

together

a national family magazine

SMALL MEN
BIG SHADOWS

**INDIA
INCLUSION
AUDIT 2023**

An end-of-the-year
national survey to
access the state of
inclusivity

Page 10

**JOIN
US**

06

545 Runs to Chase
ANUSH KUMAR S

08

Making Politics While the
Men in Blue Shine
SANKAR VARMA

11

War and War Again
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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CONTENTS

December 2023 Volume 17 Issue 11

04 Editorial: Politicisation and Populist Inroads
Saji P Mathew OFM

06 Cover Story: 545 Runs to Chase
Anush Kumar S

08 Cover Story: Making Politics While the Men in Blue Shine
Sankar Varma

11 War and War Again: The Cycle of Retribution Continues
Gerry Lobo OFM

14 The Crib of Greccio
Sidney J M Mascarenhas OFM

16 The First Christmas Crib
Joy Prakash OFM

18 Making the Crib – A True Story for Christmas
Dominic Mascarenhas

19 Fear Is Contraction
Richard Rohr OFM

22 Politeness & Civilisation: Lessons from Northeast India
Dr MN Parasuraman

24 The Con Game
Monica Fernandes

26 The Andaman and Nicobar Islands: Balancing Progress and Preservation
Romil Udayakumar TNV

28 What Have We Become?
Dr Marianne Furtado de Nazareth

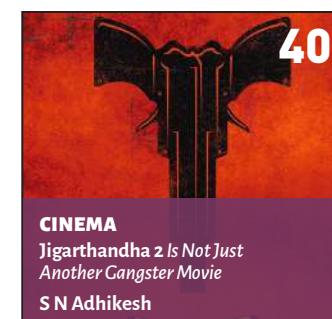
30 Education Must Prepare Students to Go Beyond the Four Walls
Pradeep Anthony L OFM

31 Cause for Concern: Where Are Our Children Heading?
Dr Veena Adige

34 Farming: Big Dreams Are Possible Through Small Steps
Davis Kalookaran OFM

42 To the Very End
Fr KM George

Erratum: In the November 2023 Vol 17, Issue 10 of *Together*, there was an incorrect byline. The article titled *Democracy of Diversions!* (page 32) was originally written by Gerry Lobo OFM. We regret this error.



POLITICISATION AND POPULIST INROADS

Populists need visibility to grow popular. Every event and affair they conduct would be treated as the group's opportunity to gain visibility and limelight.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Do we need leaders in a utopian society? However utopian a society may be, if there are humans, they will obviously form into groups and organisations. According to the study of Peter Ferdinand Drucker, an American management consultant, educator and author, if we put a group of people together what can naturally come out of them is friction, confusion, and underperformance; for anything more than this we need leaders. A group cannot self-direct itself. If we as a group need order, peace, success, etc. we need leaders. Rightly so every community and nation has leaders. Watching leaders of various nations in recent times makes us realise that every community and nation who has leaders does not necessarily end up having peace or genuine success and prosperity. Why?

Going Populist

'I, me, and only myself' approach is against democratic results. Narcissistic populist leaders make themselves into a cult of personality with '56-inch chest' who occupy a place above the institutions of a country or community; and they use, abuse, and abolish institutions and facilities for their own end. They often forget that individual rights and aspirations for equality, fairness and free speech belong to everyone in a democracy as much they belong to them. Political analysts say that populist authoritarian regimes emerge as a result of a demand from below. There is little trust and cohesiveness among social groups in countries that so obviously identify victors and losers, respectable and indecent in the political, economic, social, an religious domains. Psychologically speaking, this fosters anti-establishment and populist feeling that stem from an unfulfilled demand for status and affiliation, especially among the "losing" group. These people are often dissatisfied and alienated from political processes; populist leaders step up and fill the gap left by other political elites, they put out the figure of a providential leader who will be able to restore a nation to greatness. They emerge with heightened patriotism, mass demonstrations & road shows, distortions of truth and history, and with slogans like, 'make America great again, or *'Aache din aane wale hain'*.

Crystal Cordell says that populist leaders offer easy and instant solutions to complex issues, without considering the complexities of the issues at hand, which would undermine sensitivities, modernity, and social sciences. Populists propose solutions that are backward looking, like, withdrawal from international institutions and collaborations to protect their people from increased competitions or cultural challenges from a globalised world. They play to the gallery.



We are in a populist era and the politicisation of the public sphere and non-political agencies continues to jeopardise the governance and management of institutions.

Back in his days, the Greek philosopher Socrates warned the people of the danger of demagogues who flatter the people. Cleon, the first prominent and popular representative of the commercial class in Athenian politics, perhaps democracy's first demagogue, was supposed to be the first one who shouted on the public platform, who in his oratory used abusive language and who spoke with his cloak girt about him. He aspired to be the master of the masses, appealing to their emotions and biases while pulling off a variety of tricks designed to captivate large crowds. A demagogue, according to political scientist James Ceaser, is someone who "leads by inflammatory appeals or by flattery and who proceeds to build personal popularity without concern for promoting the public good." The real danger arises when a gifted leader uses those techniques to advance his pursuit of unbridled power. He will be successful in destroying the nation or community.

Think about the best leaders that you ever worked with? What did they do or say that inspired you? Is it their lying, yelling, forcing, not allowing you to speak up, etc? or is it their gentle ways that brought the best out of you: made us a little more courageous, a little more comfortable, people who harnessed the better side of us?

Politicising Public Spheres and Events

People need visibility to grow popular. They would crave for and snatch every opportunity to be seen by others. Every event and affair they conduct would be treated as the group's opportunity to gain visibility and limelight. They would also make sure others or people who question, confront, or have an alternative point of view are not seen in their events, or if they happen to be there, they are made to look irrelevant and unimportant. Populist leaders use every happening platforms, from Covid-19 vaccination to cricket matches, for their visibility and lobbying. Not so long ago *The Wire* had reported that a cricket match played in Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad, seemed more like a political rally than a cricket match. As a Gujarati newspaper *Divya Bhaskar* had reported, 80,000 tickets were purchased by the BJP men and women themselves in various points and cohorts. The stadium seats about 1,30,000 people.

In conclusion, we are in a populist era. The politicisation of the public sphere and non-political agencies continues to jeopardise the governance and management of institutions. Heads of independent institutes hold positions but are powerless puppets. Leaders (religious, corporate, and political) bend and break independent and self-governing bodies, events and affairs to serve their ends.

Small men with disproportionately big public images are like 'small men casting long shadows'; and the shadows becoming bigger 'is a sure sign that the sun is about to set.' ■

545 Runs to Chase

Just like how religion plays a crucial part in pulling the strings of the Indian voters, even sports have emerged as a thread in the puppet show.

ANUSH KUMAR S

The term *sportswashing* has become the talk of the globe over the past few years. The dictionary describes it as a term used to describe the practice of nations, individuals, groups, corporations, or governments using sports to improve reputations tarnished by wrongdoing. The concept has opened an entire world of thoughts in front of us as a society.

It is said that “man is a social animal,” and emotions do play a crucial part in his or her life. “In politics, when reason and emotion collide, emotion invariably wins”, this is

how Drew Westen, an American psychologist, describes a political battle. Especially in democratic nations like India, emotions are perhaps the biggest campaigners. Just like how religion plays a crucial part in pulling the strings of the Indian voters, even sports have emerged as a thread in the puppet show.

“First is the ideology that you call Hindutva; second is nationalism; third are the beneficiaries; and fourth is their organisational and financial strength. If you want to defeat the BJP, then you will have to break three of these four strong forts and gates.”

Prasanth Kishore, a household name to all the political observers in India, had these words to quote when he was asked how to beat an incumbent government within a democracy.

Still, the ideology that you can use sports to evoke nationalistic emotions and, in turn, convert them into votes remains a less aware political route in India.

Sportswashing, however, is relatively new to the world as a whole.



“*Sportswashing gained immense popularity when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund was used to buy a majority stake in Newcastle United FC in the English Premier League.*”

The term first gained immense popularity when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund was used to buy a majority stake in Newcastle United FC in the English Premier League, which is the most watched football league in the whole world. Questions were asked towards Boris Johnson, the then UK Prime Minister, on how a state alleged for the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi could be allowed to invest funds worth billions of pounds into the country’s sports.

We had just seen the top of the iceberg called “sportswashing” by then. The Public Investment Fund (PIF) later went on to purchase majority stakes at leading Saudi Arabian football clubs in June 2023—Al-Nassr, Al-Hilal, Al-Ahli, and Al-Ittihad, namely. They were hence able to bring in global icons like Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar Jr. (only to name a few) into the kingdom. Saudi Tourism, with the brand name “Visit Saudi,” was spotted on the advertising boards of the IPL (Indian Premier League), which is the most-viewed sports league in India.

A few years ago, “visiting Saudi Arabia” was a far-fetched dream for an average traveller, but now it has become quite the opposite. Saudi Arabia was also recently announced as the host country for the 2034 FIFA World Cup. While globalisation is something that is on the rise through such acts, does it wash away what happened in the past? Does it remove the human rights violations and oppression of the past? Sportswashing seems to be the way moving forward in other parts of the world as well.

There seem to be emerging signs of such a practice in India, especially in the context of the ICC Cricket World Cup, which recent-

ly concluded. While it is true and natural to see the leader of a nation at the stadium in a crucial final, the question remains: how many videos of leaders in the dressing rooms of teams have surfaced before on the internet?

The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, was filmed talking to the Indian contingent after the devastating final loss with clear audio. Such a gesture was greatly appreciated by the citizens of the nation, whereas on the other hand, a section claims signs of minor “sportswashing” to have spread roots in India.

A few months ago, the women wrestlers of the nation protested in the streets of Delhi, demanding action against the Wrestling Federation of India president, Brijbushan Singh, who was apparently a BJP MP at the Lok Sabha.

The wrestlers, including Olympic medal winners like Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik, demanded the arrest of Brijbushan, who was accused of committing multiple sexual offences against the wrestlers. All that these wrestlers expected then would have been a similar gesture from the Prime Minister or at least an assurance, which never came.

The viewership and sponsorship numbers between cricket and wrestling are not even worth a comparison. Is that a factor in deciding the emotions of the authorities towards the athletes who play for the same name on the field?

Cricket is often described as an emotion among the 1.4 billion population of India. Is this emotion in the process of being converted to polling booths through sportswashing? The 2024 general election can, of course, give a general glimpse of the same. ■

Making Politics While the Men in Blue Shine

A public sphere that is deeply rooted in communalism which constantly creates an 'other' as its enemy from within is deeply problematic.

SANKAR VARMA

The recently concluded cricket World Cup is in a way a blessing in disguise for certain politics of hate which was earlier sensationalised, but now successfully containerised. The anger meted out at Mohammad Shami is a simple example of how communal and content less Indians today have become. Forgetting whatever has been achieved in history and judging an individual simply based on one's mistake is a classic example of a present which absolutely never carried any history with them. After all politics of hate that is deeply communal will never have or can ever create any history too. Having said that let us analyze the current public sphere of India.

However before we get into the idea of *public sphere* in empirical sense let us just explore its academic foundations largely conceptualised through Jürgen Habermas who himself have today lost clarity as to what *public sphere* really means. The reason for saying why he himself has lost clarity is simply because of his blind support to Israel who is continuing to kill children who are the future generation of any nation. In a way it can be also discerned that anybody supporting Israel are nothing but mere supporters of genocide.

So the idea of a love for future generation basically dissolves right there where public sphere in itself experiences a deliberate shrink. So a Habermas critique of public sphere is not what I am talking about here but a public sphere that is deeply rooted in communalism which constantly creates an 'other' as its enemy from within which is deeply problematic is what defines the public sphere of India today. Habermas defined public sphere as a domain of social life where public opinion can be formed. It can be seen as the breeding ground.

The recently concluded India's run for its world cup created multiple breeding grounds. But the main breeding ground for contestation that is to be taken is definitely the violence meted onto Mohammad Shami the five-wicket haul taker. Putting him in bench for a long time and finally rising to a situation taking India towards the final is beyond any appreciation or monetary value. But what did we do to him? What I am trying to pose here is neither in particular on Shami or the Prime Minister going and hugging Shami but a larger point of how performances represent to the outside crowd, and more so if it is via technological reproducibilities.

Performance Culture and Public Sphere

Public opinion in a public sphere most of the time dissolve with a performance of care or love or a pat on the back which can stimulate the sportsmanship of anybody. The recent decision of the honourable Prime Minister of India to go to the India cricket team's dressing room was one of a kind.

A highly appreciable one, where the camera always already makes him a winner to the viewer's eye, despite country losing. This is nothing but a continuation of politics by other means because the links between representations of emotions and the constitution of socio-political meaning gets to the heart of a key concern of international relations: the issue of power. Emotions – the ways we feel and why we do so in the circumstances we do – are inevitably shaped by dominant political discourses and the entrenched interests that are associated with them.

In short, representational practices are central to—and an ideal starting place for—examining the collective politics of emotion. Emma Hutchinson states that representational practices provide a pathway through which emotions acquire (and, indeed, always already possess) a collective dimension and, in turn, shape social and political agency, behaviours and policies.

When the performances of Indians at the world cup dominate almost anywhere in the public sphere (here I mean both physical and virtual (digital reproducibility)) what becomes common to the human eye is the defeat-less run of the men in blue. A walk through the Chinnaswamy Stadium ensured the spirit of cricket survived but perhaps such a spirit was seen to be a little less when teams other than India played. Where did the public sphere go?

Did it get dissolved with the ticket price or nationalism? In other words, the love for cricket is not really the love for cricket, but it is also the love for the nation which is absolutely fine. But nation do not define the government nor does the government define the nation. A simple answer to the game of nations would be what Benedict Anderson calls *imagined communities*. Everything is perhaps in this sense an imagination. In other words, established territories are nothing but imaginations of how a nation should be formed and hence can't we not also say that isn't winning or losing through taking sides of a nation also an imaginary one? ■



**Let us make our world more inclusive;
Participate in our annual national survey**

Everyone wants to belong; and everyone does have the right to belong and grow. A sense of belonging is one of humanity's most basic needs. Belonging is a feeling of being happy or comfortable as part of a particular group and having a good relationship with the other members of the group because they welcome you and accept you with equality of opportunity and opinion.

Sadly, many are pushed to the margins, sidelined, and excluded from decision-making, in policy matters, pushed out of social positions, positions in religious hierarchy, etc. because of their position in a particular section or intersection of society.

The *Together* magazine (www.togethermagazine.in) is conducting an end-of-the-year audit to access the state of inclusivity in India. Please be part of the **India Inclusion Audit 2023** by answering seven straightforward questions.

Help build an inclusive society!

SCAN TO TAKE
THE SURVEY



You can also go to Google Forms directly <https://cutt.ly/inclusion-audit-2023>

War and War Again

The Cycle of Retribution Continues

It is the “other” who is obviously threatened by “my” existence! Instead of becoming a neighbour to the “other,” I perpetuate the cycle of retribution and become a war-head or a rocket or a destroyer air-craft!

GERRY LOBO OFM

Human history has not known peace. Perhaps because it is ‘human’! Once more, in a so-called ‘civilised’ world barbaric hatred has surfaced by way of a full-scale war between Israel and Palestine. Terrorism is not dead; it is alive with even a mightier force. The Hamas in the Gaza Strip on the Mediterranean waters has exposed its power by waking up the Intelligence failed Israel. In retaliation, with no stones unturned, Israel has vowed to eliminate Hamas from the ‘face of the earth.’ War and war again in the Biblical Land not ever knowing ‘peace’ that the Sacred Scriptures have never ceased to proclaim to this day!

It is Christmas again. The raging war in the land where God of all people, of all races and of all languages, and a God who came as Peace in the tiny babe of the Nazareth family, is the only “bitter Gift” which the humans who are homeless, displaced from their legitimate homes can receive, people who are deprived mercilessly of having even a cup of cold water and electricity. Families





whose children are slaughtered barbarically, living or even eliminated by now in that land of a God who was born as a Child, have only tears as their gift or hatred in their heart as a sword waiting to pierce the enemy. This is the irony of reality and the expression of the bane human existence. Is this all that for which human beings come into this world and disappear through conflicts and wars, hunger and nakedness, physical sufferings and psychological distress?

Christmas, as it is celebrated throughout the world, momentarily satisfies the external hunger, leaving one frustrated when it is all over. Instead of establishing stronger solidarity, human compassion, neighborliness as shown by the Samaritan man in the Gospel of Luke and friendship among people, the mere external pompous celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ only widens the chasm between neighbours. It is not that the Child of Bethlehem who causes division and cold, silent indifference but the egoic human hearts that prefer to live without compassionate concern and bring about terrorism of destruction with violence and war. The acts of charity done on Christmas day do not often cause a radical turn towards the well being of others, instead only keeps

one self-content and righteous. Charity is exhibited on one day; whereas all through the rest of the year neighbour does not exist. Because one's conscience pricks about the existence of the "wounded", grandiose generosity is sentimentally exercised most often around Christmas time. This gives the impression that God exists only around the Christmas time when charity devotions are enacted, perhaps with all good intention too!

Whole of humanity is facing an unprecedented crisis ranging from the economic distress to political instability to violent aggressions. Not only the current impending war in West Asia and the Ukrainian invasion by Russia inch by inch, but also the political war among parties in India as they prepare for the approaching General Election in the country. The political heat will increase in the coming months which eventually produce hate speeches. In the mean time people are forgotten for power and money, thus enlarging the gap which is already existing in the exigency of life. When playing with religion with a spread of hate in thought, word and deed, how does Christmas fit in, unless its annual celebration drastically marks the end of violence and violent feelings, and creates an atmosphere of harmony and neighbourliness? Unless the latter becomes an existential commitment of people because the Saviour was born to become humanity's neighbor and eliminate the distance that keeps people from one another, the celebration of his birth would only produce greater selfishness for an autonomous existence. It is a common knowledge that even though his birth took place in a "no man's place," his teachings clearly showed the rightful existence of every person in one's own land in freedom, and that every human being has the right to live there. His own displaced status, both in his infancy as well as in his adulthood, point to the reality of the economically and of the politically displaced people in the world, as the Gaza Palestinians and Ukrainian refugees face today. This situation is obviously caused by the avaricious ones

creating constant conflicts between states and diverse communities of people, and due to natural upheavals divesting them of whatever belongs to them by right.

Terrorism and the terroristic activities are ever to be condemned. They are nothing but a cycle of retribution perpetuated, resulting in the death of human beings. Contemporary world has grown up with it and has nurtured it in varied forms. What is un-understandable is that no question has been addressed by world leaders for the causes of terrorism and no appropriate answer is consciously discovered. Perhaps the world is not eager to find an answer! The world political leaders take definite stand or side to the issue but not make a deliberate effort to resolve it. Terrorism is dehumanizing. Should the heads of nations with its instrument of peace, the UNO, sit and watch human lives caught up in the cycle of retribution or find a way to eliminate animosity and violence which is rooted in humanity? Perhaps, from the ground level on, the fundamental right for a life in freedom is not promoted by people. Or perhaps the existence of the "other" on the same level ground has become a problem for human beings. This has generated apartheid, racist or ethnic and religious feelings so much so that conflicts and wars are daily phenomena in the world. The recent histories of Sri Lanka, West Asia or the Manipur crisis bear testimony to this situation. Means of eliminating anyone who does not fit into our scheme of thinking have been constantly on the surge, resulting in actually causing irritation one way or another or inciting hate or threatening with terroristic ploys, as in the case of Hamas in the recent past. The answer to terrorism is not to be sought in condemnation but in the exercise of what is "human", not as a mere philosophy, but as a compassionate approach leading towards dignified existence with rights proper to citizens. Have the world leaders and their respective institutions and political organisations done enough on this even after the two World Wars in the last century? If this is not done, the result is what the Hamas did to Israel which instantly blew up into a full scale war with horrendous destruction of human lives and property, particularly the killing of innocent children.

Condemning terrorism and the acts which accompany it by the world leaders from their fixed positions is all proper because most of the time it suits their convenient profit. However, to burn their fingers in establishing lasting peace and justice among warring

factions or listening to the rightful grievances of an oppressed people is something no leaders of our world have willingly come forward to do. If the crisis in West Asia is seventy five year old and remains un-resolved, the world is only providing on a platter the possibilities of tension by a group of people to break their long-standing patience by terroristic activities and create attention from the bystanders. Deep-seated enmity and cruel hate keep brewing in such people, and as a vengeance it is manifested in physical attacks. Who is the cause of this venomous and destructive hate? It is the "other" who is obviously threatened by "my" existence! Instead of becoming a neighbour to the "other," I perpetuate the cycle of retribution and become a war-head or a rocket or a destroyer air-craft!

Christmas in the cycle of retribution and in the atmosphere of war which has been lingering for years on by way of inciting hate feelings and physical annoyance, cannot be a celebration merely of a past, historical event, rather it is a strong message that this world belongs to all; that every race, colour, language and peoples have a definite right to live with freedom, and that the deep seated enmity must be rooted out in order to embrace every person's existence is as sacred as one's own. The world is dehumanised by people's irrational behavior and their murderous attitudes whose only aim is to destroy the enemy. Christmas peace begins with the destruction of the enemy within every individual. Christmas is a "message," not a grandiose celebration. Christmas pushes forth a strong and a determined sense of compassion, one that turns into a 'cycle of gentle peace' from the 'cycle of retribution,' revealing to the "other" that he or she really matters! ■

The Crib of Greccio

SIDNEY J M MASCARENHAS OFM

Today, Christmas and the Crib have become commercial seasons and business ventures. Ironically, Peter Bernadone the physical father of Francis of Assisi, did not realise that his son, who wastefully gave away the drapes and cloth he brought from France, would bring the Church and society itself, a month's season of financial profits that would be a cause of distress to Francis and his followers. Francis' attachment to the virtues of poverty and humility, would become the "foundations of endless disputes and interpretations.

No one can deny, that Greccio, an unknown place on the top of a rock hill, would become a place, renowned throughout the world. Greccio, even today, attracts many tourists of all sorts.

1 Celano §§ 84 to 87 give a picturesque description of what took place. Francis of Assisi was in love with Jesus Christ and the Gospel.

But his love for Jesus Christ was unlike the love of our great Moghul

Emperor, Shah Jahan, for his beautiful wife, Mumtaz. Shah Jahan built a grand Monument in pure white marble to keep the memory of his love for Mumtaz eternal! But no where in that spotless marble, is his love for Mumtaz depicted. This love of his was not even reflected in the little mirror, where he was imprisoned by his son Aurangzeb. The light of the moon and the stars on the Taj Mahal, do not let us see or feel the warmth of Shah Jahan's love for Mumtaz. One also wonders about the hands of skilled artisans who worked at producing the Emperor's love Monument! Some sources claim their hands were chopped off after they finished their unique masterpiece, lest they produce another masterpiece that would excel the Taj Mahal! That structure, even today, remains alone in its location on the banks of the Jamuna! Today, a descendant of the owner of that land, claims that land! Such is the story of earthly grandeur! Vanity of vanity!

Greccio is also a fancy story of love. It is an early medieval play. But Greccio is not a fantasy of Francis of Assisi's love. It is a story of Francis of Assisi's love for his Lady "Poverty" as played out by the Lord and Redeemer at the time of his birth on earth amidst all creatures and humankind. St. John says; "He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognise him. He came unto his own, and, his own people did not accept him. But those who did accept him, he gave power to become children of God" (Jn. 1: 10 – 11) St. Luke 2: 4 – 20 is more detailed. St. Luke

“ The “illiterate” and “simple” Francis of Assisi, like Jacques Derrida, “mantled” and “dis-mantled”, “constructed” and “deconstructed,” like in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* of Michel Foucault.

includes shepherds (known thieves) as witnesses to Jesus' birth. I Cel 83 tells us that Francis saw in all the poor around him, He even envied poverty! (1 Cel 83.)

In short, the “illiterate” and “simple” Francis of Assisi, like Jacques Derrida, “mantled” and “dis-mantled”, “constructed” and “deconstructed,” like in the *Archaeology of Knowledge* of Michel Foucault; the Crib Managed Information Market Electronically (MIME) and asked how we can legitimate truth since 1975 – like “What is Postmodernism? of Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, who defends plurality and plurisense and pleaded in his magistral work: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1978), that Philosophy does not search for “essence” but “keeps the conversation going in a pluricentric, pluriversal, and plurisensible world of diverse nations and peoples.

The Crib of Greccio produces the birth of Jesus in a crib. But this Crib of Greccio is today in every “Heart/Hearth, Language, People, Nation, Believer and Unbeliever!”

The Poverello of Assisi initiated a transnational culture and business! The crib is ever since in every home. It challenges every heart and home. The poverty of the crib has created a Christmas season of generosity among people and nations! Even businesses offer discounts!

Thus the Crib of Greccio should create hearts that are full of love and compassion, hearts that are full of generosity, like the Lord had. “Although he was rich, he became poor for your sake, so that you should become rich through his poverty. (2 Cor. 8:9). ■



✎ **Franciscan Bethlehem** The Sanctuary of Greccio is a formidable architectural complex that seems to rise from the bare rock. It is located about 15 km from Rieti, at 665 meters above sea level in the Sabine mountains, close to the ancient medieval village of Greccio, it is the place where St. Francis created the first Christmas Crib.

The First Christmas Crib

Was it a naïve devotion? Not at all. For Francis of Assisi, it was the undertaking of a faith that was simple, but also true and absolute.

JOY PRAKASH OFM

There is much more than Francis of Assisi as the initiator of the Christmas crèche. His own explicit intention was to rehearse the physical inconvenience of the Divine Child and His mother! Hence, he requested John of Valetta to represent the external circumstances of the inconvenience that the Poor King had to undergo along with his mother. The crib making of 1223 and the crib making of 2023 can fill the dots to reinforce his sense of the meaning of Christmas! Besides, this year marks the 800th anniversary of the Crèche event at Greccio!

Among all the events of the life of Christ, the one Saint Francis remembered most was the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. His first biographer writes, “He used to observe the Nativity of the Child Jesus with an immense eagerness above all other solemnities, affirming that it was the Feast of Feasts, when God was made a little child and hung on human breasts. He would kiss the images of the baby’s limbs thinking of hunger, and the melting compassion of his heart toward the child also made him stammer sweet words as babies do. This name was to him like honey and honeycomb in his mouth.”

Francis would be surprised to find himself in the company of the first disciples of Jesus, especially John: “This is what we proclaim, what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what

we have looked at and touched with our hands – concerning the Word who is life. This life was made visible, and we have seen it and bear testimony to it; and we proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and has now appeared to us” (1Jn 1-2).

Was it a naïve devotion? Not at all. For Francis of Assisi, it was the undertaking of a faith that was simple, but also true and absolute. According to IE Motte, “Totally respecting the way in which God gives Himself to us, Francis’ devotion reaches out to meet the incarnation. Since the love of God wanted to become perceptible, visible, and tangible, is there any better attitude for man than to perceive and touch?” Francis went deeper and made everything incarnational. From God’s way of incarnating, Francis got a cue to let his spirit go the way of the Eternal spirit.

This way of God emptying Himself in human form made Francis to reflect on the immensity of God’s self-emptying act. He took a further cue from Paul’s description of God’s emptying: “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave and become as we are, and being as we are, he was humbler yet, even accepting death, death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8). Francis was wonderstruck by this downward mobility of God.

Henri Nouwen expresses his reflection on this whole event very movingly: “The One who was from the beginning with God and who was God revealed himself as a small, helpless child, as a refugee in Egypt, became obedient to adolescent and inconspicuous adults till his 30th year and submissive to them, joined the ranks of sinners, though he was without sin, in the Jordan, as a penitent disciple of the Baptiser, became a preacher from Galilee, followed by fishermen, as a man who ate with sinners and talked with strangers, as an outcast, a criminal, a threat to his people. He moved



➤ The cave where Saint Francis of Assisi staged the first-ever nativity scene on Christmas Eve in 1223.

from power to powerlessness, from greatness to smallness, from success to failure, from strength to weakness, from glory to ignominy. The whole life of Jesus of Nazareth was a life in which upward mobility was resisted. Even though he was full of divine power, he believed that changing stones into bread, seeking popularity and being counted among the great ones of the earth were temptations. Jesus chose to descending way over and over again. Again and again, you see how Jesus opts for what is small, hidden and poor and accordingly declines to wield influence.”

This stupendous act of God so impressed Francis that his first biographer, Thomas of Celano, expressly says that “the humility of the incarnation and the charity of the passion” of Jesus Christ occupied Francis’ memory so much that he wished to think of nothing else.

This catechetical tool of visually portraying the external circumstances of Jesus’ birth at Christmas 1223, visually portrayed to the inhabitants of Greccio and the nearby countryside, significance of the birth of Christ who, up until then, had been dead. Though there was no statuette in the re-created crèche of 1223, what is admirable is that through his preaching on that Holy Night, it is reported that all the inhabitants of Greccio, who witnessed Francis’ preaching, experienced Jesus being awakened from his deep torpor in the hearts of people. Thomas of Celano says, “This vision was not in contradiction to the reality of things, since through his servant Francis, the child Jesus had awakened again in the hearts of many who had forgotten him.” Will the centenary of the first crib awaken the Christ-child in the hearts of the people of our day? ■

Making the Crib — A True Story for Christmas

DOMINIC MASCARENHAS



This is a true story I am personally witnessed to. It happened in a parish I once resided in. In my neighbourhood there was a typical catholic family of the eighties; John, Maria, and three daughters. Ah, three daughters (and no son) was considered a 'curse' by many, back in those days. The family was a 'good family'; the father and mother both worked hard to give their children a good upbringing (rather the best upbringing they could). The parents themselves were from simple backgrounds. It was a family that daily said the prayers at nightfall, as was customary in the village. As a cheerful family; they would laugh and smile and greet everyone.

The neighborhood taunts (that John was not man enough to beget a son) seemed to get to the man; somewhere John started drinking. Instead of returning straight home, his feet began taking daily detours to the tavern. John spent long hours there nursing drinks before returning home. The man, who was otherwise mild, would often talk rubbish after drinking. No one dared approach him in that state. He could quite easily fly off the handle.

It continued for many years until one day the parish priest visited them at Christmas time. The parish priest looked around the house. The house had a 'fairy-tale' look. Yes, the man was very artistic. He had personally made all the beautiful decorations. The priest while appreciating the decorations, asked, 'John, why not make the decorations for our church next year for Christmas'.

The man cherished the appreciation (perhaps the first time someone appreciated him). Here was a simple man with a simple job as a clerk in a small factory, used to receiving criticism at work (often for no reason), getting a chance to change. Around October itself, he brought home meters and meters of twine and crepe paper and other material (including brown paper and colours for making the crib). Each evening he rushed straight home and began making 'flower' decorations on green twine strings for three straight hours (before dinner) to hang up in church (and far more beautiful than he had ever made).

After the flower strings and other decorations were put up in church, John began making the crib. Brown paper carefully folded, took the shape of mountains and hills and valleys and the cave for the Holy Family. And then came Christmas Eve, with all its twinkling lights. The Church seemed like a fairyland. Midnight service got over, and the parish priest placed the baby Jesus in the crib. People all came and paid homage. They looked around and praised the décor. John was feeling pretty pleased.

But then came his turn at the crib. And something happened. John saw the arms of the baby outstretched almost as if asking him to take Him to himself. At that moment John burst into tears (a man, who never cried, cried unashamedly that night). No more did he need a 'son', when the child Jesus Himself seemed to reach out. John then became an even more devoted husband and father, and was a model parishioner until his death many years later. And every year, for him the Christmas miracle was relived. Every year until the end, his art talents also decorated the crib in that place. May the Child Jesus work a Christmas miracle in our lives too. ■

Fear Is Contraction

When we're not sure what is certain, when the world and our worldview keep being redefined every few months, we're going to be anxious.

RICHARD ROHR OFM



Fear unites the disparate parts of our false selves very quickly. The ego moves forward by contraction, self-protection, and refusal, by saying no. Contraction gives us focus, purpose, direction, superiority, and a strange kind of security. It takes our aimless anxiety, covers it up, and tries to turn it into purposefulness and urgency, which results in a kind of drivenness. But this drive is not peaceful or happy. It is filled with fear and locates all its problems as "out there," never "in here."

The soul or the true self does not proceed by contraction but by expansion. It moves forward, not by exclusion, but by inclusion. It sees things deeply and broadly not by saying no but by saying yes, at least on some level, to whatever comes its way. Can you distinguish between those two very different movements within yourself?

Fear and contraction allow us to eliminate other people, write them off, exclude them, and somehow expel them, at least in our minds. This immediately gives us a sense of being in control and having a secure set of boundaries—even holy boundaries. But people who are controlling are usually afraid of losing something. If we go deeper into ourselves, we will see that there is both a rebel and a dictator in all of us, two different ends of the same spectrum. It is almost always fear that justifies our knee-jerk rebellion or our need to dominate—a fear that is hardly ever recognised as such because we are acting out and trying to control the situation.

Author Gareth Higgins describes moving through the "no" of fear to the "yes" of love: Look beneath your fear and you will discover what it is you really care about. What you wish to protect: people, places, things, hopes, dreams. Aggression, shame, and disconnection—even as attempts at making a better life for me or a better world for all of us—don't work. But as we expand our circle of caring to

include all people, all places, all of creation, we discover that our fears are shared and that all our cares come from the same place. Come to understand your fear, and you may find that we're all just trying to figure out how to love.

What Do We Do with Our Fear?

We must learn to name and to live with our fears instead of merely denying them or projecting them onto others. Our age has been called the age of anxiety, and I think that's probably a good description for this time. We no longer know where our foundations are. When we're not sure what is certain, when the world and our worldview keep being redefined every few months, we're going to be anxious. We want to get rid of that anxiety as quickly as we can. I know I do. Yet, to be a good leader of anything today—a good pastor, manager, parent, or teacher—we have to be able to contain and hold patiently a certain degree of anxiety. Probably the higher the level of leadership someone has, the more anxiety they must be capable of holding. Leaders who cannot hold anxiety will never lead us anywhere new.

That's probably why the Bible says "Do not be afraid" almost 150 times! If we cannot calmly hold a certain degree of anxiety, we will always look for somewhere to expel it. Expelling what we can't embrace gives us an identity, but it's a negative identity. It's not life energy, it's death energy. Formulating what we are against gives us a very quick and clear sense of ourselves. Thus, most people fall for it. People more easily define themselves by what they are against, by whom they hate, by who else is wrong, instead of by what they believe in and whom they love.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus sweat blood because he was afraid [Luke 22:44]. It is possible that he was infinitely more afraid than we could ever be. But the difference is: Jesus was not afraid of being afraid, because he knew it was just fear. . . We are afraid of fear because we believe that it has the power to name who we are, and it fills us with shame. . .

A New Fearlessness

Can any of you, however much you worry, add a single cubit to your span of life? If a very small thing is beyond your powers, why worry about

the rest? Think how the flowers grow; they never have to spin or weave; yet, I assure you, not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of them. Now if that is how God clothes a flower which is growing wild today and is thrown into the furnace tomorrow, how much more will God look after you, who have so little faith! (Luke 12:25–28)

Mystic and theologian Howard Thurman describes the fear experienced by those who, as he puts it, have "their backs against the wall" through oppression and injustice: The ever-present fear that besets the vast poor, the economically and socially insecure, is a fear of still a different breed. It is a climate closing in; it is like the fog in San Francisco or in London. It is nowhere in particular yet everywhere. It is a mood which one carries around with oneself, distilled from the acrid conflict with which one's days are surrounded. It has its roots deep in the heart of the relations between the weak and the strong, between the controllers of environment and those who are controlled by it.

The first question has to do with a basic self-estimate, a profound sense of belonging, of counting. If a person feels that they do not belong in the way in which it is perfectly normal for other people to belong, then they develop a deep sense of insecurity. But the awareness of being a child of God tends to stabilise the ego and results in a new courage, fearlessness, and power. I have seen it happen again and again.

Grace and mercy teach us that we are all much larger than the good or bad stories we tell about ourselves or one another. Our small, fear-based stories are usually less than half true, and therefore not really "true" at all. They're usually based on hurts and unconscious agendas that persuade us to see and judge things in a very selective way. They're not the whole 'you', not the 'great you', and therefore not where life can really happen.

Ask yourself regularly, "What am I afraid of? Does it matter? Will it matter in the great scheme of things? Is it worth holding on to?" We have to ask whether it is fear that keeps us from loving. Grace will lead us into such fears and emptiness, and grace alone can fill them, if we are willing to stay in the void. We mustn't engineer an answer too quickly. We mustn't get

settled too fast. We all want to manufacture an answer to take away our anxiety and settle the dust. To stay in God's hands, to trust, means that we usually have to let go of our attachments to feelings—which are going to pass away anyway. People of deep faith develop a high tolerance for ambiguity and come to recognise that it is only the small self that needs certitude or perfect order all the time.

Conversing with Your Fear

Author and broadcaster Lisa Colón DeLay understands fear as an emotion to become curious about, converse with, and ultimately befriend. Here she recommends having a conversation with our fears as a part of our inner growth in God. We don't have to hunt fear with a pitchfork. Fear has something to say. Our fears offer us an invitation to engage with the discomfort of the inner places. Will you give your fear a chance to speak to you?

When you realise that you are afraid or

not doing well, sit down with your fear and have a conversation. Here are three ways to converse with fear: First, when you feel or notice discomfort, pause. Stay paused until you know more. Second, acknowledge what is happening in the moment. Be honest: "This feels bad—negative. What do I feel? Maybe it is fear, but I'm also angry. What else? I feel overlooked." Third, dig a bit deeper. Ask: What is this trying to show me? or What else might be going on? Give yourself some time, and delve into the fear: "I'm not sure why I'm angry. Now, thinking about it more, it wasn't such a good day. Three things happened today that made me feel frustrated, inferior, and like I wasn't being taken seriously."

Embarrassment or shame will likely put us in a rabbit freeze-or-runaway mode. Denial, anger, and deflection are other unhelpful responses. Instead, let's encounter the fear or the discomfort with some questions and curiosity. And then, once we've noticed something new, we move on. ■



Politeness & Civilisation Lessons from Northeast India

Dr MN PARASURAMAN

Garo is the language of the A•Chik or Garo people, who are the dominant ethnic group of the Garo Hills that constitute the western part of Meghalaya. One reason I love and miss Garo is that it's a very polite language. It doesn't have any serious bad words. *Achak* (pronounced aa-tchak), which translates accurately into "dog" in a contemptuous tone, is as bad as it gets. Almost all Aryan and Dravidian languages, and places I have lived, have many strong and disgusting bad words that are directed towards mothers and sisters and more.



Garo is also the only one among the six Indian languages, which I am familiar with, which has a natural equivalent of *please* and *thank you* (except *shukriya* in Urdu–Hindi). *Nanni, nanri, dhanyavaad, dayavu cheithu, kanivaamna* and *dayachési*, are all, with all my deep, deep love and respect for the languages concerned (Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu), relatively recently coined (less than 100–150 years ago), roundabout ways of saying *thank you* and *please*. We don't use them in non-formal contexts.

In Garo, even between parent and child, spouses, siblings and bumchums (very close friends: informal) you can hear *kasapae* (kasa paayey), *mittela* (mi thaella) and *mittel bijok* (mi thel bijok) being used. *Kasapae* is please (literally 'for love's sake', *kasa* being love). *Mittela* is Thank You. *Mittel bijok* is thank you very much!

Garos even have a verb-ending form or inflection that is a politeness enhancer in imperative sentences (where you ask/tell someone to do something).

For example, I could tell my Garo household helper Ms Sengchi: (i) *Chi rababo* (Bring the water); (ii) *Chi rabapabo* (the *pa* being the politeness enhancer); (iii) *Kasapae chi rababo* ("Please bring the water", without politeness enhancer); and (iv) *Kasapae chi rabapabo* ("Please bring the water", in the most polite manner). I am Garo to the extent that I always go for this one.

In fact, the Garos don't call anyone except the closest by name once that person has a child of their own. The person is always addressed as mother of *x* (where *x* is the first or only child) or father of *x*. Sengchi, being a true Garo, always calls me Kiran *pa*. I, not being a true and polite Garo, call her by name. Actually I should be saying Fenisha *Ma* (Fenisha is the name of her daughter and only child). If I had been a Garo by birth, she would've been uncomfortable with my calling her Sengchi.

But the beauty is that Garo is a very democratic language in certain ways. E.g. There is only one second-person address *you* (as in English after the mid-19th century). In Malayalam we have *nee, thaana, ningal, thaangal, angu* and like Divehi (the language of Maldives),

the use of third person either by name or social position—marker as the second person. In fact, some of my Malayali students address me as 'Sir' even when referring to me in speech or writing completely in English. E.g. "Sir had asked me to submit the assignment on Monday." I have to tell them that in English the second person doesn't take the third person form unless you are addressing the monarch, duke, mayor or some feudal-era dignitary.

Now, this whole chain of thought was triggered off one day in mid-2020 by a thread in a Facebook linguistics community about the various responses to *thank you* both in English and other languages.

I made a list in English: (i) *No mention*; or, *Please don't mention it* (what I learnt in school)! (ii) *You're welcome!* (iii) *It's my pleasure!* (iv) *Not at all!* (v) *No problem!*

In Indian cultures (barring Garo discussed above and perhaps others of which I am totally ignorant) we don't normally explicitly mark acknowledgment for favours between intimates. Most of my friends (both students and others) find my habit of saying *thank you* a little amusing. Some even tell me that it is inappropriate given my intimacy with them.

I once said *thanks* to a Malayali friend of mine who had become pretty close to me and she sent me a grimace emoji and said: "Puzhungi thinnu" (*Cook and eat it!*). I sent a quizzical emoji and question mark in reply and she sent smiles and said, "I meant your thanks."

In my English boarding school, I was in full *thank-you* mode. But over the years I have been getting Indianised. And these days even I tell a few people that our relationship doesn't warrant a *thank you*.

The prize for the best *thank-you* response in my memory goes to Prof Kona Prakash Reddy, formerly of EFLU. We are friends but not very close. We are guru bhais, both students of Hoshang Merchant, celebrated gay poet and critic. Once I asked him for a favour in his capacity as a professor in EFLU. And he did it immediately. When I began to thank him, he shouted: "Eh! Come on Man! What the hell!" Another gem was from my coworker Praveena Thompson: "No big deal." (Said in a flat emotionless tone). ■

THE CON GAME

They tempt us to fill the bottomless emptiness of loneliness with material things. We fall easy prey to advertising gimmicks and misleading ads.

MONICA FERNANDES

“We are living in a material world”, belted out pop star Madonna, and we are material men, women and children. How true! At festival times, instead of spending some time in introspection, prayer, with our family, using our talents productively and reaching out to the needy, we are focused on the next mega sale.

Our blind aping of the West has led to our jettisoning the ancient value of cooperation. Extreme individualism is leading to the breaking up of relationships in families and among friends. We are egoistically focused on being the center of attention. That is why people take selfies in dangerous places such as at the edge of a cliff, sometimes with fatal results. This social turmoil has led to a vacuum of loneliness in our lives. Companies are taking maximum advantage of the situation. They tempt us to fill the bottomless emptiness of loneliness with material things. We fall easy prey to advertising gimmicks and misleading ads.



Price framing: Advertisements create the illusion that the price is less. For instance, we may decide not to exceed ₹1,000 in purchasing an item. So if the price is ₹999, we grab the item, little realizing that we have been fooled.

False urgency: When we shop online, we are sometimes see the message, “Mega Sale ! Hurry! Only few left in stock.” We are bent on grabbing the item before it is too late. In reality the product may be defective or stored for too long. We should check the manufacturing date, especially for food items.

Eye catching advertisements and fancy packaging are used to make an item look attractive when it is not so. This is tactic used to con the gullible buyer. Celebrities endorsing products is another trick. I recall the ad of glamorous star with heavy makeup adorned in a striking sari. She looked gorgeous. I later saw someone wearing the same sari. It didn't look so great on her but she probably thought she looked like the film star. Again, celebrities are shown eating some very unhealthy processed food for the photo shoot. In reality, they follow a strict diet where processed food has no place while we land up eating unhealthy stuff. It makes sense to carefully read the ingredients of the product especially with regard to eatables and cosmetics, before being carried away by ads.

The internet is having a profound effect on our spending habits. Where those from the lower income bracket once saved, they use their money on clothes, cosmetics and the latest mobile. EMIs are very tempting but little do we realise that we are living beyond our means and the bubble could burst at any time. The expensive car we ‘own’ could be confiscated by the bank in case we are unable to pay the EMIs due to a loss of job or illness or accident. A very stressful situation indeed.

Another trick used is promoting family packs. Due to the economies of scale, these are cheaper than individual packs. The question we need to ask ourselves is whether we are in a position to consume so much. If we land up throwing out the excess, we are unwittingly contributing to the degradation of the environment.

“Buy one, get one free,” scream the ads. We fill our closets with unwanted clothes just because we have got one free. In reality the manufacturer may have doubled his price before offering the bogus discounted price or he is getting rid of old stock or the items are not in demand as the fashion has changed.

Children are often the targets of ads. Parents are prepared to make sacrifices to buy toys and eye catching garments for their children. Money can't buy a child's love but some parents don't seem to think so. They ply their children with the latest gadgets and then ignore them while they party. The kids are left in the care of nannies.

Retail therapy lifts our moods, relieves our stress and makes us feel good temporarily. But it is no substitute for healthy relationships. Strong bonds don't happen overnight. We have to work on them instead of wasting our time and hard earned money on trifles that are here today and gone tomorrow.

Possessions do not bring us peace of mind. The famous author Ayn Rand said, “Money is only a tool.” It helps us to live comfortably, to afford medical treatment especially as we age, to enjoy ourselves. But it should be used responsibly not merely for our instant gratification, but also to reach out to others. ■



THE ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS Balancing Progress and Preservation

ROMIL UDAYAKUMAR TNV

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a mesmerizing archipelago nestled amidst the Bay of Bengal, present a fascinating paradox – a harmonious blend of urban vibrancy and tribal traditions. While urbanisation continues to reshape the landscape, the indigenous tribal communities steadfastly preserve their unique cultural heritage, creating a tapestry of diverse identities.

At the heart of this paradox lies a subtle symbiosis between the urban and the tribal. On one hand, urbanisation brings modernisation, economic opportunities, and access to essential services, transforming the lives of island inhabitants. Yet, this progress also poses challenges, potentially disrupting the delicate balance between human development and environmental conservation. This symbiosis is constantly being disturbed by the parasitic urbanisation that is being pushed into this untouched island.

The influx of urban settlers and the expansion of infrastructure have undoubtedly impacted the tribal way of life. Traditional livelihoods, once centered on hunting, fishing, and gathering, are increasingly challenged by changing land-use patterns and environmental pressures. The introduction of modern education and healthcare has brought positive changes, but it has also led to concerns about the preservation of tribal customs and languages.

“Kaala Pani,” a Netflix series by Sameer Saxena, is the epitome of how nature reacts to all the malices the urban world injects into its being. It offers a chilling yet thought-provoking commentary on the consequences of unchecked urbanisation and the importance of environmental preservation. Set in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the series follows a group of

survivors who must grapple with the devastating effects of a deadly virus outbreak, which can be seen as a manifestation of nature’s wrath in response to human exploitation of the environment. The series’ setting in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which have experienced rapid urbanisation in recent years, highlights the potential impact of this development on indigenous communities. The influx of outsiders and the expansion of infrastructure can disrupt traditional livelihoods, erode cultural practices, and threaten the preservation of tribal languages and knowledge systems.

The series’ themes of nature’s wrath and the interconnectedness of all living things resonate with the deep connection that indigenous communities have with the natural world. The tribes’ understanding of the delicate balance of the ecosystem and their traditional practices of resource management can offer valuable insights for sustainable development in the region.

“Kaala Paani” is a stark reminder of the need to respect the natural world and adopt sustainable practices. The series challenges us to reconsider our relationship with nature and prioritise preservation over unchecked exploitation. The survivors’ journey of survival and self-discovery is a powerful metaphor for the challenges we face as a species in our quest for progress and development. The series serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all living things and the importance of preserving the cultural diversity of our planet.

The Indian government has been implementing various development plans in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, with the aim of boosting the economy, improving infrastructure, and enhancing connectivity. However,

some of these plans have raised concerns about their potential impact on the islands’ fragile environment and the indigenous communities that inhabit them.

The islands are facing a delicate balance between development and preservation. While development is important for improving the lives of island inhabitants, it must be done in a way that does not harm the environment or displace indigenous communities.

A number of developmental plans are being passed to change the islands into a commercial haven, yet what the authorities fail to look at is the absolute massacre of the natural world that humans of the island and the islands live under. “Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island” is a ₹35,000-crore transshipment port at Galathea Bay along the island’s southeastern coast. The Campbell Bay Development Plan envisages the development of a new township, port, and airport in Campbell Bay, Great Nicobar Island.

The Little Andaman Development Plan proposes the construction of a coastal township and industrial complex in Little Andaman Island. The Hut Bay Tourism Project aims to develop Hut Bay, Little Andaman Island, into a major tourist destination. These juggernaut developments will result in the displacement of indigenous tribes and the clearing of natural land, replacing it with urban constructions which would malign the ecological cycle on the island.

The development projects proposed for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands raise significant environmental concerns that must be carefully addressed before proceeding. These concerns include deforestation, displacement of indigenous communities, increased pollution, and detrimental impacts on unique ecosystems. The development of tourism hotspots could also lead to overtourism, straining the islands’ resources and causing irreversible damage to their natural beauty. These environmental concerns underscore the need for thorough planning, careful consideration of potential impacts, and the adoption of sustainable development practices, community engagement, and strong environmental regulations to ensure a harmonious

“ The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are home to over 2,000 species of plants, including many that are found nowhere else in the world. ”

balance between progress and preservation in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are home to a unique biodiversity of plants and animals. The islands are home to over 2,000 species of plants, including many that are found nowhere else in the world. The islands are also home to a variety of animals, including elephants, tigers, and sea turtles.

The stark reason for urbanizing an island so pristine is the monetisation opportunities it offers. The administrative authorities must realise that these developments might result in repercussions that cannot be controlled by mankind. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a fragile paradise that faces a number of challenges. However, by adopting sustainable practices, we can preserve these islands for future generations. Sustainable tourism, preservation of the natural environment, and community empowerment are key to achieving sustainability in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Urbanisation is not the answer to every issue that the island faces; one would never understand if one keeps looking at it from a cemented vantage. One must try and step onto the soil that the tribes live in. One must learn to apply symbiotic interactions with what yearns to be preserved.

As we envision the future of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, let us not be blinded by the allure of progress but guided by the wisdom of nature. Let us tread lightly, listen deeply, and act with reverence, ensuring that these islands remain a beacon of beauty, a sanctuary of life, and an enduring testament to the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature. ■



HENRY MARTIN 2007

What Have We Become?

DR MARIANNE FURTADO DE NAZARETH

There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.

When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. 'But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

“
But then again, none of us are guaranteed tomorrow. Today is all that we can be certain of. So why would we put off living faithfully as God's steward until tomorrow, if we can do it today?
”

“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time” (Matthew 21:33-46).

Did the tenants really think that by killing the landowner's son they would inherit the vineyard? Why would they possibly think that? And the only answer that I have been able to come up with, is that those first tenants must have been convinced that the owner of the vineyard would never come back. Or perhaps hoped that he was dead. But either way, they must have been convinced that judgment day for them would never arrive. That they could simply keep the fruits of the vineyard for themselves. What other reason can explain their actions? Convinced that the landowner would never return, they boldly killed his son.

A sad irony of this parable, by the way, is that it is told by Jesus just before he is killed. Clearly, this parable is teaching us that God is the landowner. And clearly it is teaching us that the chief priests and the Pharisees are like the original tenants of the vineyard. When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard this parable, they knew it was about them. How could they not? And yet, they still had Jesus put to death. What were they thinking? They must have forgotten that they didn't own the vineyard and were just tenants.

They probably had been convinced that the true owner would never come to take his property back. What is this parable teaching us? Jesus seems to be teaching us that we are the tenants, the stewards, of God's vineyard. We have been entrusted with this world and with all that we have, and are now called to care for it well, then finally give our creator the fruits of our harvest.

And this parable is also warning us not to take any of this for granted. Our world, our life, our salvation – it is all a gift from God. We, too, can be tempted at times to think that we can keep the fruits of God's vineyard for ourselves. We work hard, making our living and providing for ourselves and our family, and it's easy to forget that everything that we have is not ours, but given to us to be taken care of, and to provide returns in due seasons.

Biblical scholars tell us that it would typically be five years before the landowner would expect to receive his first returns from the land. So, I want you to imagine for a moment that you are one of those tenants. And that for the last five years you have worked hard in the vineyard, and it has produced much fruit. And then, after five years without a word of warning from the landowner, there suddenly appear some servants of his, to collect his share of the produce. Over the five years the tenant may have hoped these servants of the landlord would never appear. That the landowner would forget all about his vineyard and by some miracle they would get to keep it all for themselves. After all, five years felt like a lifetime. However the servants did come after five years for the landlord's share as instructed.

But then again, none of us are guaranteed tomorrow. Today is all that we can be certain of. So why would we put off living faithfully as God's steward until tomorrow, if we can do it today? Why would we tempt God to take the Kingdom of God away from us, and give it to others who will produce the fruits of the kingdom? One day He will come to check on his vineyard and on us, to see what we have done with his investment, and what has become of us. ■

EDUCATION MUST PREPARE STUDENTS TO GO BEYOND THE FOUR WALLS

PRADEEP ANTHONY L OFM



Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel, spoken by Socrates centuries ago, can give voluminous insights on how our education system should be. Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru was of the opinion that education has to enhance one's social and economic status. India is the world's most populous country with more than 143 crores of people, but many are unemployed or doing irrelevant jobs. The National Institute of Management and Technology's survey in 2020 shows that Indian Education System is in the 33rd position in the world.

As per the article, *Worthless degrees are creating an unemployable generation in India*, on 18th April 2023, in the *Economic Times*, more than half of the Indian graduates are unemployed. The education system in India is not making

necessary progress in the lives of the lower middle class and poor people. The higher middle-class people get specialised in higher degrees and mostly get settled in foreign nations. The author Parakala Prabhakar in his book, *The Crooked Timber of New India*, critically views the progress of the present government in this regard, he mentions with facts that there is unemployment in India, but the policies made by the government are not helping the people of India. Prabhakar points out that Indian education concentrates on only for 5% of skill developments of young minds whereas in UK about 68%, in Germany about 75%, in US about 52%, in Japan about 80% and in South Korea about 96%. Thus, Indian education makes people unskilled, unemployable, and unemployed.

Arguably, the best education systems are from Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Canada, Finland, and Norway. What makes them different? In Finland primary school students spend hardly 20 hours a week in class. Unlike any other countries, at the age of 11 they are allowed to do creative business and earn money for their living. Lunch and excursions are free for the students. They are taught to be self-sufficient by washing their own plates, play the games that they like the most. Surprisingly school fees are the same for all, no extra donations are permitted. The result for their exams is not published but given in private to evaluate themselves. Teachers are highly qualified; to be a teacher is a remarkable career in western countries. Parents there have anxiety to find the best schools for their children. There is trust between teacher and student. Their studies are able to make students go from theory to practical implementations, and to life.

Whereas Indian education systems have loads of theory in its syllabus as a result many do not know why they have to study stuff that is not pertinent to them. Indian education system rigidly places students within the framework of a curriculum; as the result students do not think out of box. The digital and e-learning platforms have been increasing even in smaller cities of India, however, unless the system promotes broader and student centered pedagogy, change in educational system will remain a utopian idea.

Education should ultimately ignite people's mind, promote peace, acceptance than discrimination and prejudicial rationality. It should form good humans who contribute to the welfare of one's family and community. ■

Cause for Concern Where Are Our Children Heading?

Dr VEENA ADIGE

What are we doing to our children today? Forbidding chocolates and sweets because they are laden with sugar, forbidding biscuits and chaats because they are unhealthy or having useless calories, forbidding children from playing with crackers during Diwali because they pollute the atmosphere, forbidding everything that is enjoyable and loved by children. Fear of too much Technology makes parents prevent them from watching TV, using laptops, mobiles, iPad and the like as well.

Aren't they missing out on the joys of childhood? What will they grow up into? Mental freaks, psychological patients? I may be sounding too harsh but this is today's reality and unless we do something about it, we will be raising a generation of freaks.

Whether it is the urban upper-middle class family in India or the one in the US, parenting has taken a wide turn. The older generation punished and scolded the children, forced them to eat and have regular habits and timings for sleeping, eating and playing. But today good parenting consists of discipline through long explanations, healthy food, and enrolling them in various online and offline courses, participation in various contests and the like.

Many children today are single ones with no siblings and working parents, families are smaller so there are no cousins, the fear of corona and other contagious diseases, means no meeting friends or playing too close to them. What can and should they do? In urban places,

lack of open spaces and garden confine them to homes where adults have no time for them. Some may be creative and play by themselves, others may read books but the majority may just twiddle their thumbs, becoming cranky or trying to attract attention through stubbornness, naughtiness or being plain irritating.

There are classes of various streams, various timings and various payments. Parents tend to make their wards join so that they can utilise their time effectively.

Some are educational like art classes, drawing and painting, music, playing, science experiments, brain quiz and the like. But they cannot replace real friends or play mates. Football, roller-skating, swimming and other sports classes which often cost a bomb are a good option but they

do not have the spontaneity of natural sports and games.

Children today have limited physical activity. They have information culled through Google and other devices but there is a difference between knowledge and information. Even a five-year-old today can rattle off information regarding many things. But is it proper knowledge?

We are to be blamed, at least partially, for our children losing the charm and spontaneity of childhood. In our zeal to perfect children, we are raising tense and cautious ones instead of the innocent and free ones that once were called children. ■

In our zeal to perfect children, we are raising tense and cautious ones instead of the innocent and free ones that once were called children.

IN STAMPS

23 December

National Framers' Day | Kisan Diwas

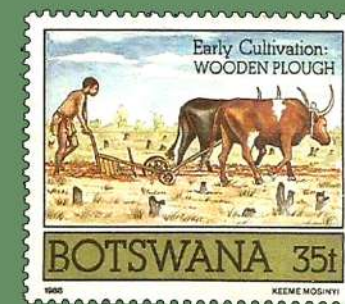
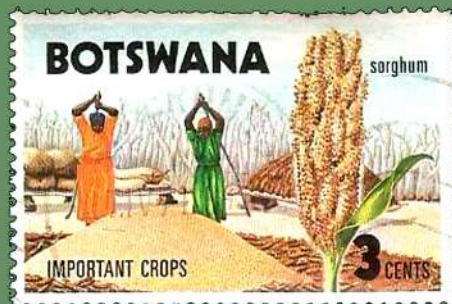
TOM JOHN OFM

Farmers' Day is an annual observance to celebrate the national impact of farmers and agriculturists. Farmers work around the clock and year-round to guarantee people do not starve to death or die of hunger, yet they struggle to consume at least two square meals every day. Every year, Farmers' Day is observed to raise awareness of and thank farmers for their contributions to society and Indian economy.

Choudhary Charan Singh, the fifth prime minister of India, is the father of National Farmers' Day. His dedication to farmers' welfare and advocacy for their rights led to the establishment of this important observance in his honour. Coming from an agricultural family,

he was a proponent of rural and agricultural development. He made continuous efforts to keep agriculture at the centre of planning for India.

Charan Singh had contributed to the formulation Debt Redemption Bill 1939 to give relief to the peasantry from moneylenders, which brought great relief to rural debtors. He was also instrumental in bringing about the Land Holding Act 1960, which was aimed at lowering the ceiling on land holdings to make it uniform throughout the state. He was the founder of the Kisan Trust to educate India's rural masses against injustice, and foster solidarity among them. While serving as agriculture minister in 1952, he led UP in its efforts to abolish the Zamindari system.



Farming: Big Dreams Are Possible Through Small Steps

Farmers have minds and hearts that know the pulse of the earth. Our survival depends on their hard work.

DAVIS KALOOKARAN OFM

Undoubtedly it is a thrill to sit under the shade of a tree planted and nurtured by one's own effort. It might look impossible but each one can contribute his might that can make a difference to our surroundings. In this direction, we, friars in Chippilithode, Kerala, with the vision of Justice, Peace and Integration of Creation (JPIC) are doing what we can. We have formed two InFarM (Indian Farmers Movement) groups in Chippilithode and they are actively involved in useful and meaningful engagements. If this JPIC action of planting one tree each by each member of the community is earnestly carried out, some 200 trees will bloom around our house.

Farmers club (24 men and 12 women) is functioning as self-help groups. They are still to be registered formally. The basis for forming farmers club is the awareness that they are wise and knowledgeable people, especially on matters concerning traditional farming methods. Farmers have a mind and

heart, which knows the pulse of the earth. Our survival depends on their hard work. We have envisaged a number of programs to encourage and create interest in farming activities. An increasing number of farmers are pulling out of farming sector as it is not remunerative any more, especially due to damage to crops by wild animals, changing weather conditions and increased cost of production. We are trying our own innovative ways and show that it is within our power to make situation conducive.

There is a small plot of land where we do experiments and trials and make corrective measures. Jack fruit plants, rambutan plants, mango, mangosteen, butter fruit, bread fruit, guava, papaya, banana, ginger, pepper, coconut, nutmeg, teak etc. are planted here in the nursery. Then they are taken by farmers to be grown in their fields. It is mainly to stop land erosion and may be after fifty years or so there will be timber for future buildings! That is a silent transformation/revolution we want to bring about. A success story is that the jack

plant taken from our nursery by a farmer has already started yielding fruits. Jack trees in the friary compound are expected to bear fruits next year. Plants are distributed to people, and they plant them in their garden as per instructions. Regular and close follow up study and evaluation is done.

It is found out that the oldest tree in India is a mulberry tree. This tree is said to be more than 1,200 years old. This is found in Joshimath valley of Uttarkhand. Shankaracharya, who brought about reform and renewal in Hinduism said to have meditated under this mulberry tree. Seeing our passion to grow mulberry around the friary, a friend presented us a Brazilian mulberry plant. We have plans of grafting mulberry and distributing them to farmers. Birds and children will have sweet mulberry at their hands reach. This will also pave way to stopping land erosion and land sliding and thus provide stability and sustainability to ecosystem.

Self-help group for women aim at self-employment and income generating programs. Activities include making jackfruit chips, pickles, Indian sweets, herbal medicines, mushroom cultivation, and selling them. Finding market for their products is still a challenge. Women coming together, sharing their life problems and vision with one another is in itself a great thing. This venture is a platform for this and can generate additional

income for the family. Dr Swaminathan, the father of Green Revolution in India says, 'Development should be measured on how much was able to give to those who have nothing than how much more is given to those who already have.'

Bee keeping venture is functioning well. This year we intend to strengthen the group of 'beekeepers' and double the number of beekeepers. Towards this goal training program was conducted. This is the time to split beehives and make new hives.

We have already given beehives to five new farmers (complete set—a bee box with bee hives mounted on a stand). There are few more farmers who have undergone training. We will be providing them beehives in the near future. These farmers rear bees not on a commercial basis but to produce honey for own use. They do get some extra income by sale of honey too. Guaranteed pure honey has great demand and is ideal gift for relatives and friends. This makes it attractive for others to get involved in bee keeping. Our motto is to make family life ever sweeter and healthier. More over honey is an integral part of any Ayurveda medicine. Fear of getting stung by bees has now given way to an interest of loving and caring for bees.

There is no limit to our dreams. We wish to have more land to take these types of work forward to create a model farm and farmers can come and cultivate vegetables and fruits for their needs. ■



TAKE TIME OFF

Relax
Enjoy Goan Hospitality



A Postcard from Europe

SAJI SALKALACHEN

As we arrived at Napoli Centrale Station, little did we know that our encounter with the taxi driver would be a gripping tale of wits and negotiation. Seemingly eager to capitalise on our tourist naivety, he boldly quoted an exorbitant fare of €30 for a mere two-kilometre ride downtown.

However, our savvy response came in the form of mentioning the non-existent Uber rate, leaving him with no choice but to gracefully lower his demand to €15. With luggage in tow and no other alternatives, we realised that taking things for granted, especially in Napoli, was a lesson we would cherish forever.

Our stay at the Napoli hotel took an amusing turn during

checkout when we requested an accommodation receipt. The concierge's attempt to provide a receipt with "total money pagaro (due) = €936.31" left us puzzled and amused (we had paid all dues upfront). Resorting to a mix of Google translations and hand gestures, we managed to convey that we had already paid the amount, insisting on the correct term "paid" (pagato). The experience turned out to be a humorous lesson in navigating language barriers.

In the bustling streets of Napoli, we encountered a unique public transportation system where tram and bus drivers didn't issue tickets or handle money. Instead, passengers were required to purchase tickets or passes from nearby tobacco outlets and validate them in small machines inside. On one occasion, I found myself on the verge of despair as three consecutive shops had exhausted their ticket stocks, leaving me ticketless and fatigued under the scorching sun. In a moment of desperation, I decided to employ an Indian jugaad (an innovative hack often resorted to in India).

I boarded a tram at its terminus, explaining my ticket predicament to the driver. To my astonishment, the

driver showed remarkable integrity, halting the tram beside a tabacchi so I could buy a ticket. Despite my efforts, no tickets were available, and with imploring eyes, I sought an exemption. However, the driver upheld the rule firmly, teaching me a valuable lesson in integrity and resourcefulness.

Our debut day in Vienna brought us the enchanting sight of numerous architecturally splendid churches, a hallmark of the city. Enthralled by the captivating facade of one church, we decided to take a peek inside.

To our sheer amazement, a Syrian Christian Achen greeted us in Malayalam, our native tongue from Bangalore. We soon discovered that Rev. Shaiju Mathew Achen was pursuing a master's degree in theology at the University of Wein.

This serendipitous encounter led to a heartwarming experience as he invited us to join his Sunday Qurbana with a few families. The camaraderie and spiritual connection made us feel truly blessed, and Rev Shaiju kindly offered invaluable insights into the local culture and noteworthy locations.

As we approached the latter part of our long-anticipated trip to the United States, we were about to face the most frustrating and disheartening moment in our travel plans. While standing in line at the airline counter at Rome Fiumicino Airport, eagerly waiting to check in for our WestJet flight to Las Vegas with a layover in Calgary, our excitement quickly turned to dismay. The check-in official informed us that we couldn't board the plane due to the requirement for Indian passport holders to possess a Canadian visa when transiting through Canadian soil.

It was the case even if the traveller held a valid US visa and a confirmed

onward reservation with the same airline, all within the frame of a mere 2.5-hour transit stop in an approved Canadian port.

Regrettably, the travel desk that handled our ticketing (Messrs Balmer Lawrie) did not provide this crucial information during the time of booking. Since they were the official government employee travel portal, we trusted in their reputation and guidance. This misinformation triggered a series of distressing events that completely derailed our travel plans.

We felt utterly bewildered, outraged, and humiliated as we stepped away from the queue, with the sense of hurt compounded by our national pride. Unlike citizens of a few other countries, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Taiwan, Indians were not exempt through an electronic travel authorisation (ETA), and it required them to obtain a full visa even for a short transit period. This incident underscored the importance of researching visa requirements for all transit countries, regardless of whether it was a refuelling stop, debarking stop, or a plane change, even when one depends on travel agencies for ticketing.

Compounding the situation was the lack of timely assistance from the customer service teams of Balmer and Lawrie in India and WestJet Travel Services in Calgary while we were at Rome Airport. Prompt resolution for the issue proved impossible due to time zone differences and the absence of a quick response. The fallout from this incident resulted in unforeseen expenses, including an impromptu flight ticket purchase from another airline, forfeiture of prepaid hotel accommodation, and a disruption to our entire travel schedule.

Fortunately, despite the emotional and physical toll, we managed to recover and reach our US destination, albeit a day later. We could finally leave behind the unsettling memories of past tremors and begin to enjoy the welcoming comforts and scenes around us. While we continued to savour the ever-changing landscapes and diverse cultures, we found ourselves in dual roles as both observers and recipients. This journey instilled in us a deep sense of wonder and gratitude for the sights and encounters we experienced, and it not only broadened our horizons but also enriched our souls immensely. ■

The Covenant of Water

A FRANCIS OFM

Reminiscing the past, does not always make us feel at ease, particularly, if our memories aren't associated with a 'glorious past'. A learned skill that humans commonly use, call it an 'adaptive mechanism', in dealing with the not-so-glorious memories of the past, is to repress them at the oblivious shores of the unconscious. If this does not work, conveniently resort to a forced state of amnesia. If ever a conversation is initiated around it, we tactfully deflect, "I don't remember the past, and even if I do, I don't wish to resuscitate those ghosts. They are of the past and I leave them there."

The Covenant of Water, an intensely moving fiction by *The New York Times* best-selling author Abraham Verghese, is all about the past, combined with glorious and the not so-glorious stories of the imaginary "Parambil" family of Travancore, Kerala, 'the southern tip of India sandwiched between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, a land that was shaped by water, and it's people united by a common language: Malayalam.'

Verghese masterfully ushers readers to the green canopied Parambil world, with the wedding of a 12-year-old girl to a man, 30 years older to her. Her 70 years of life that transformed her from a naive little girl to a conscientious, kind, wise and unflappable matriarch, the 'big ammachi' highlights the focal point of the story. Traversing with the big *ammachi*, her husband—the *thamb'ran*, daughter Baby Mol, son Philipose, daughter-in-law Elsie, and the

granddaughter Mariamma, and the folks like Shamuël pulayan, his son Joppan, Odat *kunjamma* and Anna *chedethy*, the readers get glued to them as an 'insider', sharing the intricacies of their everyday life in all their depth dimensions.

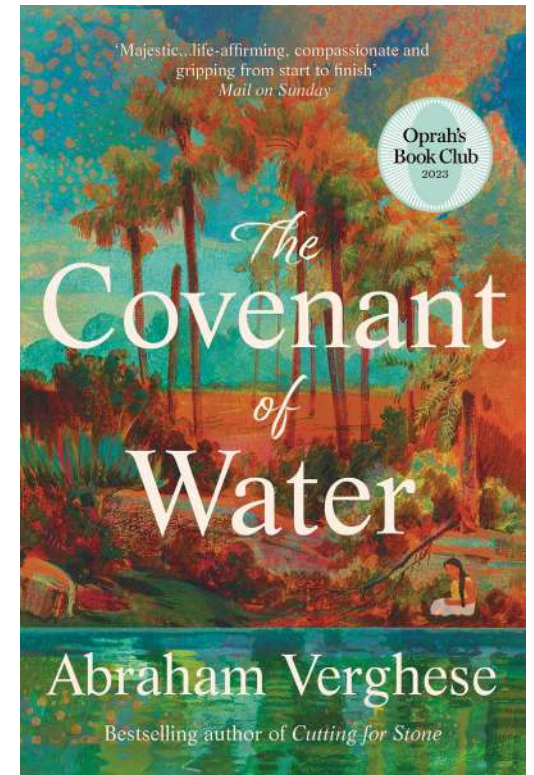
Amid the unconscious rhythm of the vices and the virtues, inherent to rustic life of the 20th century, this 715-page book proffers to readers a certain sense of serenity and a deepening of hope for holding on to life, however bleak it could be. And for those who trust in God, a greater satisfaction for having known the faith journeys of several ordinary humans who showcase the extraordinary strength of character. Like any family, Parambil too is wrecked with intermittent blows of illness, death and dying which only make it difficult for the readers to take the story for granted. In all three generations of the Parambil, spanning from 1903 to 1977, individuals carry a 'condition' that leads them to die of drowning. This mystery, however, doesn't get diagnosed, as it consistently follows the family like an unconquerable beast or a poltergeist, until the death of the big *ammachi*—until her granddaughter Mariamma becomes a physician.

Parallel to the indomitable Parambil story, there are also the stories of Dr Rune and Dr Kilgore, and a bevy of inmates from St Bridget's leprosarium, that dovetail human suffering and vulnerability with the waves of genuine compassion and acceptance. It is also the story of a renowned physician in high demand

“ Readers will have little discomfort in reminiscing the past of the Parambil, as if it were to be one of their own proud family narratives. ”

professionally, and selfishly sought after by the affluent society for their well-being and cure, retreating to the margins at the stroke of a divine call to serve, repair and reclaim the thrown away and forcefully ostracised lives of lepers.

Being a physician himself, the author could not help but bring in a number of doctors to the Parambil plot, from Glasgow, Scotland, to Madras, to Kochin, to the newly built hospital in Parambil estate, as he enthusiastically documents the 20th century medical advancement. The story evidently has many feel-good components to classify it under the genre of the family drama. Nonetheless, we cannot overlook the shades of light it casts on the striking trails of issues that wrecked the social, cultural and the political fabric of the colonial and the post-colonial India. The little bride who matured into becoming the big *ammachi* whose name is not known until the time her granddaughter is named after her, raises the question about the role of women in the society. The well-articulated response of Joppan who refuses to tread the path of his father, Shamuël *pulayan*, underlines the tension around the evils of caste system, and the unquestioned exploitation of the lower caste. The *pulayi* woman who feeds the orphaned little boy Lenin Evermore whose parents die of small pox, brings into this boiling cauldron of social injustices another relevant question of inherent hypocrisy of the so-called religious folks and the gap between their teaching and practice of faith. Her stoic



description on the conversation of her grandfather to Christianity evinces the age-old paradox: "No one told him (grandfather) that the *pulayar* Jesus died on a different cross. It was the short, dark cross behind the kitchen."

Interwoven with a barrage of moving themes of human struggle, aspirations, vulnerability, hopes, failures, forgiveness, faith, romance and humor, the author succeeds in transporting the readers to love the characters of this epic tale of historical fiction. And in all its probability, by the end of the reading, the readers will have little discomfort in reminiscing the past of the Parambil, as if it were to be one of their own proud family narratives. So it feels to this reader.

Little wonder it is, that the *Time* magazine includes this book on its list of the 100 must-read books of 2023! ■

Jigarthandha 2 Is Not Just Another Gangster Movie

S N ADHIKESH

Karthik Subbaraj's latest film is an absolute delight. Lawrence Master's performance in this movie stands out as one of the best in his career. Subbaraj skillfully utilised his acting abilities to the fullest. The entry scene is amazing, and the setup is brilliantly executed. Lawrence portrays a completely different character, something never seen before. Despite multiple bad choices, his acting capabilities were never in doubt. *Kanchana* was something; I still get chills when I see it. The way he performed was amazing and adrenaline-pumping. After the disastrous *Chandhramuki 2*, within a month, he has delivered what I would call the best of his career after *Kanchana*.



In the first half, he played a dreaded gangster in Madurai with another emotional side revealed in the second half, both portrayed mind-blowingly, especially towards the climax. His dance steps, though different, were executed well. I genuinely hope he maintains this momentum as an actor and collaborates with talented directors like Subbaraj, giving life to fresh scripts. Credit goes to the director for utilizing him and creating a character like Assault Sethu that will be remembered for a long time.

Sana was saved this time from carrying the entire movie on his back. He portrayed a character with a completely different shade compared to his previous roles in *Maanadu* and *Mark Antony*. His charisma and screen presence make him unique among actors. There are many internal conflicts happening inside his head about which side he should choose, especially in one particular scene where he introduces his character to Lawrence's, which is mind-blowing. His delivery of long page dialogues is brilliant. Naveen Chandra's cop character was truly intimidating; he was devilish till his last moment. Nimisha did a pretty good job, but it's Lawrence Master and Sana who steal the show and were the pillars of this movie.

One of the best aspects of Subbaraj's movies is the subtle politics weaved into the multiple-layered stories. Be it *Jigarthandha*, *Mercury*, or *Iraivi*, each holds a strong message subtly delivered throughout the narrative. Here, Subbaraj shifts the narrative after an incredible first half and a banger of an interval scene. Slowly, the real essence of what he wants to convey emerges, subtly told from the first frame. The elephant VFX

“
Jigarthanda Double X is a love letter to cinema, a celebration of its ability to transcend boundaries, inspire creativity, and shape individual lives.”

is top-notch, considering Tamil cinema's standards. Cinematography by S Thiru was exceptional, especially the shots in the forest area. It seems every department worked meticulously, understanding the director's vision. Clint Eastwood has a spiritual presence throughout the movie; it's a treat for his fans, with his presence felt till the climax.

Jigarthandha 2 manages to break away from many gangster movie cliches, although there are some minor pacing issues, especially in the second half, which might be justified by the movie's demands. The first half was a joy and a thrilling retro ride, while the second delves into a serious topic that warrants daily discussion. The art director deserves a bow; they transported us into the '70s era. The music from the first part gave me goosebumps, and the rest of the cast delivered solid performances, fitting their roles.

Sana deserves special mention for his exceptional work, especially in that one portion. His music and Lawrence Master were just perfect. This film presents a larger-than-life version of the first part and keeps you pumped throughout. However, the best shot for me remains the first establishing shot.

In short, screenplay Arakan Subbu Tarantino delivers again. Please do something soon with Vijayna. In essence, *Jigarthanda Double X* is a love letter to cinema, a celebration of its ability to transcend boundaries, inspire creativity, and shape individual lives. It is a film that demands to be seen, not just for its cinematic brilliance but also for its profound insights into the human experience. ■

To the Very End

Fr KM GEORGE

Once upon a time a withered leaf fell among lumps of earth lying at a construction site. One of the lumps there was attracted to the fallen leaf. The dry leaf also had a special feeling for the lump of earth. Eventually they fell in love. Unnoticed by others they shared the deep desires of their hearts. Subsequently, they decided to set out together on a long long journey, a pilgrimage to Kashi, the holy city of Varanasi (Benares). Both were fully aware of their fragility and vulnerability. If exposed to rain the lump of earth would melt away. Exposed to strong winds the dry leaf would be swept away. So they devised an intelligent plan to protect themselves. In the likely event of rain, the leaf would sit atop the lump and shield it like an umbrella. In case of strong winds, the lump would sit on the dry leaf and protect it from being blown away. So they set out "hand in hand", bracing rain and wind for days and nights. And finally the holy city appeared on the far horizon. Their faces lighted up with joy, hope and a sense of near accomplishment.

Suddenly the sky darkened, a heavy rain and a howling wind arrived together. The dry leaf was blown away and the lump of earth was melted down to a little pool of murky water.

What a tragic end for a loving couple!! Yet this terrible story was taught to us, seven-year old children at school. Printed in large fonts without illustration the text had to be read aloud in class to practice our mother tongue. Most of us small kids read it well, and probably enjoyed the rhyming end of the story too. Looking back one realises the deep sadness and sense of meaninglessness the story might have instilled in some of the sensitive kids. I wonder if any contemporary child psychologist would recommend that story to be included in the primary school text.

Could it be traces of that traumatic childhood memory that provoked me to retell the story now? Probably the recounting can be therapeutic for me according to what Freudian psychoanalysts tell me. Along with the melancholic side the story carried a very positive note as well. It is the story of a deep commitment and ultimate loyalty of the leaf and the lump to each other. They travelled together towards a noble goal in unwavering friendship and love until the relentless law of nature 'did them part'. Memory eternal! ■



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



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

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



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

Little Sisters of the Poor

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