

# together

a national family magazine



You may reasonably expect a person to walk a tightrope safely for ten minutes; it would be unreasonable to do so without accident for two hundred years.

BERTRAND RUSSELL

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**Scams and Takeovers Help Capitalism Thrive in 2023**  
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08

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

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

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

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

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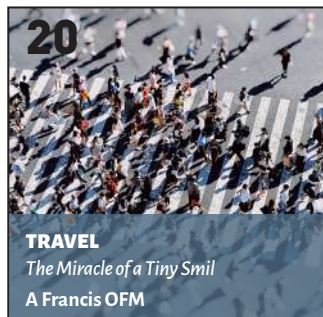
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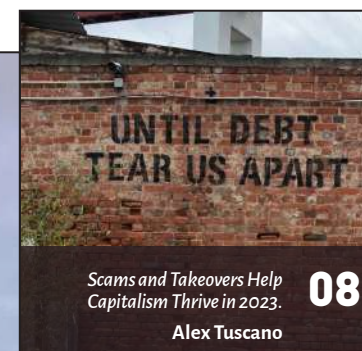


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# 2023 THE YEAR THAT WAS

2023 has certainly been a unique year, hasn't it? With 365 days, like any other year, each passing day feels longer than the last. Perhaps it's just a personal perception or maybe it's the overwhelming sociopolitical turmoil and chaos that has gripped us.

SUMIT DASGUPTA



## January

### Indian Wrestlers Fight for Justice

Indian Wrestlers, Vinesh Phogat, Bajrang Punia, and Sakshi Malik, initiated a protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar, accusing WFI chief Brij Bhushan Singh Sharan, a BJP MP, of sexual exploitation and intimidation, demanding his resignation.

## February

### The Darfur Genocide

The ongoing systematic killing of ethnic Darfuri people in western Sudan begins. It is considered the first genocide of the 21st century. The UN says more than 9,000 people have been killed and 5.6 million displaced in the past seven months.

### Devastating Earthquake In Turkey

Turkey was devastated by earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale. An area of about 350,000 square kilometres was affected across Turkey and neighbouring Syria. According to estimates, about 14 million people were affected and nearly 60,000 deaths were reported.

## April

### India defeats China in Population

According to the UN, India became the world's most populated country, with a population of over 1.43 billion people.

## May

### Violence in Manipur

Ethnic violence erupted in Manipur between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. The violence has killed over 180 people and displaced thousands. The unofficial numbers could be much higher.

### India Gets New Parliament House

India built a new Parliament building. Located right next to the old one, the new building was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

## June

### Disaster in Odisha

An electronic signaling error in Odisha resulted in a train collision that claimed the lives of 296 individuals and left 1,175 others injured leading to India's biggest rail tragedy.

## August

### Chandrayaan-3 Lands on the Moon

Chandrayaan-3 lander accomplished a historic feat by touching down on the moon's south pole. This milestone positioned India as the first country to achieve a successful landing on the moon's south pole and the fourth overall, following the United States, China, and Russia in this remarkable endeavor.



## September

### India Hosts G20 Summit

Delhi decked up in its finest as India played host to leaders from across the world during the G20 summit on September 9–10. The big takeaway for India was the agreement on an economic corridor linking India, Gulf countries and Europe.

## October

### Israel-Palestine-Hamas

The conflict between Israel and Palestine involved Hamas militants launching attacks that resulted in 1,200 Israeli casualties and over 240 hostages. Israel responded with intense airstrikes. The conflict has claimed over 19,000 Palestinian lives, including 100 journalists and 135 UNRWA aid workers, with more than 8,000 children killed in Gaza.



## October & November

### ICC World Cup in India

The country hosted the tournament across 10 stadiums for six weeks. The final match between India and Australia, despite being the most Googled, ended in a heartbreaking defeat for India after a 10-match winning streak.

## November

### Uttarakhand Tunnel Collapse and Bold Rescue Operations

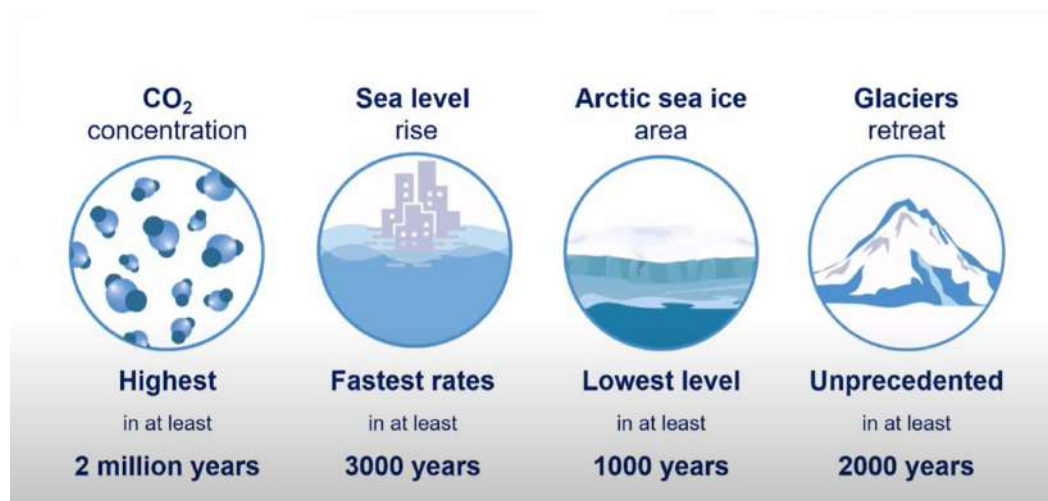
Forty-one construction workers were trapped inside an under-construction tunnel in Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi district. What followed was a long-drawn and challenging rescue operation, and eventually, they were safely rescued after 16 days of captivity.

## December

### Parliament Security Breach

Shocking scenes played out inside Lok Sabha when two intruders deployed coloured smoke canisters and jumped from desk to desk. They were soon overpowered and put under arrest, as were two of their associates, who used coloured smoke outside.





# WE ARE MAKING AN IRREVERSIBLE LEAP

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Signs are everywhere. Our dear lives and its inescapable surroundings are changing their course; or is it that big changes around us are affecting things that matter to us the most. 2023 suggests that we are changing, politically, culturally, and technologically in a faster pace than ever before. We, like the unannounced eruption of a volcano or arrival of an earthquake, are pushed to a sudden leap into the unknown. A quantum leap or a disruptive upheaval? Only time will tell. We are a species that is good at adapting and fitting in—and that gives us hope.

Moving beyond individual events, which are perceptible to our naked senses, what are the big drifts and developments that shaping our world? What is the big picture? We should not go about as if we have not seen them.

It took humanity over two million years to progress from sharpened rocks to polished metal for hunting and gathering. In modern times, humanity took over a hundred years to move

from steam engines (1712) to electric engines (1834). Boom! Comes the post-modern contemporary times. In last fifty years, along with new philosophies of relativism and subjective truth and cultural mayhems came Internet of things, Artificial Intelligence, big data, blockchain, 5G, 3D printing, robotics, drone, gene editing, nanotechnology, and more. Now is the time of AI assisted creation, convergence, and confluence. The result is not easily predictable. Change will change everything. The lines between humans and machines are blurring, except that we can see a few things coming and take guard. The potential for transformative change in areas like work, governance, and creative industry is significant and potentially irreversible. Don't miss the bus; quick, get out of your comfy tent. Be the early majority.

In population we have surged past China to become the world's most populous nation, and having a considerable number of young people may be a demographic dividend. But what

needs a serious debate and intervention is that a populous country with mega billionaires, with political patronage, on one side and 111th position out of 125 in the Global Hunger Index may make many walk on the tightrope; and many more fall out of balance. The monies and powers are with only a few, the vast majority are just part of the population.

Climate change is real; and this change is irreversible. The 2023 UN Climate Change Conference was convened from 30 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai. It brought to the fore the impasse and pretended concern for the earth and ecology. Despite rhetoric of urgency, the conference failed to substantially narrow the ambition gap between current national pledges and the emissions reductions needed to limit global warming. The lack of concrete timelines and immediate action plans remains a glaring concern. The omnipresence of fossil fuel companies and lobbyists throughout COP28 cast a dark shadow on the conference's credibility. Their active role in shaping discussions and influencing outcomes raises serious questions about true commitment to decarbonisation. Concerns about equity and justice permeated the conference. Issues such as historical responsibility, intergenerational fairness, and the disproportionate impact of climate change on developing nations were inadequately addressed, furthering existing vulnerabilities.

We have a new parliament building; the Indian Parliament Mandir is the symbol of Indian democracy and republic. The size of our parliament building has increased, but the length and quality of our parliamentary debates have decreased. Political polarisation and democratic recession deepened in India. There is an erosion of freedoms. India's press freedom rank dropped further to 161 out of 180 countries surveyed in the World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Without Borders in 2023. There were attempts to push out elected members of parliament out of

parliament: some succumbed, other fought back, and some others are still fighting.

Erosion of institutional autonomy is suicidal. Concerns have been raised about the diminishing independence of key institutions like the judiciary, election commission, and media, potentially undermining checks and balances within the system. There is a shrinking space for dissent. Crackdowns on civil liberties, increased restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, and the targeting of activists and critics raise concerns about democratic backsliding. Majoritarianism and marginalisation: The rise of majoritarian politics and the potential marginalisation of minority communities and their voices pose a challenge to India's inclusive and pluralistic democracy. The spread of fake news and propaganda online can manipulate public opinion, hinder informed discourse, and weaken democratic processes.

We are at the turn of a year. One of the foremost thinkers and philosophers of China, Confucius, four centuries before the common era, said, "We have two lives; the second one begins when we realise we have only one." One can begin one's second life from any point in one's life. Every time we show a little more courage to love, speak the truth, etc. we are beginning our second life. When we decide to help someone, or more importantly, be brave enough to ask for help we are beginning our next year, next life. Martin Heidegger famously said that your destiny cannot be changed, but can be challenged. Every time we begin again, we are challenging our density.

There is a thought-provoking poem by a Brazilian poet called, Mario de Andrade; and the poem's name is *My Soul Is in a Hurry*. The poet, as he passes through his midlife, looks back at his life and writes, my future is shorter than my past, I have fewer days in front of me, and more days behind me. I have no time for mediocrity, lethargy or excuses. As the poem proceeds he uses a beautiful metaphor of a boy with a bowl of cherries. He says, my life is like boy with a bowl of cherries. As soon as the child got the bowl of cherries he just began to gulp them in. All on a sudden he realises that he has only a few cherries that are left in the bowl. He stops; he takes a deep breath, now he begins to eat the remaining cherries attentively and passionately. And the poem ends with the words, "We have two lives; the second one begins when we realise we have only one." Happy New Year. ■



## Scams and Takeovers Help Capitalism Thrive in 2023

ALEX TUSCANO explores the trajectory of India being the 5th largest economy in the world, and at the same time is 111th out of a total of 125 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2023; with its progress against hunger nearly halted since 2015.

When I was studying “capitalism” I understood that it is an economic system that is governed by a certain law, more appropriately called logic of functioning of capitalism. The capitalist invests his money to purchase capital, meaning the building, the machinery, the raw material, and a certain hour of work (8 hours of work) from the labourers. In the process of production, the labourers with the help of technology convert the raw material into finished products. At the end of the production process the owner of the capital sells the product and gets cash in return. The owner will not be satisfied if the sale of the finished product gives him the same value as that which he puts in the process of production. He is looking for profit from the process of production. The capitalist wants to recover his

investment in the means of production and the profit. If he has bought weaving machine, cotton and has employed wage labourer he wants to recover the equivalent value of this with profit. Since the cotton has become cloth there is an increase of value of cotton. This increase of value makes it possible to get profit. The labourers need to get wages. How much does a labourer need to get? Labourers should get wages that will be sufficient to maintain the family of the labourers. This means the labourer should get equivalent value of the cost of his and his family's shelter, food clothing, health care, and education of his children. This is the most basic livelihood needs of the labourers. While labourers get their wages they produce double of the value of their wages in 8 hours of their work. This is where the profit of the

capitalist lies. There is a difference between the amount the capitalist pays as wages to the labourers and the monetary value the labourers create in eight hours of work to transform

If capitalism functions along this logic there is nothing wrong with it. Of course there is an inequality in the process. It is not anybody's crime that there is an inequality in the society. Those who own the means of production will make profits, their profits will keep growing and it will get accumulated and expand his capital. The labourers will spend their wages on the livelihood of their families and will again go to work to earn wages.

From the logic of capitalism labourers get wages and the capitalists get profit. The difference we have shown here from the textbooks of economic is that the profit and the wages is from the new value the workers have created. The difference between the total value the labourers create and the wages they receive is actually the profit of the capitalists.

Capitalism exists because of unequal distribution of wealth. Moreover it exists because there are people own the wealth and there are those who do not own anything. The wage earners get to work with those who own wealth then they can live from the wages they receive for their work. When the wealthy put their wealth into production and when they employ wage-earners who will work for the wealth-owners then capitalism comes into existence.

The capitalism has reached the next stage of development, and it is called finance capitalism. A capitalist instead of investing his own money to buy real capital he invites people to give him money which he can invest in real capital. He then issues share certificates and sells in the open market. Here banks play a very important role in this process. Earlier we kept our money in the bank and the banks lent to the capitalists. But now money comes to the capitalist in the

form of shares. Stock market has become the real market of capital and capital has become socialised. What do we mean by capital is socialised? Today the capital is not owned by an individual capitalist who started his industry. His capital belongs to the people who have bought shares of the company. And those who own maximum shares of the company control the functioning of the company.

### Hostile Takeover of NDTV by Adani

This year we have experienced how the NDTV which was started by Radhika Roy and Prannoy Roy gradual grew into a corporate and public limited company and was able to sell shares to public. He borrowed interest free loan of ₹403 crore from Vishwa Pradhan Commercial Private Limited (VCPL). He took this loan in the name of RRRP Company. VCPL Company was funded by Reliance Company; and gave it equivalent value of shares. Formally the value of shares with Reliance remained as shares. But on a fine day the ADANI groups bought this VCPL Company for ₹103 crores.

Mr Roy and his wife landed in a situation where they did not any longer owned majority shares and therefore control of the company. In this way ADANI became the owner of NDTV, holding the maximum shares and De facto overnight Adani became the owner of NDTV. This is a classic example of how finance capital alters the nature of capital and the capitalists.

It was important for ADANI to take over NDTV because it was the only TV channel that gave news and report about the real issues of India: unemployment, education, farmers' distress and so on. This had become a major obstacle for his growth and the brand name of Adani. Today NDTV runs the risk of become a mouth piece of Modi government and Adani company.



### Coal Scam

We have heard of coal scam under UPA government. It was related to allocation of coal mines. But today we have a much greater scam around coal. Mr. Prahlada Joshi had informed the parliament that there was no shortage of coal. But in spite of this the National Thermal Power Corporation asked the government to import 10% of the required quantity of coal. The price of coal in India is ₹1,700 per ton. But if we have to import coal then we have to pay ₹17,000 per ton. The government of India decided to import 20 million ton coal. Out of this the government gave the contract to Adani Enterprise to import of 17.3 million ton coal. Mr. Rahul Gandhi brought to the notice of the public that Adani Enterprise while importing the coal to India had rooted the coal through Dubai and escalated the price of the coal.

### Privatisation of Airports and Sea Ports

When Modi came to power it had decided to privatize the airports. It was stipulated that no one corporate company can own more than two airports. But this rule was amended and a corporate was allowed to buy any number of airports. With this Adani Enterprise was able to acquire six airports. The Mumbai Airport was owned by GVK Industries—a very reputed company. They had developed the airport to status that it has today. The GVK was harassed through raids by ED and income tax and finally made to hand over the airport to Adani. Adani Ports and Logistics commenced operations at Mundra Port in Gujarat. Today it owns 15 ports across India.

### Loan Waving Business

Subramaniam Swamy has stated that the biggest non-performing assets of the bank are from Adani enterprises. After 2014 the banks have written off Adani's loans amounting to colossal proportions. If one wants to know how Adani is able to acquire such huge number of companies the answer is simple. He has

not invested his own money. He borrows from the bank to buy airports, and seaports; and when he fails to repay the loans it gets waved off. In conclusion the amount of loans waved off is basically the money that belong to the tax payers. Adani owns the companies bought from the loans that were waved off.

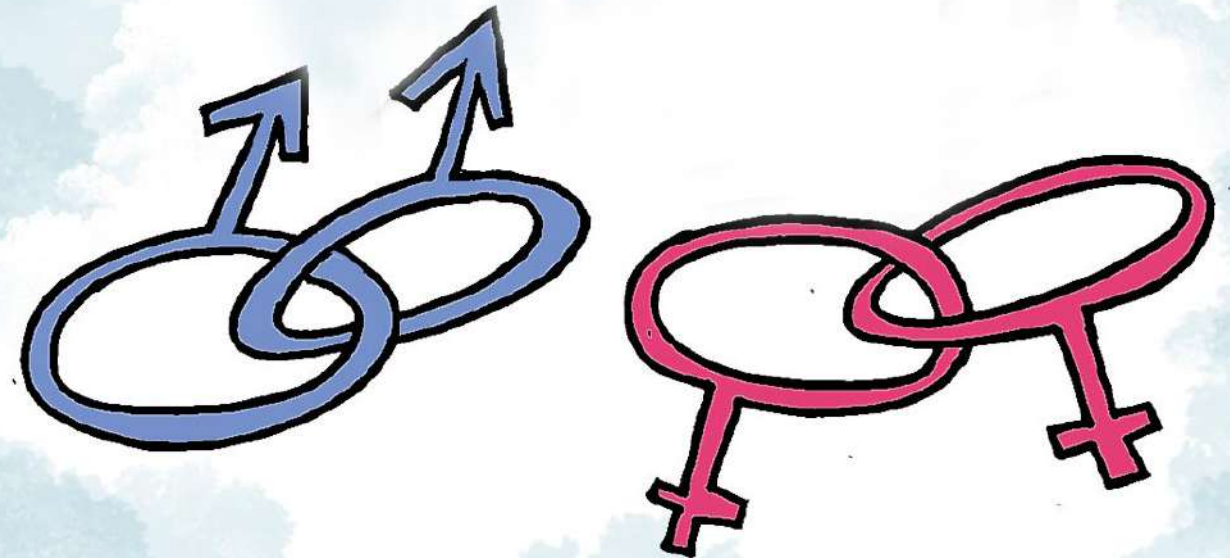
### Hindenburg Report

This report exposes certain controversial dealings of Adani Company. Adani has seven stock registered companies, e.g. Green Energy, Power transmission, Ports and logistics, Coal Company, Gas, etc. He owns \$120 billion stocks. Of these stocks \$100 billion came to him in the last three years.

He is accused of violating SEBI rules. According to this rule any public limited company should not hold more than 75% shares. 25% shares should be held by public. But these shares are held by the 30 off shore shell companies created by Adani located in Mauritius, Dubai. The names of some of the companies are APMS investment Funds, Cresta Fund, LTS Investment Funds, Elara India, Opportunities Fund, Opal Investment Funds. These are basically controlled by Adani and his family members, Rajesh Adani, Vinod Adani these companies are suspected to be involved in money laundering. They can manipulate share prices and over value their companies. Based on the high value of the companies Adani can get huge bank loans.

Are you shocked by these details? This is capitalism. It is called aggressive capitalism fully controlled by finance capital. Capitalists used production of commodities for human consumption to satisfy human needs is only an excuse. Their real game is different. Now we understand why while our economy is the fifth largest economy in the world, we still have a huge number of our population going hungry to bed every day; and health care, education, employment, etc. will remain a far cry for our people. ■

# AND THE LAW SAID, 'I DO NOT'



**SAME SEX MARRIAGE DEMANDS GAIN IN INDIA**

## The Licence To Love, Live, and ~~Marry~~

**This decision decriminalised homosexuality in India, marking a crucial step towards LGBTQ+ rights. While this decriminalisation was a positive development, legal recognition of same-sex marriage has not yet been enacted in the country.**

**RISHIKA LAKSHMI MS**

**I**ndia, a land where ancient traditions intertwine with modern aspirations, presents a fascinating tapestry when it comes to the societal perception of same-sex relationships. While significant strides have been made in recent years, the journey towards full acceptance and inclusivity remains an ongoing saga, painted with vibrant hues of progress and shadowed by lingering strokes of prejudice.

“Despite the legal progress, societal stigma and discrimination persist, casting a shadow over the lives of many LGBTQ+ individuals and their relationships.

It's true that the acceptance and recognition of same-gender love have varied across different societies and throughout history. While progress has been made in many parts of the world, there are still places where there is resistance, discrimination, and sometimes outright hostility towards same-sex relationships. Over the past few decades, there has been a global movement advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, including the right to love and form relationships regardless of gender. Achievements have been made in some countries with the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the recognition of same-sex partnerships, and, in some cases, the legalisation of same-sex marriage. However, challenges persist, and the degree of acceptance can vary significantly from one region or culture to another.

As of 2023, India has made some significant strides in LGBTQ+ rights. The Supreme Court of India, in a historic decision in 2018, declared that consensual adult same-sex relations are not criminal, overturning colonial-era Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. This decision decriminalised homosexuality in India, marking a crucial step towards LGBTQ+ rights. While this decriminalisation was a positive development, legal recognition of same-sex marriage has not yet been enacted in the country. Advocacy and discussions around the topic continue, but there hasn't been national legislation explicitly permitting same-sex marriage.

Despite the legal progress, societal stigma and discrimination persist, casting a shadow over the lives of many LGBTQ+ individuals and their relationships. Traditional notions of gender roles and family structures, often deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric, can overshadow the lived realities of same-sex couples. Imagine intricate, age-old patterns woven into the

tapestry, sometimes obscuring the beauty of the threads that deviate from the norm.

The tapestry of societal perception is further enriched, or perhaps complicated, by the threads of religious beliefs. Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, each with their own vibrant hues and intricate patterns, influence societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals. Understanding the diverse shades of religious interpretations is crucial to navigating this complex landscape.

In rural India, however, the path to acceptance can be more arduous. Deeply ingrained traditions and conservative values surrounding gender roles and family structures often cast a shadow over LGBTQ+ experiences. Religious beliefs and interpretations can also play a significant role, influencing societal attitudes and shaping community norms. Move from the bustling cityscape to the serene countryside, and the tapestry's colours shift. Acceptance tends to be higher in metropolitan centres, where exposure to diverse communities and LGBTQ+ activism paints the canvas with brighter, more inclusive shades. Rural areas, however, often retain the traditional patterns, their colours muted by limited exposure and entrenched beliefs. But just as new leaves sprout on ageing trees, younger generations are weaving fresh threads of acceptance into the tapestry. Their open minds and increasing awareness about LGBTQ+ rights add vibrant splashes of colour, gradually replacing the faded hues of older generations' perspectives.

Limited access to resources further isolates LGBTQ+ individuals in rural areas. Support networks and safe spaces are scarce, leaving individuals feeling alone and unsupported. Young people grappling with their identity may face particular challenges, navigating a land-

“While the verdict fell short of expectations for many, it did not extinguish the spark of hope for LGBTQ+ rights in India and the public discourse surrounding the case has brought the issue to the forefront of national consciousness.

scape devoid of understanding and acceptance. The tight-knit nature of rural communities, while offering a sense of familiarity, can also be a source of social pressure. The fear of rejection and discrimination from family, friends, and neighbours looms large, often forcing LGBTQ+ individuals to remain closeted or conform to traditional expectations.

In 2023, India's vibrant tapestry of tradition and progress faced a critical juncture in the ongoing saga of LGBTQ+ rights: the debate surrounding the legalisation of same-sex marriage. While the year brought no final resolution, the journey itself, woven with threads of legal arguments, societal perspectives, and passionate advocacy, offers a rich narrative of a nation grappling with a complex issue.

The year began with a flicker of hope. In October 2022, the Supreme Court agreed to hear petitions challenging the government's refusal to recognise same-sex marriages under the Special Marriage Act. This move, following the 2018 decriminalisation of homosexuality, marked a significant step towards LGBTQ+ equality. Months of fervent arguments followed, with petitioners highlighting the fundamental right to equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution and the discriminatory impact of denying same-sex couples legal recognition. The government, on the other hand, argued that such a decision should be left to Parliament, citing societal concerns and the need for legislative debate.

In October 2023, the Supreme Court delivered its verdict. While it did not legalise same-sex marriage, it acknowledged the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ couples and urged the government to address their concerns. The bench, the court declared, it was now on the Parliament to decide on the issue.

The verdict, though not the definitive answer many had hoped for, was met with mixed reactions. LGBTQ+ activists viewed it as a setback but vowed to continue their fight for equal rights. Supporters expressed disappointment but acknowledged the complexity of the issue and the need for further societal dialogue. The court, in a 3:2 judgement, deemed the legalisation of same-sex marriage a legislative issue, leaving the ball in Parliament's court. This decision, while disappointing for those seeking immediate legal recognition, could potentially pave the way for a national debate and legislative action. The Parliament needs to consider the legal arguments presented in court, public opinion, and the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals when shaping future legislation.

While the verdict fell short of expectations for many, it did not extinguish the spark of hope for LGBTQ+ rights in India. The public discourse surrounding the case has brought the issue to the forefront of national consciousness, paving the way for conversations about inclusivity and equality. Furthermore, the court's acknowledgment of discrimination opens doors for legal challenges in other areas beyond marriage, potentially improving the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals in the interim.

“As India navigates the complex terrain of LGBTQ+ rights, the question remains: what will the final pattern of societal acceptance look like? Will it be a vibrant mosaic of diverse perspectives, or a muted tapestry constrained by tradition? The answer lies in the hands of every individual, in the choices we make and the voices we choose to raise. Let us strive for a future where the threads of love, respect, and equality find their rightful place in the ever-evolving tapestry of India.” ■

# Media Content and Viewers' Behaviour

**The beliefs of television viewers become synonymous with the curated, repetitive themes portrayed on television. This is bound to cultivate a worldview that is shaped by the television.**

IVANA VERGHESE

India had witnessed quite a few deaths of children in 2004, who died trying to imitate superhero stunts from a popular television show *Shaktimaan*. Aftab Poonawala who very cruelly murdered his girlfriend Shraddha Walker in 2022 and chopped her corpse into several pieces, revealed on investigation that he was inspired by an American Crime Web Series. A number of other incidents show how media has had an impact on the perceptions and subsequent actions of individuals. What remains a question is whether the repeated exposure to media violence causes individuals to act in ways they otherwise wouldn't.



George Gerbner proposed the cultivation theory according to which people who watch television frequently are more likely to be influenced by the messages from the world of television. Their worldview and perceptions are altered to the extent that they reflect messages repeatedly seen on television. This exposure and influence by media cultivate a shared worldview among viewers which in time, becomes the dominant narrative. The surveys conducted by Gerbner revealed a small but statistically significant relationship between television consumption and fear of being a victim of a crime. It was found that heavy viewers overestimated crime rates as well as their risk of being victims of crime and often underestimated the safety of their neighbourhoods. The beliefs of television viewers become synonymous with the curated, repetitive themes portrayed on television. This is bound to cultivate a worldview that is shaped by the television.

With expansion in technology, research on cultivation has also broadened with other forms of media like apps, social media, video games being included in addition to television. We are exposed to a wider range of media today. There are concerns on how biased, misleading information online shape our perceptions. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter & YouTube are the leading social media platforms that tend to create a synthetic reality where people believe everything they see online. Cultivation theory provides a skeleton structure that can define how exposure to different forms of media can influence our perceptions and behaviour in turn.

Research carried out by psychologists L. Rowell Huesmann, Leonard Eron, and

others starting in the 1980s found that children who were exposed to longer hours of media violence in elementary school tended to show relatively higher levels of aggression when they became teenagers. Later research by psychologists Douglas Gentile and Brad Bushman however, suggested that exposure to media violence is simply one of the multiple factors that contribute to aggressive behaviour. While several other studies have found a correlation between exposure to media violence and aggressive behaviour, this does not necessarily imply causation. Exposure to media violence can be best perceived as one of the many factors that contribute to the risk of violence and aggressive behaviour in individuals.

The Netflix show *You* has found groundbreaking success and by appealing to people all over the world. According to Netflix, the show follows a 'dangerously charming, intensely obsessive young man' who 'goes to extreme measures to insert himself into the lives of those he is transfixed by.' This show is critiqued for the sex appeal that it gives to the protagonist—a criminal because it can create unhealthy fantasies in viewers that can go from gaslighting and stalking to murder. *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* also a show on Netflix received backlash for hurting the sentiments of several of the victims' families by re-traumatizing them and treating the serial killer as a pop icon. The show had created a wave of thirst for Dahmer with people creating fan blogs, cosplaying him on social media and manufacturing merchandise. The adaptations of the stories of serial killers or this genre in general, was seen to do more harm than good when Hollywood heartthrobs play monsters thereby overly romanticising them.

In conclusion, while binge-watching crime shows can shape attitudes towards violence and aggression and also create an acceptance of aggressive behaviour, not all viewers are equally affected by what they watch at all times. Research has shown that the effect of exposure to media violence especially in children is moderated by their situation during presentation or that period, as well as their individual predispositions. ■



# New Year: Time Again to Begin Building Peace

The future is always the same as the present. That's why we have to change the present.

RICHARD ROHR OFM



We have to begin within and allow ourselves to be transformed. Then the future can be different than the present. Otherwise, we have no evidence that we're going to do anything different tomorrow, next week, or next year. We're going to react next week to the violence that emerges in our wider culture, in our institutions, and in our families just as we react right now. And so we always have to return to what I have often called "cleaning the lens." Authentic spirituality is always on the first level about us—as individuals. It always is. We want it to be about our partners, our coworkers, or our pastors. We want to use spirituality to change other people, but true spirituality always changes us.

Many people intellectually accept Gandhi's or Martin Luther King Jr's teachings on nonviolence and try to execute it by willpower, but that's not what I call a "mystery of participation." Such people aren't participating in a qualitatively new and different life in themselves. They have changed their minds but not their hearts. In real moments of tension and trial, such

people are as much a part of the problem as the people they oppose. Their will and egos are still totally in control with their need to be right, to win, and to have success, which almost always leads to violence of some kind.

I think that was the great disappointment with political activism and even many of the nonviolent movements of the 1960s and 70s in the US. It was not really transformation. It wasn't really coming from what we would call—to use a very old-fashioned, religious word—holiness. Such action was often not coming from holiness, but simply the intellect and will, which are not the transformed self.

## Change Starts from Within

We each carry a certain amount of pain from our very birth. If that pain is not healed and transformed, it actually increases as we grow older, and we transmit it to people around us. We can become violent in our attitudes, gestures, words, and actions.

We must nip this process in the bud by acknowledging and owning our own pain, rather than projecting it elsewhere. For myself, I can't pretend to be loving when inside I'm not, when I know I've had cruel, judgmental, and harsh thoughts about others. At the moment the thought arises, I have to catch myself and hand over the annoyance or anger to God. Contemplative practice helps me develop this capacity to watch myself, to let go of the thought, and to connect with my loving Inner Witness. Let me explain why this is so effective and so important. Unless we can become the

“When we talk about building a world where all people can achieve justice and fulfill our potential as human beings, we really mean all people. That is Dr Martin Luther King's vision of “Beloved Community.”

watcher, we'll almost always identify with our feelings and our judgments. They feel like real and objective truth.

Most people I know are overly identified with their own thoughts and feelings. They don't really have feelings; their feelings have them. That may be what earlier Christians meant by being “possessed” by a demon. That's why so many of Jesus' miracles are the exorcism of devils. Most of us don't take that literally anymore, but the devil is still a powerful metaphor, and it demands that we take it quite seriously. Everyone has a few devils. I know I'm “possessed” at least once or twice a day, even if just for a few minutes!

There are all kinds of demons. In other words, there are lots of times when we cannot not think a certain way. When we see certain people, we get afraid. When we see other people, we get angry. For example, numerous studies show that many white Americans have an implicit, unacknowledged fear of Black men. Most of us are not consciously or explicitly racist, but many of us have an implicit and totally denied racial bias. This is why all healing and prayer must descend into the unconscious where the lies we've believed are hidden in our wounds and embedded in the

social reality of our cultures. During contemplation, forgotten painful experiences may arise. In such cases, it helps to meet with a spiritual director or therapist to process old wounds and trauma in healthy ways.

## Building Beloved Community

When we talk about building a world where all people can achieve justice and fulfill our potential as human beings, we really mean all people. That is Dr Martin Luther King's vision of “Beloved Community,” where all people can live in peace. Beloved Community is an acknowledgment that the only way for a peace to ever be sustainable, the only way that our people can always be safe, is if all people are free.

Building Beloved Community is not about loving the people who are easy to love. It is about cultivating love for those that are difficult to love. *Those people* over there. The *others*. The people who voted for *that guy*. The people who work in the very systems that are destroying our communities. The corrupt corporate CEO. The foreign dictator responsible for countless deaths.

If you are not struggling to love people, if you are not trying to build understanding with those you disagree with, then you are not really doing the work of building Beloved Community. The work of building Beloved Community is understanding that we're not trying to win *over* people, but to *win people over*. Historically, winning a war has meant defeating the opponent. There is a clear winner and a clear loser.... But in nonviolence, once in a while you have to defend somebody, but it means you're always willing to suffer first for the cause—that is to say, for communion with your enemies. If you overcome your enemies, you've failed. If you make your enemies your partners, that is beloved community. ■



## Munna Qureshi Definitely a Hero of 2023

MONICA FERNANDES

**F**orty-one workers trapped in the Uttarakhand tunnel for three weeks must have experienced terminal despair. Living without a bath, without change of clothes and sinking faith in survival every day.

Engineers, technicians, drilling experts from all over the world tried, tried and tried. They gained a certain quantum of success, but never a final solution to the problem. Drills broke, rocks cracked and attempts failed several times.

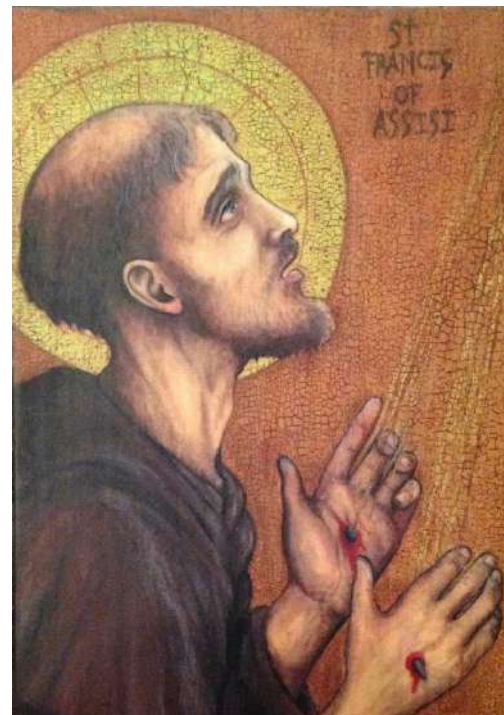
Then was pressed into service a team of people, skilled in a banned and banished art. They were rat-hole miners. The team was led by a 29-year-old man from Delhi. They are called so because they remove all debris by bare hands and burrow narrow holes like rats. The one they dug in Uttarakhand was 2.6 ft in diameter.

The 29-year-old leader of this team, was the first to remove the last rock in the burrow and see 41 trapped men staring at him. The trapped workers must have felt like watching the *Vishwaroopam* of Lord Shri Krishna. The name of this young saviour is Munna Qureshi.

He says he and his entire team will not collect a single rupee as charges for his services in saving these men. He says he has earned so much pride by saving the lives of 41 Indians, that the pride will last him for a lifetime. He doesn't need any money for this work

If ever life is kind enough to grant you an opportunity of saving somebody's life, and if the faith or religion or caste of those you save, even once comes to your mind... you are a lesser soul yet to attain the stature of Munna Qureshi. He might be an uneducated, un-groomed rat-hole miner, but he represents the Godliness in every human. He has got the whole country thinking. May his tribe grow and may every Indian think like Munna Qureshi.

Long live the spirit of Munna Qureshi. ■



## Stigmata of St Francis of Assisi — 800 Years Ago

JOHN SEKAR OFM

**T**he Franciscans, having commemorated the 800th Anniversary of the Approval of the Rule and Christmas at Greccio in 2023, will now proceed to celebrate the 800th Anniversary of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi in 2024.

Stigmata refers to the spiritual phenomenon where a person bears wounds that resemble those of Jesus Christ on the Cross. These wounds typically manifest on the body: the hands, feet, and side, mirroring the wounds of Christ crucified on the Cross. St. Francis of Assisi is believed to have been the first in the history of the Church to have received the stigmata.

St. Francis received the stigmata on 17 September 1224 while he was praying on Mount

La Verna. It was during one of his five Lents (Fasting and Prayer) that began after the Feast of Assumption (15 August) and concluded on the Feast of Saint Michael (29 September) that a Seraph (angel) appeared crucified before Francis in a vision. As he contemplated enthralled by the vision, wounds similar to those of Christ's crucifixion appeared on Francis' hands, feet, and side.

St Bonaventure in describing this event writes, "Because of this new and astounding miracle unheard of in times past, Francis came down from the mountain a new man adorned with the sacred stigmata, bearing in his body the image of the Crucified not made by a craftsman in wood or stone, but fashioned in his members by the hand of the living God."

Not just St Francis of Assisi who has been recognised as a stigmatist in the Church. There are others too. Besides others, St. Mariam Thresia (1876–1975), born in Punthrikkurissi, Kerala, India, and St. Padre Pio (1887–1968), born in Pietrelcina, Italy, who lived in the 20th Century, are believed to have experienced the stigmata. St. Mariam Thresia, a nun and the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Family, reported experiencing the wounds of Christ's crucifixion. St Padre Pio, a Capuchin friar, bore the stigmata for several decades, and it became one of the most well-known aspects of his life.

This spiritual and mystical phenomenon is always put under scrutiny to check its authenticity and credibility. The Church follows a critical and rigorous medical and theological examination of such instances before authenticating the Stigmata. Despite such a stringent verification process, looking at the mystical lives that the stigmatists lived attaining a loving union with the Divine in their lifetime through an ardent life of prayer and contemplation, one cannot but accept that they could receive this exclusive spiritual gift called Stigmata.

In light of the 800th anniversary of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi in 2024, it may be a good idea to know/revisit his life, spirituality, and teachings to see, why God should have granted him this spiritual gift called Stigmata—a good spiritual deed for the New Year! ■



# The Miracle of a Tiny Smile

A FRANCIS OFM



After disembarking the flight at the International Airport in Thiruvananthapuram, a city that is known for its 'undulating terrain of low coastal hills', I was walking towards the immigration services as swiftly as I could. I casually noticed a young man walking along side, keeping up the pace with me. Upon the quick random realisation that dawned on me that he was the window seat occupant in the same row in which I had occupied the aisle seat. Crossing our gazes unexpectedly, I extended to him a forced smile of courtesy, as a gesture of civility expected of all us on such awkward occasions. Without any hesitation, he reciprocated my smile, with the same. Soon, we found ourselves engaging in conversation, introducing, and learning about the whereabouts of each other. A relational landing space which neither of us foresaw or anticipated, until that moment!

To my pleasant surprise, I learnt that we both had boarded same flights, starting our itineraries from the great city of Toronto, a land that celebrates all forms of diversities. At the departing airport, the Lester B Pearson International Airport, which was named after 14th prime minister of Canada, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for organising the first peacekeeping force, we sat, in the same lounge, for more than three hours prior to boarding the fancy 'Emirates Boing 201' heading to Dubai. We also spent four and half hours at the Dubai airport lounge individually, waiting for our connecting flight to Thiruvananthapuram. We boarded the same Emirates aircraft and travelled all the way across the Arabian Sea that connects three major peninsulas, the Horn of Africa, the Arabian and the Indian Peninsulas, for a stretch of five and half breathtaking hours.

Despite sharing the same departing and destination ports for our travels, we hardly ever noticed each other until on the last lap, just before disappearing to each other's separate directions of anonymity. Without any exaggeration, I would make the claim that we spent more than 24 hours altogether, and traveled 8,729 miles in close, but unconnected physical proximity. Sadly, we had no clue about our shared journeys, and throughout we conducted ourselves as strangers.

All it took us to connect was just an innocuous gentle smile! Ripping of the impatience we experienced at the baggage carousel, we started to chat a little more about ourselves and to get to know each other a little deeper.

As the destiny of life has its mischievous trick to play on every person, I was startled to know that we both happened to have a common ancestral connection with Anjuthengu, a picturesque seaside village cradled along the shore of the Arabian sea where we both had our births, and spent the entirety of childhood and growing up years. The destination of this current trip for both of us was to the same

village, historically famous for its resistance to the early commercial settlement of the English East India company in the form of an armed revolt in 1697 called the 'Anjuthengu Revolt', where we have our loved ones residing, currently. Coincidentally, this young man's uncle happened to be my classmate at St Joseph's High school, the only high school in our village where we studied from the first grade to the final year of the high school education.

As interconnected as it seemed, after our visits to our loved ones, we would both be going to the East end of Toronto, Canada, where we have our current homes, and residential status as 'immigrants' waiting for us!

Walking in tandem amid all these astounding coincidences that gushed into our pleasantly shocked mental realms of awarenesses, the time came for us to exit from the Airport, and move towards the respective cabs that were waiting for us.

But before leaving the entrance of the airport I heard me repeating for the one last time, "What a strange coincidence!"

On a second thought though, I questioned my inner wondering: "What is strange about it? Is it really a coincidence? As humans, aren't we all connected, or better, interconnected, on some level, or (for that matter) on multiple levels?"

It is fair enough to say that, to the extent, I shared commonalities with this young man, may not be the extent I share connections and commonalities with many others on the paths of the daily routine of my life I meet. Still, I cannot consider others as strangers to me. At the end, in the careful peeling of the strangeness inherent in others, I will surely fall flat, as I did on this trip, that there are no strangers, but friends who have not met before.

The miracle of the tiny smile is the golden path to transform the so called, others-who-are-strangers into friends.

One brief, innocuous but daring tiny smile! ■



# What's on My Bookshelf?

SHREEJA MANDAL

It's that time of the year again when we as a species collectively try to condense our impressions of the year gone by in the form of lists, highlights of the year so to speak. Psychology says we are pattern-seeking beings who love the comfort of hierarchical presentation of information for ease of consumption and comprehension.

If you, like me, also struggle with finding a balance between your hobby of buying books and your hobby of reading books, hopefully this list will make your next trip to the bookstore a bit easier. So here it is, my list of the 10 most impactful books of 2023, in no particular order:

## 1. **The Fraud** by Zadie Smith (Fiction)

Starting this list off with a personal favourite, we have Smith with her sixth novel. Although a work of historical fiction based on an actual criminal trial that held the 1870s Victorian English population enthralled, this book is very much a reflection and meditation on the contemporary global political climate.

## 2. **Prophet Song** by Paul Lynch (Fiction)

Winner of the Booker Prize 2023, Lynch has described this book as an attempt at 'radical empathy' that pulls the reader into the experience of surviving in a society embroiled in political crisis.

## 3. **Roman Stories** by Jhumpa Lahiri, translated by Todd Portnowitz (Fiction)

In recent years, Lahiri has been living in Rome, Italy, and has been writing extensively in Italian, her adopted language. *Roman Stories* is the latest one of this series of Italian writings. In this collection of short stories, Lahiri extends many of her recurring concerns—identity, place, displacement, alienation and otherness—as she grapples with the ideas of home and exile.

## 4. **Illegitimate Authority: Facing the Challenges of Our Time** by Noam Chomsky and CJ Polychroniou (Non-fiction)

The distinguished theoretical linguist and public intellectual, Chomsky, has always had his finger on the pulse of the world. In this series of insightful interviews with Polychroniou, Chomsky delves into the pressing issues of our times, the most troubling of which is perhaps the rapid erosion of the concept of democracy, particularly in the USA, and escalating geopolitical tensions.

## 5. **The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store** by James McBride (Fiction)

Set in 1972, workers in the construction site of a new development project in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, unearth an unexpected skeleton at the bottom of a well. The mystery of the

skeleton's identity and how it wound up where it is found conceals closely guarded secrets amongst the residents of Chicken Hill, a ramshackle neighbourhood where immigrant Jewish and African Americans coexist peacefully in their shared aspirations and challenges.

## 6. **Chain-Gang All-Stars** by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah (Fiction)

If you love Charlie Brooker's dystopian TV series *Black Mirror* (2011–present), this novel is for you. *Chain-Gang All-Stars* is a dystopian satire where death-row inmates engage in televised duels for a shot at freedom.

## 7. **The Best Minds: A Story of Friendship, Madness and the Tragedy of Good Intentions** by Jonathan Rosen (Non-fiction)

The post-pandemic world has, at long last, facilitated some sustained conversation on mental health in recent years. In light of this, Rosen's memoir is a brilliant take on friendship and love laced together by self-delusion, which works as a commentary on how the western world deals with mental illness and all that it entails.

## 8. **Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World** by Naomi Klein (Non-fiction)

One day Klein discovers that a woman who shares her name but espouses views that are drastically different and repugnant to her own is repeatedly getting mistaken for her. Although Klein initially dismisses this as too absurd to be true, the situation quickly takes a dark turn and plunges her into a distorted reality.

## 9. **How to Say Babylon** by Safiya Sinclair (Non-fiction)

In this breathtaking memoir, Sinclair recounts her childhood in a coastal Jamaican village in a draconian Rastafarian household—dreadlocks, no jewellery, modest clothes and preparation for eventual wifedom—on the fringes of a touristy pleasure hub.

## 10. **Days at the Morisaki Bookshop** by Satoshi Yagisawa, translated by Eric Ozawa (Fiction)

Books about bookshops and booksellers are having a moment at the moment, as are books on the slow life and healing, and books by Japanese authors. Combine all three and you have *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop*.

Hah! You thought the list ends here! Surprise, there's more to it! No list (however short!) of the most impactful books of a particular year is complete without including the books that find a resurging popularity in their readership due to their ability to reflect on the contemporary human condition.

So here are my honourable additions to my previously explored top 10 most impactful books of 2023:

*On Palestine* by Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé (Non-fiction); *The Iliad and The Odyssey* by Homer, translated by Emily Wilson (Epic poetry); and *Desperately Seeking Shah Rukh: India's Lonely Young Women and the Search for Intimacy and Independence* by Sharanya Bhattacharya (Non-fiction).

Okay, this is definitely the end.  
Happy reading! ■





# A TEACHER'S CONFIDENCE

**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.**

Dr MN PARASURAMAN

My first “job” was in 1999 January at a small self-financing English medium school for children from low income families. The parents of these kids believed that even poor quality English medium private schooling in tiny, ill lit classrooms in an unplastered building was better than a Telugu medium government schooling. Talk about decolonisation!

The school was being run on a profit model. They achieved this by the simple expedient of not having teachers for half the subjects till the

last two months of the academic year. Close to exam time they would appoint income-less graduates like me who were prepared to work for 60/- per hour in the evenings. Bedding was arranged in the building for students to sleepover. Classes were from 9:30 AM till 9:30 PM with two to three breaks.

The job was offered to my MA classmate Pradeep Kumar at Hyderabad University. He had a BED and a few years' experience before joining MA. He offered it to me and I took it. To tell you the truth shamelessly, I took the job mainly to finance my drinking habit, for which I didn't want to lie and get extra pocket money from home.

I was a “great” teacher because I never carried a cane or foot ruler unlike every one of the other teachers. I spoke lovingly, peppering my English liberally with Telugu and Dakhini Urdu. I patted heads and shoulders freely and made soft air kissing sounds.

And I discovered that 20 marks of the AP SSLC English paper were for letter writing, formal and informal. I was an expert. And it's not rocket science. It's easy to teach. I used to make them write two letters every evening. Then I would teach other things, mostly through assigning writing and correcting notebooks individually. While they were not actually writing or receiving my feedback, the kids could do pretty much whatever they liked, including roaming around the classroom, so long as the decibel level didn't rise high enough to attract other grownups. Kids age 13 and 14 from lower-middle class thrive in such a relaxed atmosphere. Their minds open up.

The school was called Sahiti Vidyarniketan, after the owner-cum-principal's daughter. Idk how the Principal was with other staff, but as a Central University MA student from Kerala (God's Own Ultra-Literate Country)

with an intimidating boarding school English accent *free* of any regional markers, I commanded respect. My timings were *flexi*. I usually went there by 6:00 PM after endless tea and flirting on campus. I stayed till 9:30. The hostel mess secretary would keep my dinner for me.

I taught only 40–50 kids about to take their SSLC exam. The kids appeared for the exam in March. They requested me to accompany them to the exam centre, “just to give them confidence.” We travelled by a cramped van. A little boy Thaha, with fair chubby cheeks sat on my lap.

When the results came out, almost all of them passed with 80%-plus in English and many 90%+. For the first time in the short history of that school, *no* failures.

I want to sign off with the story of a boy called Pramod.

Pramod was a Malayali boy. His father had been a factory worker for an AP Government public sector company which had gone into ruin. They didn't have any assured income for two years. Father supported the family by doing odd jobs. Pramod was a textbook example of an “underachiever”. Two times SSLC failed. Distracted and disoriented in class.

My first treatment of Pramod was not something I am proud of. He had been pushing decibel levels. I pointed him the door and barked at him to get the hell out of class if he couldn't sit still. (I bark pretty ferociously on the rare occasions that I do!) He obeyed in terror. Apart from my height and weight, there was the usual intimidating social capital. HCU student. Accent free English. Deferred to even by the almighty Principal.

Two nights after the barking, I was cycling furiously down from campus to get beer from GB Wines, not far from the school. A boy called out loudly to me: “സാർ! സാർ!” Tbh, I was impatient when I saw it was Pramod. It was almost closing time for the liquor store. But I braked.

A teacher stops for a student in visible distress, even if he's not yet an MA or a Gazetted Officer. Even if he's working for 60/- per hour for hours actually taken and not for UGC scales. And even if he's desperate for beer.

For the first time Pramod spoke to me in Malayalam, “Sir, I am terribly afraid and worried. I have failed this SSLC exam two times, Sir. I flunked my English. If I don't pass this time...” The consequences couldn't bear articulation. That was when I asked him about his background. Then I patted his back and said, “Don't worry, my boy! This time \*you will!\* you just need to follow the instructions I give you in class.” Twice he asked me, “Will I get through, Sir? Will I get through?” “YOU WILL!”, I repeated as much to grab my beer as to impart confidence to him. After that he was an attentive and trouble free child in class. Got through SSLC with 65+ in English.

The following year the principal of the school came for me to my hostel room. I was a JRF scholar now, with a full-fledged MA. I was away at my sister's house in the city under room quarantine for chicken pox. (Reading Prof Mathew Monipalli's classic book, *The Craft of Business Letter Writing*!) When I came back I found a note on the door with the principal's name and phone number, requesting me to call urgently. But I didn't want to risk infecting 50 kids and making them miss their SSLC exam. Moreover, I had a JRF dole, 5000/- per month, quite princely in 2000.

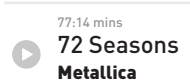
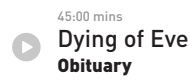
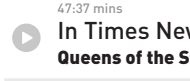
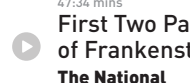


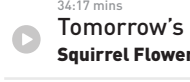

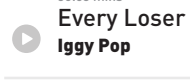

But I remember a few of those children. Pramod, little Thaha who sat on my lap like a son, dusky, bright-eyed and cerebral Jyotirmayee, whose doting father proudly told me that her mother was a Tamil speaking lady whom he had married for love in their native border town, the Saivaite pilgrim centre Srikalahasti. The place where the adivasi saint Kannappa Nayanar plucked out his eye to stop the bleeding of the eye of a Shivalingam. Who offered deer meat cooked in forest honey to the Lord, who accepted it joyfully... Kannappa's story has been sung since at least the eighth century. My story had to wait 21 years. But now it's out. ■



# Top Rock Albums of the Year

KAPIL ARAMBAM

Grading a rock album can be tricky, especially considering the number of factors that affect an album's overall appeal, impact, and quality. And today, based on reviews and ratings, *Together* brings to you a list of ten best rock albums of 2023. Check it out!

 <div>77:14 mins <b>72 Seasons</b> Metallica</div> <div>►Metacritic ◀Pitchfork</div> <div>►77/100 ⇄ ◀6.4</div>
 <div>45:00 mins <b>Dying of Everything</b> Obituary</div> <div>►76/100 ⇄ ◀NA</div>
 <div>47:37 mins <b>In Times New Roman...</b> Queens of the Stone Age</div> <div>►80/100 ⇄ ◀6.8</div>
 <div>47:34 mins <b>First Two Pages of Frankenstein</b> The National</div> <div>►79/100 ⇄ ◀6.6</div>
 <div>48:47 mins <b>This Stupid World</b> Yo La Tengo</div> <div>►85/100 ⇄ ◀8.5</div>
 <div>63:26 mins <b>Take Me Back to Eden</b> Sleep Token</div> <div>►60/100 ⇄ ◀NA</div>
 <div>34:17 mins <b>Tomorrow's Fire</b> Squirrel Flower</div> <div>►81/100 ⇄ ◀7.4</div>
 <div>37:03 mins <b>Rat Saw God</b> Wednesday</div> <div>►89/100 ⇄ ◀8.8</div>
 <div>36:53 mins <b>Every Loser</b> Iggy Pop</div> <div>►79/100 ⇄ ◀6.9</div>
 <div>53:11 mins <b>ID.Entity</b> Riverside</div> <div>►NA ⇄ ◀NA</div>



**72 Seasons**  
Metallica

0:00 ————— 24,518,308\*

*Metal Hammer* says Metallica have still found something new to say (if not play) deserves respect!



**Dying Of Everything**  
Obituary

0:00 ————— 295,219\*

*Blabbermouth.net* rates the 10 songs in this new Obituary album 'smash, kick and slay with admirable levels of vehemence and viciousness'.

\* Monthly listeners on Spotify

Data courtesy: Pitchfork, Metacritic, The Needle Drop, AllMusic, NME, Rolling Stone, The Guardian



**In Times New Roman...**  
Queens of the Stone Age

0:00 ————— 7,127,271\*

*NME* describes *In Times New Roman...* as a grotty listen, using pain to encourage a rawness in their sound.



**Take Me Back to Eden**  
Sleep Token

0:00 ————— 3,023,657\*

*Metal Hammer* describes this as a record that expands the band's universe and the band's strongest effort to date.



**First 2 Pages of Frankenstein**  
The National

0:00 ————— 5,888,387\*

The *Rolling Stone* put The National's new release as 'a remarkable reassertion of the band's potency'.



**Tomorrow's Fire**  
Squirrel Flower

0:00 ————— 235,415\*

*Paste* rates this release an 8.8 out of 10, calling it the best Squirrel Flower album to date, highlighting the emotional depth of their lyrical prowess



**Every Loser**  
Iggy Pop

0:00 ————— 4,449,122\*

*Pitchfork* writes that the listeners are, over the course of its 11 tracks, treated to a parade of iconic Iggy archetypes.



**This Stupid World**  
Yo La Tengo

0:00 ————— 965,462\*

A far livelier and live-sounding album than one would expect from a group this deep into their career! –*Exclaim!*



**Rat Saw God**  
Wednesday

0:00 ————— 405,342\*

*Beats Per Minute* claims that the album is an example of a band operating at their highest most infectious potency, and the end result is riveting



**ID.Entity**  
Riverside

0:00 ————— 224,305 \*

Poland's favorite progressive rock band is back with their eighth studio album release. You need to listen to it first!



# The Ego Reigns Supreme

MONICA FERNANDES

Indian society was once a co-operative one. Family members were united and worked for the common good. Farmers helped each other in tilling the land. Indians joined hands under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi to oust the British. Unfortunately Western influence has insidiously crept into our midst, stressing individualism, selfishness and competition. The new status symbol is to flaunt our possessions. We yearn to be popular, to catch eyeballs. The electronic media has also played its part. We send countless WhatsApp and Instagram messages, including selfies, but have no time either to chat with the elderly grandmother at home or to visit a friend who is sick. We forget God and our fellow men. The ego reigns supreme.

Where does the malaise begin? It begins in the family, the primary unit of society where parents either have no time for their children or smother their individuality and freedom by pushing them to be super achievers.

Paradoxically in an effort to stand out and be different, it is surprising how alike we have become! A young mother was narrating how she was the only one who took her son for a birthday party without a nanny. All the kids were relegated to their respective nannies while the mothers showed off their slim figures and designer outfits. The mothers seemed to be clones of each other. The only quality time the kids got was with their nannies. The ears of all present were assailed by loud filmy music. Pardon the oxymoron, but they were indeed poor rich kids: poor in parental attention but rich in toys and goodies.

The term “helicopter parent” was first used by Dr. Haim Ginott in his book entitled “Between Parent and Teenager.” Pushy parents, sometimes seeking vicarious attention, are obsessive about their child’s studies and extracurricular activities. The kid is smothered with overbearing, competitive parents. The child could become lonely, self-absorbed and may have psychological issues. He has been brainwashed into thinking that he is the center of the universe and has no time for others.

The competitive spirit continues in schools and colleges. The curriculum only emphasizes knowledge. The students are not taught about their duties and responsibilities towards the family, society, weaker sections of society and the environment. They are not given any spiritual guidance nor are they provided with the knowledge of how to cope with failure and life’s stressors. Youngsters now wear somber, dark coloured t-shirts to college. Gone are the carefree days of their parents who wore vibrant colours.

I once read a book entitled “Survival in the Executive Jungle.” Having worked in a corporate environment for several years, I feel that this title is very apt. The toxic competition with executives scrambling to achieve targets is not very conducive to the employee’s emotional and physical well-being.

Politics is part of the game. Bosses taking credit for results while their subordinates have done all the hard work is very de-motivating. Money and the trappings that go with it have become the new status symbol. Parents keep on working harder in order to buy a bigger house and a fancier car. They are never content. Black money, corruption and bribery exist in order to fuel our never ending perceived ‘wants’.

A society where there is so much wastage in terms of scarce resources, where there is so much loneliness and emphasis on the individual ego is heading for disaster. The roots of the family must be consciously strengthened. Young people do not realize that social media friendships are fake and based on artificial ‘Likes’. Family time together is a must.

The family that prays together and eats together stays together. No one should be allowed to watch television or check out his/her mobile during meal-time. I recall that our family would exchange views, problems we faced during the day and generally chat during dinnertime. We would go for Sunday mass together. Vacations and picnics provided excellent opportunities for bonding. Children need to feel loved. They need to feel a sense of belonging.

In some families where both parents are working, the entire family pitches in with chores. The mother is respected and is not the disgruntled beast of burden who slogs for money during the day and for no money at home in the evenings. Children are taught to reach out to others in whatever way possible. If Alan is a good singer, he could join the church choir. Meena could help the maid’s daughter with her studies. Desmond could paint a poster for an NGO in order to raise much needed funds. There are countless ways in which we could use our talents individually and collectively in order to make this world filled with strife a better place.

I conclude with the inspirational words of St. Mother Teresa, “I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God, who is sending a love letter to the world.” ■



Best **International** Web Series of 2023

NIKHIL BANERJEE

1 **Black Mirror**  
Episodes 6

*Black Mirror* Season 6’s sharp bite might turn towards the metaverse, influencer culture, or climate change, offering darkly comedic cautionary tales for our hyperconnected age. Expect *Black Mirror* Season 6 to delve into the ethical quandaries posed by AI, genetic engineering, or brain-computer interfaces.

2 **Lupin**  
Episodes 7

*Lupin*’s treatment of its gentleman thief protagonist Assane Diop balances high-stakes heists with witty charm, captivating viewers with a modern Robin Hood tale laced with French flair and a thirst for justice.

3 **Loki**  
Episodes 6

*Loki* Season 2’s kaleidoscopic treatment of time travel and alternate realities expands upon the God of Mischief’s chaotic charm, weaving a mind-bending journey through self-discovery, multiverse mayhem, and existential humour.

4 **This Is Going to Hurt**  
Episodes 5

*This Is Going to Hurt*’s unflinchingly honest portrayal of the NHS through the eyes of a junior doctor balances dark humor with raw emotion, offering a poignant and relatable glimpse into the pressures, triumphs, and heartbreak of the medical profession.

5 **Black Bird**  
Episodes 6

*Black Bird*’s gripping treatment of Jimmy Keene’s prison infiltration hinges on the raw tension between loyalty and betrayal, blurring the lines between good and evil amidst the gritty realism of maximum security.

Best **Domestic** Web Series of 2023

**Kaala Paani** 1  
Episodes 6

*Kaala Paani*’s unflinching depiction of the fear, desperation, and ethical dilemmas faced during a deadly epidemic resonates deeply with viewers who lived through the similar experiences of the recent Covid-19 pandemic. The series sheds light on the stark inequalities and systemic flaws exposed by the pandemic.

**School of Lies** 2  
Episodes 8

At the heart of the story lies a tantalising mystery, often a crime or hidden secret, that throws the school into turmoil. Each episode unveils new pieces of the puzzle, keeping viewers guessing and constantly reevaluating their suspicions.

**The Hunt for Veerappan** 3  
Episodes 4

*The Hunt for Veerappan*’s gritty portrayal of the notorious bandit’s life and the manhunt surrounding him injects historical tension into a gripping cat-and-mouse thriller, blurring the lines between hero and villain while prompting reflection on justice and revenge.

**Priyapettavan Piyush** 4  
Episodes 6

*Priyapettavan Piyush*’s blend of heartwarming coming-of-age humor and poignant reflections on mental health challenges creates a tender and relatable portrait of navigating young adulthood in contemporary India. Piyush’s relatable awkwardness and witty banter turn navigating young adulthood into a laugh-out-loud journey, even as it tackles deeper anxieties.

**Dhootha** 5  
Episodes 8

*Dhootha*’s treatment of its central myth, with its blend of psychological thrills and folkloric elements, creates a captivating atmosphere of unease, blurring the lines between reality and superstition.’



# On a Learning Trail

SAJI SALKALACHEN

The morning air was crisp and cool, and the world woke up to chirping birds and squeaking squirrels foraging for food. I planned to walk through the campus of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, along a serviced trail that stretched nearly six kilometres.

This stretch has twin benefits. One, it provides ample opportunities for nature lovers to reflect on landscapes; two, it gives visitors a glimpse of the various hubs within the Institute campus, serving an endless stream of students and scholars for over a century. There was much to learn.

Skirting the boundary walls and steering along well-paved roads, I reach the first and most prominent spot on the campus at a distance of two kilometres, the Tata Memorial. It is a landmark and the most photographed spot on the campus, providing the visitor with what he wishes to know about the history. Indian Institute of Science, locally known as the Tata Institute, was conceived and initiated by Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata (industrialist and founder of the Tata group of companies) as early as 1889 to be built as an institution of higher learning. Despite his yearnings, it materialised after his death in 1904. The institution was shaped jointly by Lord Curzon (Viceroy of India, 1899–1905), Sir William Ramsay (Chemist and Nobel Laureate), Dewan of Mysore State Sesahadri Iyer (on behalf of Krishna Raja Wadiyar IV, Maharaja of Mysore), and the State of Karnataka and commenced functioning in 1909. Since 1958, it has been a deemed-to-be-university and one among six institutes that was granted the Institute of Eminence status in 2018. The Institute's first Indian Director was Sir CV Raman, the Nobel Laureate.



Ahead, my next stop is a mini bamboo forest that portrays the Institute's tolerance for biodiversity and preservation. A nature's gift to humans, the bamboo plant endows with resilience and universal value. They rapidly grow and serve as candidates for afforestation, preservation of flora and aesthetic appeal. The natural composite structure and economic value manifest in their utility as building materials and rafts, consequent to a high strength-to-weight ratio. Several mini-forests of bamboo come into view at different locations that help to sustain the ecosystem.

Close by, a liana vine strikes an impressive pose with a labyrinth of stems twisting, turning, weaving, entwining, and climbing. Like an agile acrobat, the vine twists and turns to reach the canopy for light and survival; it connects with other trees but does not seek parasitic support for growth.

Treading further, I could not stop wondering how painstakingly the biodiversity on campus is sustained by the human interface. A large estate team, with inputs from the Centre for Ecological Sciences, responds diligently to the plant-animal-human balance of the system.

Insects, reptiles, frogs, monkeys, squirrels, birds of several species, and snakes are frequent visitors to the campus. As the ecology flourishes, all of them thrive and cohabit. With space constraints, everyone makes peace among them-

selves and the plant species. The trees compete in reaching to the sky as the canopy allows only bits of light to pass through. The dense foliage overhead causes the average temperature to lower in the campus.

A study of land use and vegetation density by researchers at IISc in 2014 using Indian Remote Sensing Satellite data and World Health Organisation's estimates revealed that a tree density of 32–55 (trees per person) would be required to compensate for the carbon released by humans. Based on the equation of CO<sub>2</sub> gas outflow (525–900 gm per day per person) and absorptivity of the gas by one hectare of trees (6–8 tonnes per year) from the atmosphere, it averages to a carbon-capturing value of 6 kg per tree per year. Gandhinagar (Gujarat), the top tree-city in the country, has four trees per person, and the Institute Campus has a matching figure considering the student population of 4,000 with faculty and staff cohabiting with 22,000 trees in an extent of 370 acres.

Walking along the southern perimeter wall of the campus, the electrical engineering and material science departments come into view. Besides being the first to introduce master's programs in engineering in India, the Institute conducts integrated doctoral programs in Biological, Chemical, Physical, and Mathematical Sciences for natural science graduates. It has emerged as the top Indian Institute, securing

the 155th spot, climbing 31 positions from the previous year. For the second consecutive year, it ranks top in the research citations per faculty (CpF) indicator in the QS World University Rankings 2023. The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF, under the Ministry of Education, Government of India, has consistently ranked it as the top university in India from 2016 to 2023, continuing its academic legacy.

A key driver for many academic accomplishments is the JRD Tata Memorial Library. It was established in 1911 and is credited with an impressive repository and provides physical and online access to a large store of information, research journals, and books.

Two former directors, CV Raman and CNR Rao, have been awarded India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna; Four former directors, Sir Alfred G Bourne, Sir Martin O Forster, Sir CV Raman, and Sir JC Ghosh, knighted. There are no Nobel laureates among Alumni, but notable are three Rhodes Scholars and several Fellows of the Royal Society.

As I returned to the starting point, warmed by a sense of optimism, it dawned on me that the signs around reflected the assurance that life on the campus would continue to sustain and nurture many more generations. The vision of JN Tata has added enduring value to this country. ■



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# 10 MUST WATCH FILMS FROM INDIA IN 2023

NITHIN G TOM

Indian Cinema never ceases to amaze. This was a year of gigantic disappointments, some noteworthy gems and some utterly shocking cinema on screen. Why do I say shocking? Go watch *Animal* by a certain Sandeep Reddy Vanga and I am pretty sure that most of you will never be able to complete that film! That being said, here is the list of ten must watch films of the year.

**1 Viduthalai Part I** (Tamil)  
Director: Vetrimaaran  
Available on Zee5

There are films that tug at your heart strings and then there are Vetrimaaran's films that destroy your heart to pieces and stay there in that heart-sized hole for the rest of your lives. This period crime thriller might remind you of some of the previous films of the same director but then he is a master at keeping the audience hooked throughout the duration of the film. With Vetrimaaran being in this form, I guess Lijo Jose Pellissery will have to settle for the second spot this year.

**2 Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam** (Malayalam)  
Director: Lijo Jose Pellissery  
Available on Netflix

Lijo watches an old ad that was popular on TV and decides to make a film using the concept used in the ad and guess what, the audience get to witness one of the finest cinematic experiences on screen. In some of his films he makes his cameraman run around everywhere without a break and in this film, the camera rarely moves to give you an experience of watching a play. On top of that you have Mammooty playing the lead role. What else do you need from a film?

**3 Kaathal – The Core** (Malayalam)  
Director: Jeo Baby  
Running in theatres (as of 30 Dec 2023)

One of the most poignant Indian films on homosexuality and the stigma attached around it. I hope this movie is remade in every Indian language with the respective superstars of that language playing the lead role. Sadly, that is not going to happen because our superstars' fear for their image except a few like Mammooty who doesn't hesitate to experiment even at the age of 72.

**4 Purusha Pretham** (Malayalam)  
Director: Krishand  
Available on Sony LIV

After the arbit documentation of an amphibian hunt, Krishand comes to us with this comedy of errors and proves that he is not a one-time wonder. Prasanth Alexander is a revelation in what is probably the greatest performance of his career. Issues like patriarchy and chauvinism are handled expertly without being preachy and with a dose of humour.

**5 Kathal – A Jackfruit Mystery** (Hindi)  
Director: Yashowardhan Mishra  
Available on Netflix

Satire at its best. Yashowardhan Mishra has pulled off what many people have tried and failed. The movie deserved recognition along the lines of *Peepli Live* is what I felt. Everything that is wrong with our society is packaged into this film and yet brought out in such a delightful manner that you will certainly have so much fun watching this.



**6 Jigarthanda DoubleX** (Tamil)  
Director: Karthik Subbaraj  
Available on Netflix

Karthik Subbaraj's tribute to Clint Eastwood and the power of cinema. Move over 'Spaghetti westerns', we have our own 'Pandyaa western' with this cult classic. Never knew Raghava Lawrence had this much potential as an actor or was it the genius of Karthik Subbaraj that extracted such a performance out of him, I am not sure. Anyway, it is a treat to the fans of Clint Eastwood and Sergio Leone.

**7 Daredevil Musthafa** (Kannada)  
Director: Shashank Soghal  
Available on Amazon Prime Video

KP Poornachandra Tejaswi is one of the behemoths of Kannada literature. To adapt one of his short stories so effectively and win the appreciation of critics and audiences alike is no mean task. When a debutant manages to do that, it makes it even more special. Shashank Soghal is definitely someone to watch out for and the Kannada audience can expect a lot from him.

**8 Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai** (Hindi)  
Director: Apoorv Singh Karki  
Available on Zee5

This courtroom drama about the struggles faced by Advocate PC Solanki in his real life to bring justice to a minor is so brilliantly made

and Manoj Bajpayee as the advocate is stellar as usual. A humble lawyer fighting against the system and an influential godman is showcased masterfully with ample drama.

**9 Thankam** (Malayalam)  
Director: Saheed Arafath  
Available on Amazon Prime Video

More than the director, the script writer deserves all the praise for this one. All budding screenwriters need to watch this as a case study. Syam Pushkaran is one of the finest screenwriters in Indian cinema right now. With his writing he can turn a simple matter of fact scene into an impactful one. The movie also has some amazing performances by Vineeth Sreenivasan and Biju Menon.

**10 Balagam** (Telugu)  
Director: Venu Yeldandi  
Available on Amazon Prime Video

This slice of life gem might remind you of the Kannada classic *Thithi* (2015) but it stands on its own with some wonderful performances and praiseworthy direction. Amidst the garbage that is produced in Telugu under the name of commercial films, these kinds of films go unnoticed. I sincerely hope more such films come out of the Telugu industry.

Special mentions: *2018* (Malayalam), *Bheed* (Hindi), *Ponniyin Selvan II* (Tamil), *Sapta Saagaradaache Ello - Side A* (Kannada) ■

# Gear Up for the Future

Eight Technical Deep Dives into Innovations in Automobiles in 2023

ROMIL UDAYAKUMAR TNV

**2023** wasn't just another year in the automotive industry; it was a revolution on wheels. Forget incremental upgrades and mild facelifts; we're talking about innovations that rewrite the very rulebook of what a car can be. Buckle up, gearheads, because we're diving deep into the technical wizardry powering the top 8 car innovations of the year.

## 1. Air to Fuel: From Thin Air to a Full Tank

Remember that gas station scene from *Back to the Future*? Well, it's not science fiction anymore. Companies like Climeworks and Air Fuel Synthesis are pioneering direct air capture (DAC) technology, literally pulling CO2 from the atmosphere and using it, along with green hydrogen, to create synthetic gasoline compatible with your existing engine. Talk about a carbon-neutral dream come true!

## 2. Carbon Fibre on Steroids: Lighter, Stronger, Faster

Move over, lightweight carbon fibre; there's a new sheriff in town. Nawa Technologies' "Nawastitch" method infuses traditional carbon fibre with a microscopic mesh of carbon nanotubes, boosting its impact resistance by a mind-blowing 900%. This game-changer could revolutionise EV battery casings and hydrogen fuel tanks, making them lighter, safer, and more efficient.

## 3. AI Copilot: Your Silicon Driving Buddy

Forget self-driving cars; 2023 brought us

AI copilots like Tesla's Autopilot and Mercedes-Benz's Drive Pilot. These intelligent systems learn your driving habits, adjust the climate control like a personal genie, and even curate the perfect playlist for your mood. Imagine cruising down the highway while your AI copilot optimises fuel efficiency, warns you about hazards, and suggests a scenic detour.

## 4. AR Navigation: Windscreen Wonderland

Paper maps are officially obsolete. Say hello to augmented reality (AR) navigation systems that project turn-by-turn directions, live traffic updates, and points of interest directly onto your windshield. Not only does this keep your eyes glued to the road, but it also overlays a virtual layer of information, transforming every drive into an immersive experience.

## 5. Software Updates on Autopilot: No More Dealership Detours

Say goodbye to the inconvenience of dealership visits for buggy software! Your car is now learning and evolving online, receiving over-the-air (OTA) updates that fix glitches, add new features, and even optimise performance remotely. Imagine waking up to a car that's refreshed, refined, and ready for the road, all thanks to the magic of the internet.

## 6. 5G in Every Mile: Your Car, a Connected Hub

Buckle up for a data-fueled ride! 5G networks are rolling out, and cars are throwing a welcome

Get ready for the ride of your life, because the future of cars is arriving faster than you can say "electric powertrain."

party. Download movies in seconds for your backseat passengers, stream high-definition maps for seamless navigation, and enjoy crystal-clear communication on the go. 5G promises a future where your car is a connected hub, keeping you entertained, informed, and safe.

## 7. Bio-Based Interiors: Sustainable Style from Nature's Bounty

Sustainability isn't just about fuel efficiency anymore; it's invading car interiors too. Companies like Ford and BMW are embracing materials like mushroom leather, algae-based fabrics, and recycled plastics, reducing reliance on petroleum and creating a greener, more breathable driving environment.

Read the full article on the *Together* website: [togethermagazine.in](https://togethermagazine.in)

## 8. Personalised Health Monitoring: Your Car as Your Wellness Coach

Your steering wheel could become your new doctor! Sensors embedded in seats and steering wheels can monitor your heart rate, stress levels, and even drowsiness, sending you alerts and suggesting rest stops when you're overwhelmed. Imagine driving a car that cares for your well-being as much as it takes you places.

These are just a few of the mind-bending innovations that have emerged in 2023, each one paving the way for a future where cars are more than just vehicles. They're companions, health monitors, entertainment centres, and even environmental warriors. So buckle up, tighten your seatbelts, and get ready for the ride of your life, because the future of cars is arriving faster than you can say "electric powertrain." ■





# Striking Political Cartoons of 2023

JAMESMON PC OFM

The following political cartoons, picked up for their sheer power to strike, dissect the complexities of our ever-intriguing and evolving political landscape. They reveal the absurd, the poignant, and the thought-provoking. They make us ponder, and perhaps squirm as we navigate the twists and turns of contemporary political issues with a touch of humour and a dash of unapologetic critique.



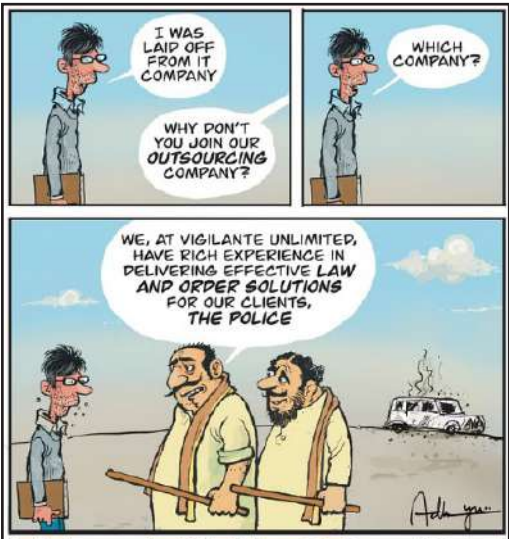
Last Laughs | Alok Nirantar | The Print | 5 Jan



Satish Acharya | X | 29 May



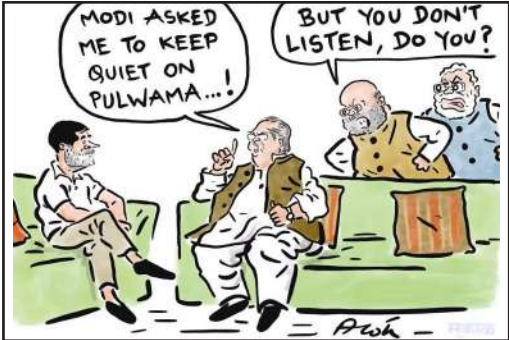
Satish Acharya | X | 29 Sep



Line of No Control | Sandeep Adhwaru | The Times of India | 22 Feb



On the Draw | Mika Aziz | The Hindu | 26 Aug



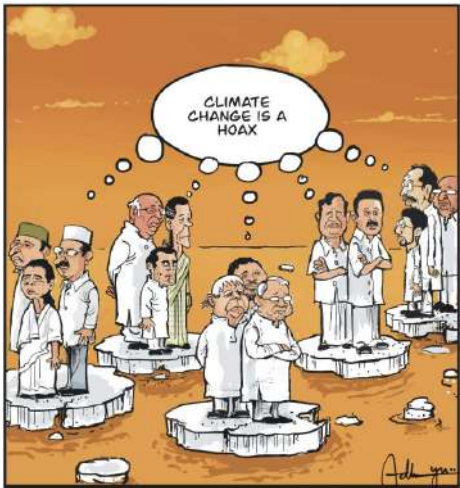
Last Laughs | Alok Nirantar | The Print | 26 Oct



On the Draw | Vasini Varadan | The Hindu | 10 Oct



Line of No Control | Sandeep Adhwaru | The Times of India | 19 Dec



Line of No Control | Sandeep Adhwaru | The Times of India | 23 Dec



Line of No Control | Sandeep Adhwaru | The Times of India | 6 Dec

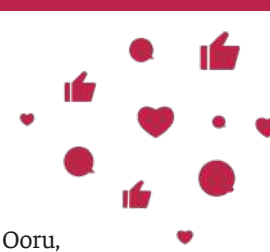
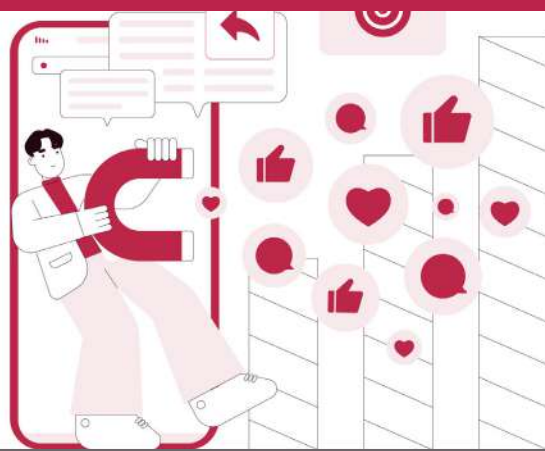


Line of No Control | Sandeep Adhwaru | The Times of India | 21 Dec



Satish Acharya | Molitics | 23 Dec





# These Went Seriously Viral in 2023

The newsmakers, the funny, and the trivial

SUMIT DASGUPTA

In 8,760 hours or 525,600 minutes that make up 2023, post-pandemic life on Earth seems to have taken on a peculiar shape. These were important enough to capture the attention economy of this generation and become another fleeting addition to the zeitgeist.

**Elon Musk and Twitter to X:** Throughout the year, Musk has remained in the news. SpaceX, test-launched the most powerful rocket ever built. Musk even challenged Mark Zuckerberg to a cage fight, though it amounted to little. Elon Musk made headlines with the acquisition of Twitter for 44 billion dollars; following a rebrand, Twitter is now known as X, a change that has been widely memed and discussed.

**Henry Kissinger:** Henry Kissinger, the American diplomat, politician, and political scientist, passed away on November 29, 2023, at the age of 100. Serving as the United States Secretary of State and National Security Advisor from 1969 to 1977. He was a Nobel Prize-winning academic, who escaped Nazi Germany to America as a child.

**The Titan that Sank:** A private submersible named the Titan exploring the Titanic wreckage made by Ocean Gate carried five millionaires as a thrill-seeking one-of-a-kind experience that

turned out way more than what they bargained for. The Titan submersible imploded, killing all five people on board. The biased media coverage also drew a lot of criticism because the media was worried about five rich people while the capsizing of a fishing boat carrying 750 desperate refugees in the Mediterranean Sea killed over 200 people.

**The Coronation of King Charles:** Queen Elizabeth of the United Kingdom passed away after a long 70-year rule. Over eight months later, her eldest son Prince Charles III became the king of the United Kingdom at the ripe old age of 75. Discussions ranged from his regal outfit to the reactions the coronation had in Britain because the cost of the coronation came from taxpayer's money and many were unhappy about it. Also, we can't forget the memes.

**Red Boots by MSCHF:** MSCHF unveiled their red boots, sparking confusion about how to integrate them into everyday wear or ensure comfort. Despite these concerns, the internet buzz surrounding the boots was substantial, with influencers and content creators worldwide discussing them. For those intrigued, these avant-garde boots are available in India for INR 60K.

**The Liver, The Witch and The Wow:** In 2023, three unlikely internet gems, Ganji Chudail (Bald witch), the 'Just looking like a wow' -Jasmeen Kaur from Delhi, and Orry with "I live. I work on myself. I am a liver," gained immense popularity, capturing the fleeting attention of Indian netizens like wildfire.

**The SAG-AFTRA Strikes in Hollywood:** The 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike, lasting 118 days, became the longest protest against Hollywood studios and the second-longest actors strike in history.

**MrBeast and YouTube:** MrBeast, or Jimmy Donaldson, stands as the most prominent creator on YouTube, boasting a massive following of over 342 million subscribers spread across five channels. His videos consistently amass tens of millions of views. One video, titled "1,000 Blind People See For the First Time" stirred widespread discourse. The video showcased MrBeast funding a purported "10-minute surgery" for 1,000 individuals to restore their eyesight.

**Barbenheimer:** The era of monoculture has faded away, and the simultaneous release of Barbie and Oppenheimer on July 21 brought a unique excitement, colloquially termed as 'Barbenheimer'. Barbenheimer sparked a cultural phenomenon, inspiring memes, movie-related costumes, and Halloween attire.

**"Real" Alien Mummies in Mexico:** The most unconventional unboxing video emerged from Mexico as alien enthusiasts presented mummified 'alien' bodies to the country's Congress, asserting new evidence of their extraterrestrial origin.

**Bangalore Is Expensive:** 'Namma Ooru, Bengaluru!' is a rallying cry for many people living in the city. In April 2023, a man went viral for holding a poster that read "Looking for 2 BHK in Indiranagar" at an IPL match at the Chinnaswamy Stadium. The X user Atin Bose shared the photo. Some called it a "peak Bengaluru moment" because everyone knows the surreal lengths one has to go to find an affordable housing.

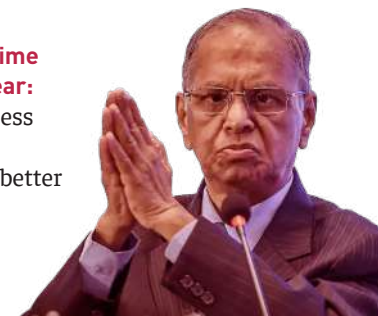
**RRR and The Elephant Whisperers:** The 95th Academy Awards were not ready for RRR and *The Elephant Whisperers*. The latter was a short documentary directed by Karitiki Gonsalves about an indigenous couple from South India who care for orphaned baby elephants. The song *Naatu Naatu* from the film was an internet sensation. After the film's release in the US, the song became a global sensation, inspiring dance trends and Instagram reels. It won the Academy Award for Best Original Song.

**Donald Trump's Arrest and Mugshot:** The headlines across the interwebs read, "Former President of the USA surrenders at Fulton County Jail." History was made online and offline when Fulton County Jail released Trump's mugshot making it the first ever mugshot of a president. It created a media frenzy and was widely memed on social media.

**Narayan Murthy:** Murthy's recent statement suggesting that young folks should commit to a 70-hour work week for India to compete globally sparked controversy. Emphasizing India's comparatively low work productivity, Murthy's call for increased working hours triggered a heated debate on social media.

**Taylor Swift was Named Time Magazine Person of the Year:**

Time says that Swift's success in 2023 was a result of her "embracing what she does better than anyone, entertaining and writing songs that connect with people". ■





# Confronting Suffering

BOBBY JOSE KATTIKAD OFM

*Pain is unavoidable; suffering is a choice.*  
Gautama Buddha

In the realm of biblical concepts, there exists a fundamental idea that likens human life to gold undergoing refinement in a furnace. As the flames consume, impurities vanish, marking the initial step in the process. The ultimate test of quality occurs when the goldsmith's face, gazing into the boiling metal, starts to emerge.

This notion resonates profoundly in the case of Jesus, epitomised by the proclamation of the overseeing figure at his crucifixion: "Truly, this is the Son of God." Having likely witnessed numerous executions, what set Jesus apart from the rest? The observer had been closely monitoring him for hours.

It was Jesus's nobility and grace in facing persecution and adversity that left an indelible impression. His saying, 'What is whispered in the room will be proclaimed from the rooftops,' found resonance in this moment. While the man, unfamiliar with messianic concepts, may not necessarily be making a proclamation of faith, it appears that one's godliness is measured by the integrity maintained during suffering. Jesus didn't offer detailed answers to the question of why he was suffering but provided a clear paradigm on how to endure.

The example set is one of noble suffering without self-loathing, resentment toward others for causing suffering, or detachment from the Supreme Being. Like the Alphonsa mango, individuals can become sweeter with time. Pope Benedict drew a parallel between suffering and aesthetics, both evoking tears and containing unsolved mysteries. Buddha's wisdom holds true—pain is inevitable, but suffering can be confronted without succumbing to pain. In this context, the term 'tolerance' may not aptly capture the essence; instead, it could be the baptism by fire, as Jesus described.

A father imparts life lessons to his children through a practical demonstration. Three earthen pots, each containing potatoes, chicken eggs, and coffee beans, are placed over a fire. After being taken out one by one, the potatoes are found soft, symbolizing some individuals who, after suffering, become more resilient. The second pot, holding eggs, is thicker – another possibility. Stirring won't isolate the coffee beans, but the boiling water transforms them into something golden, filling the room with a unique aroma.

"Herein lies the fullness of endurance," the father whispers to his children. ■



## 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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