you hear? Can you visualise objects from different perspectives? Would you rather read a map than follow verbal directions?

Visual people tend to answer yes to more of these questions; I answer yes to almost all of them. The imagistic minds in "Visual Thinking" can seem glamorous compared with the verbal ones. One could differentiate Grandin's visual thinkers who seem to be attending a colourful Jaipur art festival, then Kross's verbal thinkers who are stuck at a one-man show in Ranga Shankara, which is just one long monologue.

Have you ever raised your hand to say something at an event and suddenly realised that you have no idea what you planned to say? For that moment, I remember panicking. Then when the speaker called on me, I opened my mouth, but no thoughts emerged from my head, no visuals to help me formulate the question. How weird was that? To overcome this now, I write the questions down, especially at press conferences.

Later, describing the moment to a friend, I recalled how, when I was a kid, my mother had often asked my father, "What are you thinking?" He'd shrug and say, "Nothing"—a response that irritated her to no end. ("How can he be thinking about nothing?" she'd ask me.) I've always been on Team Dad; I spend a lot of time thoughtless, just living life. At the same time, whenever I speak, ideas condense out of the mental cloud. It was happening even then, as I talked with my friend: I was articulating thoughts that had been unspecified yet present in my mind.

My head isn't entirely word-free; like many people, I occasionally talk to myself in an inner monologue. (Remember the milk! Don't forget to turn off the gas!) On the whole, though, silence reigns. Blankness, too: I see hardly any visual images, rarely picturing things, people, or places.

Thinking happens as a kind of pressure behind my eyes, but I need to talk out loud in order to complete most of my thoughts. If no in-

terlocutor is available, I write. When that fails, I pace my house, muttering. I talk to myself while I jog every morning, where no one can hear me. My minimalist mental theatre has shaped my life. I'm an inveterate talker, a professional writer, and a lifelong photographer—a heady person who's determined to get things out of my head, to a place where I can apprehend them.

I'm scarcely alone in having a mental "style," or believing I do. Ask someone how she thinks and you might learn that she talks to herself silently, or cogitates visually, or moves through mental space by traversing physical space. I have a friend who thinks during yoga, and another who thinks aloud while cooking on auto mode.

After the pandemic began, a very visually inclined Doctor friend read a lot about how medications can help our bodies fight covid-19; as she read, she developed a detailed visual analogy in which the body was a military base under siege. When she thought about cytokine storms—events in which the immune system becomes over-activated, causing out-of-control inflammation—she didn't conceptualise the idea in words. Instead, she said, "I see the soldiers in my immune system going berserk. They become confused and start attacking the base and lighting it on fire."

I often found myself wishing that I were more visual. At the same time, Grandin and I have many of the same ideas, we arrive, by divergent routes, at the same destinations. How different do our minds really make us? And what should we make of our differences? Verbal minds, she argues, run our boardrooms, newsrooms, legislatures, and schools, which have cut back on shop class and the arts, while subjecting students to a daunting array of written standardised tests. The result is a crisis in human ingenuity. "Imagine a world with no artists, industrial designers, or inventors," Grandin writes. "No electricians, mechanics, architects, plumbers, or builders. These are our visual thinkers, many hiding in plain sight, and we have failed to understand, encourage, or appreciate their specific contributions."

In *Thinking in Pictures*, Grandin suggests that the world is divided between visual and

verbal thinkers. “Visual Thinking” gently revises the idea, identifying a continuum of thought styles that’s roughly divisible into three sections. On one end are verbal thinkers, who often solve problems by talking about them in their heads or, more generally, by proceeding in the linear, representational fashion typical of language. (Estimating the cost of a building project, a verbal thinker might price out all the components, then sum them using a spreadsheet—an ordered, symbol-based approach.) On the other end of the continuum are “object visualisers”: they come to conclusions through the use of concrete, photograph-like mental images, as Grandin does when she compares building plans in her mind. In between those poles, Grandin writes, is a second group of visual thinkers—“spatial visualisers,” who seem to combine language and image, thinking in terms of visual patterns and abstractions.

According to Grandin, there are two kinds of visual thinkers as well, because it helps make sense of differences between like-minded people. It takes visual skill to engineer a machine and to repair it; the engineer and the mechanic are both visual thinkers, and yet they differ.

In Grandin’s account, an engineer is likely to be a spatial visualiser who can picture, in the abstract, how all the parts of the engine will work, while the mechanic is likely to be an object visualiser, who can at a glance understand whether a ding on an engine cylinder is functionally consequential or just cosmetic. Artists and artisans, Grandin suggests, tend to be object visualisers: they can picture exactly how this painting should look, how this incision should be sewn up.

Scientists, mathematicians, and electrical engineers tend to be spatial visualisers: they can imagine, in general, how gears will mesh and molecules will interact. Grandin describes an exercise, conducted by one institution, in which engineers and scientists with advanced degrees were pitted against radio repairmen and truck mechanics in performing technical tasks under pressure, such as making a rudimentary vehicle out of a pile of junk. The engineers, with their abstract visual minds, tended to overthink in this highly practical scenario; they lost to the mechanics, who were likely to be object visualisers whose abilities to see it, build it, and repair it were fused. ■



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# The Complicated Art of Moving On

DR RUPA PETER



This is my last week in my current workplace. I’m moving on. Moving forward, if you will. I do the rounds, saying my goodbyes to my colleagues of seven years; colleagues who have become friends; family even. It’s bittersweet, this moment. Bitter as I leave behind people and a place that has nurtured, nourished and even transformed me in so many ways. Sweet, because I’m looking forward to the next adventure in the journey called life.

I stare at the tall trees lining the pathway of my soon-to-be ex-workplace. The branches sway gracefully to the evening winds. It’s so calm outside. My mind, on the other hand, is in a frenzy. It rushes back and forth between timelines—my first day here; the unexpected kindness of a colleague; team lunches and coffee breaks; conflict and resolution, the grapevine, the incessant laughter and unbeatable deadlines. An amazing roller-coaster ride. Nostalgia grips my very soul.

Believe me, I am no stranger to moving on. I have worked in several places and moved seamlessly through jobs. Relationships, too, have helped me perfect the art of moving on (now, that would be another piece for another day!)

In my forty years of existence, I have come to realise and have accepted (rather grudgingly) that change is the only constant. Life and time move forward in a linear pattern. There is no point in staying still or holding on. Life evolves and you evolve with it and move ahead. And there is a certain kind of beauty that lies within the uncertainty of the great unknown—the road ahead. But, the transition, the birthing pains that’s what gets to me, every time.

Change is never easy. And leaving behind people who are as comforting as Maggi on a cold, rainy day is pretty tough. Scary even. Even though promises are made to stay in touch, I know from experience that life usually takes people in different directions and these well-meaning promises may not always come through. This saddens me more. I am lost in a wave of gloom.

But then again, a germ of a thought dawns upon me. Through my two decades of work life, I have met so many amazing people—some kind, some giving, some extremely talented, some funny, some rude and some weird, even. And each of them has added value to my life—like the colleague who once taught me how to crochet or the one who cried with me when my baby was sick. The one told me my fashion sense was lousy or the one who made silly jokes about my shoes. Each one of them is an intrinsic and enriching part of my life experience. Even though, change has come knocking at my doors once more and I leave with a heavy heart, I know, I will carry a piece of them as a part of me.

A friend of mine, once said, life is like a train journey; from time to time, people will get into to your compartment and travel with you for a while. When their station is up, they get off the train. Enjoy their companionship, value the lessons learnt and cherish the memories as you move ahead with your journey. Wise words, indeed. Words that I plan to adhere to, as I journey onward. ■





## THE SPIRITUAL IMPERATIVE OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

H KIRUBAKARAN

In an era where global challenges loom large, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have emerged as a beacon of hope for a better world. While the TAGS encompass a broad range of targets, their underlying principles inherently resonate with the fundamental spiritual values that transcend religious and cultural boundaries. This article explores the intersection between sustainable development and spirituality, highlighting the critical role each SDG plays in addressing humanity's urgent spiritual needs.

At the core of spirituality lies compassion, empathy, and a commitment to the well-being of all living beings. The first two SDGs, No Poverty and Zero Hunger, emphasize the need to uplift the marginalised, eradicate extreme poverty, and ensure access to nutritious food for all. By addressing these basic human needs, these goals honor the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and promoting social harmony.

Spiritual growth flourishes in an environment of good health and well-being. The third SDG aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for people of all ages. Physical and mental well-being form the foundation for individuals to explore their spiritual potential,

fostering inner peace and a sense of purpose. Holistic healthcare systems that prioritise prevention, mental health support, and access to essential services become integral to nurturing spirituality.

Education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge; it is a catalyst for personal and collective transformation. The fourth SDG, Quality Education, recognises the transformative power of learning and seeks to provide inclusive, equitable, and lifelong educational opportunities. By nurturing critical thinking, empathy, and ethical values, education becomes a pathway for individuals to explore their spiritual nature, fostering a deep understanding of interconnectedness and promoting social justice.

Spirituality recognises the inherent divinity and equality of all beings. The fifth SDG, Gender Equality, endeavors to eliminate discrimination and empower all individuals, regardless of gender, to fully participate in society. By dismantling gender biases and stereotypes, this goal supports the realisation of human potential, allowing individuals to embrace their spiritual essence and contribute to the collective flourishing of humanity.

The interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world forms the bedrock of

spiritual teachings. Goal 13, Climate Action, acknowledges the urgent need to mitigate climate change and its impacts. By nurturing a deep reverence for nature and adopting sustainable practices, this goal invites individuals to reestablish their connection with the Earth, fostering a sense of gratitude, stewardship, and responsibility for the environment.

In addition to these specific goals, the SDGs also emphasize the importance of promoting universal values such as peace, justice, and equity. These values are essential for creating a world in which people can live in harmony with themselves, each other, and the planet.

Ultimately, the SDGs are about creating a better world for all. This includes ensuring that people have the opportunity to connect with their spiritual selves and live fulfilling lives. The Sustainable Development Goals not only address the pressing socio-economic and environmental challenges of our time but also speak to the profound spiritual aspirations of humanity. By aligning with the core principles of compassion, interconnectedness, and reverence for life, the SDGs offer a blueprint for sustainable development that resonates with our deepest spiritual needs.

As we critically assess the progress made in the eight years since their adoption, let us recognise the profound significance of these goals and commit to their realisation, for sustainable development is indeed the most urgent spiritual need of our time.

Here are some additional thoughts on the spiritual imperative of the SDGs:

The SDGs offer a framework for living a more meaningful and fulfilling life. By working towards the goals, we can connect with our inner selves, find our purpose in life, and contribute to the betterment of the world. The SDGs can help us to heal the divisions in our world. By working together to achieve the goals, we can build bridges between cultures, religions, and social groups. The SDGs can help us to create a more just and equitable world. By working to eliminate poverty, discrimination, and inequality, we can create a world where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. The SDGs are a call to action for all of us. They are a challenge to live our lives in a way

that is more compassionate, interconnected, and sustainable. They are a vision for a better world, and they are within our reach. Let us all work together to make the SDGs a reality.

In addition to the SDGs, there are many other ways to connect with our spiritual selves and live more fulfilling lives. Some of these include:

- **Meditation:** Meditation is a powerful tool for quieting the mind
- **Nature:** Spending time in nature can help us to connect with our inner selves and feel a sense of peace and belonging.
- **Service to others:** Helping others is a great way to connect with our spiritual nature and feel a sense of purpose.
- **Rituals and practices:** Many people find that engaging in rituals and practices such as prayer, yoga, or tai chi can help them to connect with their spiritual selves.
- **Learning about different spiritual traditions:** Learning about different spiritual traditions can help us to expand our understanding of the world and our place in it.

The path to spiritual fulfillment is different for everyone. There is no one right way to connect with our inner selves. However, the SDGs offer a framework for living a more meaningful and fulfilling life, and there are many other ways to connect with our spiritual selves. The important thing is to find what works for us and to keep exploring. The journey to spiritual fulfillment is a lifelong one. It is a journey of discovery, growth, and transformation. It is a journey that is worth taking.

In conclusion, the Sustainable Development Goals not only address the pressing socio-economic and environmental challenges of our time but also speak to the profound spiritual aspirations of humanity. By aligning with the core principles of compassion, interconnectedness, and reverence for life, the SDGs offer a blueprint for sustainable development that resonates with our deepest spiritual needs. As we critically assess the progress made in the eight years since their adoption, let us recognise the profound significance of these goals and commit to their realisation, for sustainable development is indeed the most urgent spiritual need of our time. ■



# THE EPIDEMIC OF NARCISSISM

A FRANCIS

The unprecedented rise of narcissism is a growing concern among many social scientists these days. Some psychologists (Keith Campbell, Jean Twenge, Ronald Reggio, Jim Taylor, and others) label it as the 'epidemic of the day.'

With the unrivaled pervasiveness of social media in the nooks and crannies of the postmodern world which ingenuously propagates the exodus of human living from the collectivist to individualistic ethos, it is no secret that humanity is making a tectonic shift towards creating an "It's all about me" or "I love me" culture. Individuals distance from the social fabrics of collectivism, social commitment, and empathy which were considered to be the bedrocks of our glorious human co-existence. Self-gratification, self-importance, and blatant individualism are aggressively promoted as the catalytic ideals for achieving success in life.

Various factors favour narcissism, for making inroads to the present-day living. The pop culture that enigmatically romanticises

the luscious lives of celebrities, the spread of the American self-esteem movement, and what is more, even the ambitious parent (or teacher) who injects her child with an overdose of entitlement of being 'special' at the expense of berating others around, - all contribute to the spawning and growth of narcissism.

Is narcissism detrimental to human maturation, after all there is some level of it in everyone of us? Naturally, 'some level of it,' is a common component in human developmental process, particularly in childhood when the infant does not see beyond himself. Infantile narcissism wanes in due course through the influence of healthy socialisation from home, school, and society. Hence the little boy who refused to share his toys with siblings, grows to be a generous adult who risks his life in saving a drowning individual, or the little girl who did not share her chocolate with others, grows to be someone who generously buys clothes not only for her family but also for the lonely elderly woman on the street! Growing to be a

healthy human means that we are mindful of our needs, outgrows the greed of our wants, and at the same time are mindful of those around, and their needs. While infantile narcissism is fundamental to human maturation, for preserving the selfhood (self-respect, self-esteem, and self-acceptance), we overcome it to equally respect and enrich the lives of our fellow beings. Unhealthy and pathological narcissism is when the grownups get fixated with self-aggrandizing behaviours to the abject disdain of others/their needs, even to the extent of being aggressive to them. This is awfully disastrous, and unfortunately, this type of narcissism is on the rise today, which the social scientists and psychologists are concerned about.

Here is a passionate warning from Christopher Berry, a teacher of psychology, against the heedless rise of narcissism that is creating a detrimental impact on the peaceful living of humans:

"A narcissistic society would be a deeply lonely place... It will have high crime rate – white collar and violent, as people take whatever they feel entitled to... Cosmetic surgery would be routine, materialism rampant, and everyone would seek fame or notoriety... It will be a place with high rates of anxiety and depression."

## From Narcissus to Narcissists

The origin of the concept of narcissism traces back to the ancient Greek mythology, to the legend of Narcissus. He was a handsome young man who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water. He was so enamoured by his beauty in the water, that he was unable to take his gaze away from it until he wasted his life and died.

Sigmund Freud popularised the concept through his paper, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, and his seminal work on ego, providing a starting point for the psychological theorizing of it, which eventually led to the official recognition of the narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) in the third edition of DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980.

On a spectrum of healthy to pathological manifestation, narcissism varies, the severe form of which being the 'narcissistic personality disorder.' The DSM-5 contains the classification of NPD as a cluster B personality disorder, and defines it as a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), a constant need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. Scholars like Kendra Cherry, a renowned psychology educator, identify five personality traits that contribute to the narcissistic personality namely, "inflated sense of self, a constant need for attention, self-centredness, lack of empathy and preoccupation with power and success."

## The Charming Narcissist

Beware, in real-life situations, narcissists appear as charming, and as persons of charisma, which reminds us of the famous words of the great Sufi mystic, Rumi: "The lion is most handsome when looking for food." Beaming with grandiosity, they portray confidence and an air of ease around them. This is just a cover up for their insecure, needy, and easily bruised self. Their charm and the façade of overconfidence last until they get the attention and adulation they are looking for. Even a slightest criticism or disagreement is sufficient to rip their phoney persona off. Once exposed, they see others as enemies, a threat to their freedom and their sense of entitlement, whatever that is! They accuse, revenge, manipulate, exploit, gaslight, guilt-trip, shame the other, do anything in order to feel their grandiosity/superiority. Research has adequately shown, that narcissism cohabits with aggression. People with higher degree of narcissism carry higher degree of aggression. The 'narcissistic rage' is a specific topic of interest in psychology. Dr. July Shaw who is an expert in criminal psychology, defines "narcissistic rage" as "an explosive mix of anger and hostility."

It is no wonder why people say that treading a tightrope would be a much easier task than living with a narcissist! With more of narcissism in us we may be able to create many more soap operas, and TV shows, but not a healthy world of shared values, and the common good that ensures its harmonious existence.



# Security

Fr KM GEORGE

Returning to my lonely, deserted house at Kottayam after more than a month of wandering I was astonished to find a finely woven security network across my entrance veranda. The ancient Webmaster himself had set up a splendid “No Entry” (X) sign literally with his own body. While majestically surveying his sticky, silvery, and smart web kingdom (Webdom), the Spider king still appeared to recognise me, a rather stray occupant of the house. He most graciously posed for a picture and permitted me to sneak into my house without disturbing his inimitably elegant and intricate work of Web Art. What a noble gesture on his part!

Deeply impressed by the beauty and splendour of his royal costume I also made a quick, silent comparison with another king who was recently enthroned and crowned with great fanfare and, according to critics, at forbidding cost for his subjects.

Forgive me if I fall for the Spider king who personally condescended to offer security for my house at no cost using organic and eco-friendly silken threads for a defence network.

Democracy or dictatorship, security has the first priority today with all political regimes. We people are, of course, bound to protect our leaders from all threat to their precious lives, because our own lives depend on theirs. Luckily the common people who elect them and trust them are not flabbergasted by the gargantuan expenditure behind all sophisticated systems of security X, Y or Z, simply because it is too sacred to be revealed to the public.



Our deep concern for the security of all—particularly children, women, differently abled, the elderly, health and judicial personnel, political and religious leaders- is, of course, well taken. However, the other side of it is not so visible. All global security shenanigans naturally breed big business that deliberately drives home to us the fear of the other. Suspicion is the supreme value here. Mutual trust is naive and simply inane.

When conflicts arise whether in interpersonal or international relations, our traditional wisdom prompts us to take the first conciliatory step of building mutual trust. Instead we proliferate CC cameras to peep into all nooks and corners of people’s privacy, and we invest heavily in several categories of security. It is the terror filled culture of suspicion and fear that we instill in the young and old under the garb of security and protection rather than cultivate trust, friendship, sharing, rejoicing, compassion and love. Ultimately all these high-end security measures that claim to save life will boomerang to brutally eliminate life itself. Simple values like mutual trust, honesty, sharing and caring alone will nurture life, and open a hopeful door to the future of the human species against all rhetoric to the contrary. ■

# Generational Trauma

SONU FAKIHA

It’s unfair how it impacts your psyche and life in general. Like termites, it starts eating you from inside. You are pulled between the past and the present. The pull is stronger from both ends, if you choose the present and move on, the past wraps itself like baggage and haunts you for the rest of your life.

I have read diasporic work, I could relate to their art even though I haven’t left the country. The exilic feeling is common and inevitable for humans; the situation differs from person to person.

What is home? A comforting feeling, a safe space, a place of belongingness, a place for your authentic selves but do we feel home in dysfunctional homes?

An individual from a dysfunctional family always find themselves in limbo. What is a dysfunctional family you may ask? It is subjective. Any family that fails to provide a safe space for their members is dysfunctional according to me. To me a hostile home is similar to a hostile nation, in intellectual words; a microcosm of a hostile nation.

A family is a significant part of one’s identity. Initial years of growing up are marked by family. The relations, which are regarded as precious and perhaps glorified can be traumatic and pull you back in many ways. This trauma is because of the unawareness and lack of self reflection family members have.

Understanding this complexity of generational trauma is not easy and not everyone can afford it. To afford it, letting one’s guard down and hearing out is important, which most of us are not ready to do. Some of us have realised that this needs to stop, but are tied when it comes to actualising it. Letting it go or fighting it isn’t easy. It pulls us back every time we raise our voice. Hence, some of us are stuck in the loop, waiting for the right time to break it.

We don’t see Indian parents hug their children, a cold behaviour towards their offsprings is seen as disciplining them. Only on rare occasions like birthdays or weddings do we see people show direct affection. It is very hard to please strict parents, it is the way they were conditioned and brought up. Some do realise and change their patterns of parenting but some unconsciously continue the loop, which may be toxic.

People who realise generational trauma are privileged enough to choose to not carry the trauma further, they try to break the loop, and make their inner child feel safe. We all try our best to nurture our inner child and try to give them a home, which they long for. ■

# Integrity

**Ambition is not an ugly word but many an over ambitious person throws ethics to the winds when trying to scale new heights.**

MONICA FERNANDES



The Cambridge Dictionary defines *integrity* as “the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change.” We have a very narrow understanding of this word to mean not taking bribes. Of course corruption is a major evil plaguing our world. It is stealing on a large scale. However, loss of integrity is any behaviour which deviates from what is right.

Sometimes we deviate from the right action because of our prejudices. An employer does not give an individual a job not because he has not fared well in the interview, but because he belongs to what is perceived to be a lower caste. Women are now clamouring for the same pay scale as their male colleagues and rightly so. They have been discriminated against because of a perception that women are the weaker sex.

Ambition is not an ugly word but many an over ambitious person throws ethics to the winds when trying to scale new heights in the company. The manager in a certain company did not have a college degree and had come up the ranks not by merit and hard work, but by currying favour with the top brass of the company. He once got his assistant, a bright MBA graduate, to make out a report. Imagine the assistant’s chagrin when his unscrupulous boss took the report to his higher ups and claimed that it was his own. The assistant quit soon after and joined a company where his efforts would be appreciated.

We have all heard of the three monkeys. One spoke no evil. The second heard no evil and the third saw no evil. I am sorry to say there was an instance when I was all the three monkeys rolled into one. I was at a party where one of the invitees was a person known to be an obnoxious snob. Mr. Snob accosted a young lad of around sixteen and began to grill him. He asked the boy personal questions such as “Where does your dad work and what is his post in the organisation? Where do you stay?” The innocent youngster’s father was working as a clerk and the snooty fellow used to be a manager. The boy’s father had an apartment in a distant suburb whereas Mr. Snob lived in a posh locality. Mr. Snob then made a comment which was in very poor taste. He said, “What a poor locality! Is

that the kind of place to live in?” The boy was embarrassed and beat a hasty retreat. When I see Mr. Snob today, I ignore him. But I did not defend the teenager at that time.

Integrity has many dimensions. We see an itinerant hawker trying to sell his wares in order to eke out a living for himself and his family. We sense his struggle for survival and yet we bargain with him for a few rupees.

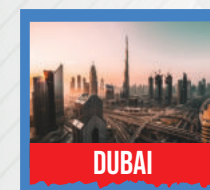
Let us think of some hypothetical situations. The shopkeeper has goofed up. He has given you two items whereas you have paid for only one. Do you point out his mistake or happily keep the extra item as a freebie? If you are a student, do you belittle another student because he is weak in studies or do you go out of your way to coach and help him/her? Do you help your working parents with chores or do you sneak out to meet friends? Do we have the guts to speak out when we see someone

being wronged? Do we make it a point to vote for elections or do we choose to go on a fun filled holiday? When writing an essay, have we extensively ‘borrowed’ from someone else?

Loss of integrity results in exploiting the shortcomings of others for our own benefit. We are today witnessing loss of integrity on a massive scale. We read of instances where parents have been turned out of their own homes, of brother killing brother over property. Farmers have been cheated of their farms. Brides are being burnt alive on account of dowry. Parents are killing their own daughters on account of a misplaced sense of ‘honour’. Forests are being cut down in the name of development. If we are quiet spectators of evil, we become part of the evil and we have no right whatsoever to be armchair critics of the exploitation around us. ■



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# Jonathan Livingston Seagull A Spiritual Interpretation

JOY PRAKASH OFM

In days gone by when motivational talks were yet to be popularised by YouTube and other mediums of the digital world, I recall using the story of Johnathan Seagull to bring home to the minds of young people the importance of three human factors: nurturing true self-esteem; becoming aware of one's true potential; and realising one's creativity and self-expression by releasing untapped energy.

It's a story about a seagull named Jonathan Livingston. Written by a pilot named Richard Bach, who uses aeronautical language, it's a fable, like Aesop's Fables, Robinson Crusoe, Santa Claus or Aladdin's Lamp. Jonathan Livingston, a young Seagull, did not want to be one of a flock of gulls. The mundane and the mediocre were not for him. He wanted to fly. He wanted to fly higher than the other birds.

During one of his first flights, he stalled and fell. To stall in the air is essentially a disgrace, a dishonour. But Jonathan wanted to fly and wanted to fly higher. He didn't want to just follow boats, eat fish, and live like the others. He realised there was something grander and greater that he could accomplish.

Jonathan didn't know why, for instance, when he flew at altitudes less than half his wing span above the water, he could stay in the air longer with less effort. His mother could not understand all his acrobatics and she asked him, "Why is it so hard for you to be like all the other birds? Why do you want to be different? Why don't you leave the low flying to the pelicans and the albatross? Why don't you eat? You are all bone and feathers!" He said, "I don't mind being bone and feathers, Mom. I just want to know what I can do in the air and what I can't. I want to know the power of my wings. I just want to know."

Jonathan persisted in his dream, but his father said to him, "Winter isn't far away; the boats will be few, and surface fish will be swimming deep. Son, if you must study, then study food, how to get it. This flying business is all very well, but you can't eat the glide. Don't you forget that the reason you fly is to eat."

He nodded obediently and tried to behave like the other gulls, screeching and fighting, diving at old scraps of fish and small crabs. But Jonathan refused to give up his dream. He

realised that he should transcend and grow. And not conform!

Jonathan attempted many ways to improve his flying capacity. He concluded that the answer was speed. In a week's practice, Jonathan learned more about speed than the fastest seagull alive.

He also lost control at higher speeds. Flying to 1000 feet, he was able to do that, too. He was about to go 70 miles an hour. The key, he thought at last, must be to hold the wings still at high speed. To flap up to 50 and then hold the wings still. It took tremendous strength, but it worked. In 10 seconds, he had blurred through 90 miles an hour. Now, he is gaining all the time. Jonathan had set a world speed for seagulls.

Jonathan never ceased trying, he persevered to the end. It was not easy to persevere, too. But, often, an inner voice spoke to him very powerfully: "If you were meant to fly at high speed, you would have a falcon's short wings".

"Father was right. You must forget this foolishness. You must fly home to the flock and be content, just a poor, limited seagull."

Jonathan thought to himself, "I am a seagull like every other seagull, and I will fly like one." So, he climbed painfully to 100 feet, flapped his wings. He felt better for his decision to be just another one of the Flock. Another voice exclaimed, "Seagulls never fly in the dark. If

you were meant to fly in the dark, you'd have the eyes of an owl. You'd have charts for brains. You'd have a falcon's short wings." Jonathan's resolutions vanished.

In his heart Jonathan refused to give up his dream. He attempted many ways to improve his flying capacity. He found that his wings were ragged bars of lead, but the weight of failure was even heavier on his back.

Against all odds Jonathan finally reached terminal velocity. The wind was solid, beating the wall of sound against which he could move no faster. He was going at 214 miles an hour. That's enormous speed for a bird. Jonathan flew directly through the centre of the flock, ticking off 212 miles an hour, eyes closed. He said to himself, "This is a breakthrough".

Jonathan flew the first aerobatics of any seagull on Earth, and he went through what he called the great breakthrough. When Jonathan joined the Flock on the beach, it was full night. He was dizzy and terribly tired. Yet in delight he flew a loop to landing, with a snap roll just before touch down. The other gulls were wild with joy at the breakthrough. Instead of their drab slogging forth and back to the fishing boats, there's a reason to life!

They said, "We can lift ourselves out of ignorance and find ourselves as creatures of excellence, intelligence and skill. We can be free! We can learn to fly!" ■



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## Atomic Weapons

TOM JOHN OFM

6 August

*Hiroshima Day* is observed every year to commemorate the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945, during World War II. The bombing killed an estimated 140,000 people instantly, and tens of thousands more died in the following years from radiation exposure. The bombing of Hiroshima was the first use of an atomic weapon in armed conflict.

9 August

*Nagasaki Day* is observed every year to commemorate the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Japan, on August 9, 1945, during World War II. The bombing killed an estimated 70,000 people instantly, and tens of thousands more died in the following years from radiation exposure. The bombing of Nagasaki was the second and final use of an atomic weapon in armed conflict.

Hiroshima Day and Nagasaki Day are to remember the victims of the atomic bombing and to reflect on the dangers of nuclear weapons. They are also days to renew the commitment to peace and non-violence.

There are currently nine countries in the world that possess nuclear weapons: the United States, Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel, and North Korea. In total, the global nuclear stockpile

is close to 13,000 weapons. Among them, the United States and Russia have the largest nuclear arsenals, with over 5,000 each. China, France, and the United Kingdom have smaller arsenals, with around 300 each. Pakistan, India, and Israel have between 100 and 300 nuclear weapons each. North Korea is estimated to have between 20 and 40.

The use of nuclear weapons would have devastating consequences. A single nuclear weapon could kill hundreds of thousands of people, and a nuclear war could kill millions or even billions of people. The use of nuclear weapons would also have a devastating impact on the environment, causing widespread radiation poisoning and climate change.

Despite the dangers of nuclear weapons, there is still a risk that they could be used. The world has come close to nuclear war on several occasions, and the threat of nuclear war remains a real one.

The world has made some progress in reducing the number of nuclear weapons since the Cold War. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. It is important to continue working to prevent nuclear war and to promote nuclear disarmament. ■





# Oppenheimer

**At first glance, the movie seems like a take on the atom bomb, but more than the bomb, it is about Oppenheimer himself, the father of atom bombs.**

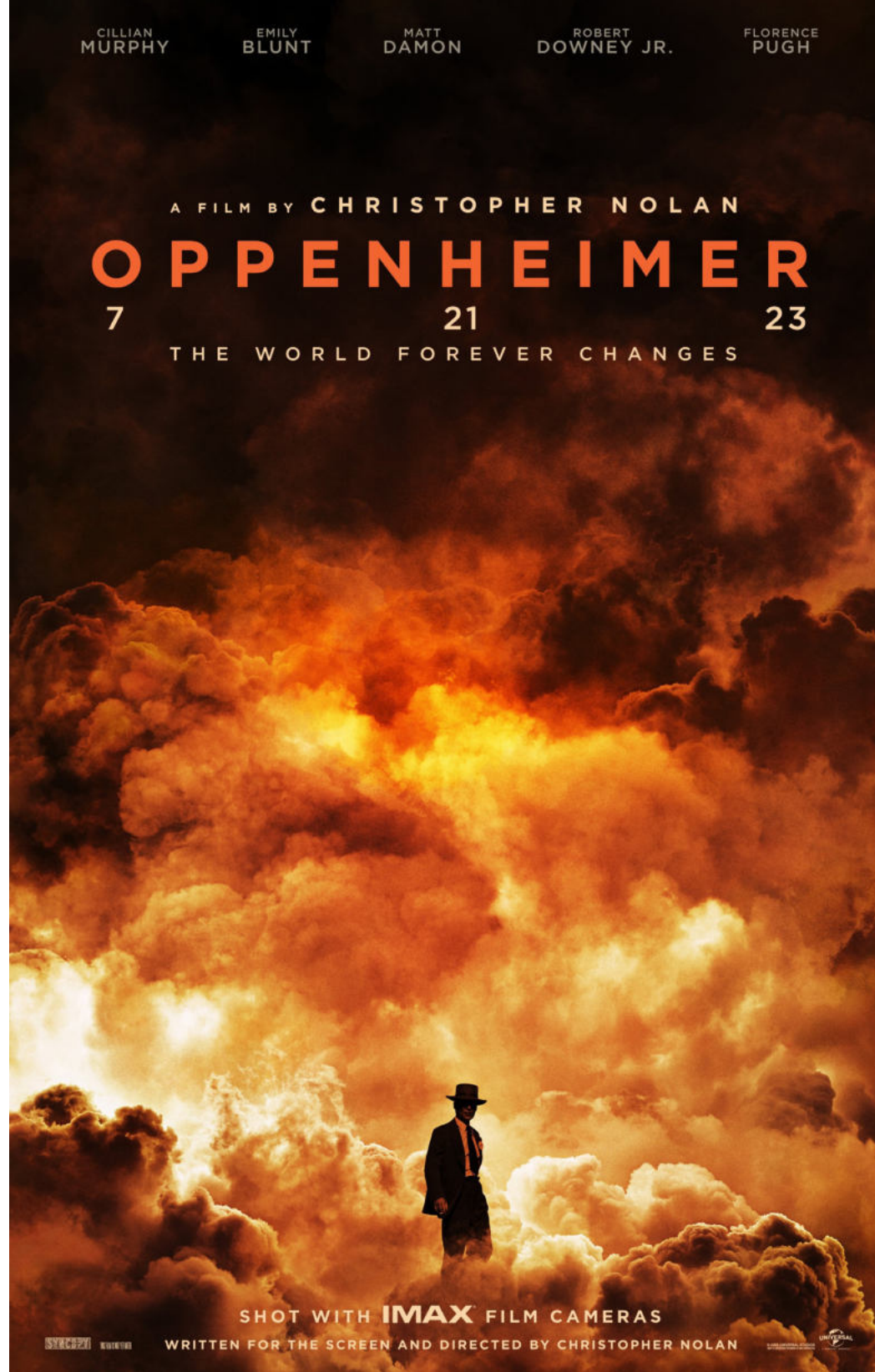
ROMIL UDAYAKUMAR TNV

The film is based on *Kai Bird* and Martin J Sherwin's 2005 book *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*. As it explores Oppenheimer's life, particularly his involvement in the Manhattan Engineer District, commonly known as the Manhattan Project, Nolan's written and produced film heavily draws upon the book.

This Christopher Nolan movie stands out as a symbol of his brilliance in cinematography and his extreme detailing of the music and audio. At first glance, the movie seems like a take on the atom bomb, but more than the bomb, it is about Oppenheimer himself, the father of atom bombs.

The film is marketed as a biopic of theoretical physicist J Robert Oppenheimer. However, the term "biopic" feels inadequate to describe the ambition and scale of Christopher Nolan's impressive, though occasionally cumbersome, storytelling. *Oppenheimer* is a complex historical drama that takes place across multiple timelines. It combines judicial drama, sexual liaisons, in-lab revelations, and personality cults in lecture halls. The ultimate monster in the movie isn't the War or the weapon of mass destruction; Oppenheimer may be more important than all of this.

The character of Oppenheimer, played by Cillian Murphy, is like a destructive entity of the atomic age—a man enthralled by the limitless potential of science who learns too late that his creation is capable of unimaginable devastation. However, in the end, Oppenheimer's creation is not the monster in this tale; rather, it is the desire for destruction that it causes in humankind. As the movie progresses, Oppenheimer's sunken, troubled visage progressively shows this realisation. Murphy has



never used his ice blue eyes more effectively to elucidate the agony the character feels.

Cillian Murphy's contribution to the character and the story couldn't have been more perfect; it is one of the most important tools that takes the story on a wild ride towards the discovery of the annihilator, "The atom bomb." The movie touches on significant moments in his personal and professional life, including his work on the bomb, the issues that followed him around, the anti-Communist attacks that almost cost him everything, and the relationships that both supported and worried him. He had an affair with Jean Tatlock, a fiery political figure played by the energetic Florence Pugh. Later, he marries Kitty Harrison, a beguiling boozier played by Emily Blunt in a slow-building performance, who travels with him to Los Alamos and gives birth to their second child there.

The final third of *Oppenheimer* is defined by these black-and-white scenes. They can appear drawn out, and there are points in this section of the movie when it seems like Nolan is getting too caught up in the struggles that America's most well-known physicist went through. Instead, as Nolan completes his portrait of a man who contributed to an era of transformative scientific discovery, personified the intersection of science and politics, including in his role as a Communist, was transformed by his role in the creation of weapons of mass destruction, and soon after raised the alarm about the dangers of nuclear war, it is here that the film's complexity and all of its numerous fragments finally come together.

When young Oppenheimer is introduced to Neils Bohr, played by Kenneth Branagh, he is asked if he can read music. Bohr follows it with a quote, "The key thing isn't can you read music, it's can you hear it. This was a reference to the troubled young Oppenheimer, a not-so-important theorist who was unaware of the destruction he would later compose. Nolan succeeds in getting the audience to listen to the music of science, drama, and politics by composing this journey through cinematography, music direction, and brilliant acting by all the performers in it, and this intricate composition unravels without exaggerating the historical backdrop of it. ■



## POETRY

# Oh My Sweet Mum

SUSAN D'SOUZA

*Many years I sat to write on you my mum,  
Words just never flowed the way I want.  
But today I got the inspiration to write on you mum,  
Because I realised what I am today is all what you instructed me to be.*

*I never wanted to be a career working woman,  
Thought life is best to stay in your bosom.  
But when you said to me, "Be a working woman, don't be like me only a housewife,  
For you will be a great help to your family when trials hit your way."  
Oh mum thank you so much for this valuable lesson you gave me,  
Thanks God I listened and followed your command.*

*Every hurdle which came my way,  
I was able to face it so well,  
Not because I wanted to face it,  
But because your shadow of love covered me through.  
I could hear people judging me,  
Oh how lucky she is to be still working,  
Little did they know it was God grace and my mum's instruction to where I ought to be.*

*I had a flair for music as a child, which my mum must have surely noticed,  
She one day said "go and join the piano classes, you will play for an audience in the future".  
Classes were at afternoon time; it was my sweet nap time,  
So I refused to go, and forever regret.*

*Years later I took up to singing and wished I had learnt to play the piano,  
Could have even accompanied by son who now play on drums,  
And we both could have been an awesome pair in a band.*

*I miss your cooking mum,  
When I enter my kitchen I pray—  
My dish comes out the same way you had done.  
I dream and relish the dishes you fed us,  
So painstakingly done in every situation even though you were ill at times.*

*You have gone to rest in your heavenly abode,  
Thirteen years apart of dad's death on the same date,  
Seeing your love for each other till death do us part,  
Is a valuable lesson all marrying youth should ever learn to stay on? ■*



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



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

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



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

**Little Sisters of the Poor**

26, Hosur Road, Richmond Town, Bangalore - 560 025  
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