

MARCH 2025 | VOL. 19 | ISSUE 03 | ₹45

together

a national family magazine



**IN
THIS
ISSUE**

Gender Budgeting
Those Who Inspire Change
Parties, Civility, Democracy
Identity and Violence

Check Out the 2025 Oscar Winners!

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 also an effort to uncover our shared humanity.

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

EDITOR
Saji P Mathew ofm
✉ editoroftogether@gmail.com
✉ editor@togethermagazine.in

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
Jamesmon PC ofm
John Sekar ofm

COPY EDITORS
Augustine Pinto ofm
Joy Prakash ofm

LAYOUT/EDITORIAL DESIGNER
Kapil Arambam

PLEASE NOTE: The views of writers do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the publisher.

DIRECTOR
Xavier Durairaj ofm
PUBLISHER
Basil Lobo ofm
MANAGER
Anthony Mathew Joseph ofm

PUBLICATION OFFICE
✉ Franciscan Publications
St. Anthony's Friary
#85, Hosur Road, Bengaluru 560095
Karnataka, India
✉ managertogethermagazine@gmail.com
✉ manager@togethermagazine.in
☎ Mob: +91-88971 46707 / +91-77366 64528

PLEASE NOTE

When you subscribe or renew or contribute to *Together*, please inform the publication office about the same, mentioning your name and details.

SUBSCRIPTION

To subscribe to the magazine or to contribute to the running of *Together* please log on to www.togethermagazine.in

Pay online (NEFT) Transaction
Franciscan Publications – Together, South Indian Bank
Branch: Christ University, A/c. No. 0396053000005736,
IFSC: SIBL0000396, MICR: 560059010

Pay by Cheque or Demand Draft
in favour of *Franciscan Publications – Together*

ADVERTISING IN *TOGETHER* (PER ISSUE)

Back cover	₹13,000
Inside back cover	₹8,000
Inner full page	₹5,000
Inner half page	₹2,000
Inner quarter page	₹1,000

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	1 year	3 years
India	₹500	₹1,400
Other Countries	US \$75	US\$200

EDITORIAL

04 March Is a Season of Seeing
A spiritual person must not look away. Looking away is selfishness, being confined to one's comfort zone, and self-preservation.
Saji P Mathew OFM

MARCH SPECIAL

06 Gender Budgeting: A Path to Gender Equality
Dr Chaya Degaonkar

09 Can Sexual Identity Be Socially Constructed?
Rakshaan Shamoodah

MARCH TOGETHER

11 Following Those Who Inspire Change
Richard Rohr OFM
15 Identity and Violence
Dr George John
18 The Phenomenon Called Aam Aadmi Party
Alex Tuscano
21 The Decline of Civility Hurts Democracy
Gerry Lobo OFM
26 Ramadan: A Spiritual Homecoming
Fateen Imran

28 Fasting: Displacement of the Ego
Joy Prakash OFM
30 The Impact of Colours on Memory, Attention, and Workplace Mental Health
Sandra Manoj
32 Age of Loneliness: Unpacking the Psychological Effects of Isolation in the Elderly
Swathy Santhosh
34 Help! I'm Trapped in a Logic Loop!
Sharon Anthony
36 Breaking Through: The Role of Mental Strength in Indian Sports Excellence
Ranjith Selvan



24 IN STAMPS
Ramadan
Tom John OFM



38 SHORT STORY
Thank God for the Summer Rain
A Francis



40 CINEMA
Films' Attempt to Make Grief Tangible
Romil Udayakumar TNV



42 CINEMA
• **Oscars 2025: the Complete List of Winners**
• **Anora: The American Dream Reimagined**

March Is a Season of Seeing

SAJIP MATHEW OFM

A spiritual person must not look away. Looking away is selfishness, being confined to one's comfort zone, and self-preservation.

Change involves change; change of actions that we take for granted and repeat every day almost unconsciously. These actions keep us away from our becoming, they delay our becoming. The very essence of our existence—the bedrock upon which everything else stands—must be espoused. I shall not hurt, I shall respect despite a host of differences, and I shall give; not because of a god above and life-after but because of a god inside and the life here and now. When one chooses courage over comfort, authenticity over approval, truth over fanfare and success, it might look very uncool; but wait a second, think of three people who have profoundly and steadfastly challenged your life and inspired change. The answers will show us the direction that we ought to embrace. It has taken seventy thousand years for us humans to arrive at where we are now, with our information technology, science, reason, emotional intelligence, and with the capacity to say no, enough, and give without fear—it has taken us seventy thousand years to be modern humans.

After the commencement of the new year (the Gregorian calendar has it on January 1, but most indigenous cultures celebrate it a bit later towards the end of January or later), ethnic and religious groups have grace-filled days or seasons to recalibrate themselves morally and spiritually. Last week I was at a Shivratri celebration at one of the pompous and newly emerging neo-Hinduism centers, Isha Foundation. That day and night is a time of abstinence, fasting, and spiritual re-

newal. In early March, Muslims all over the world begin their Ramadan month of fasting, abstinence, and mortification. And this year, the beginning of March also marks for Christians the commencement of the season of Lent, spending time in fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. Communities take time off to lift one's eyes from me, myself, and my ego existence to saying no, enough, and begin to give.

Seeing Is Beholding

Seeing is the beginning of change. A spiritual person must not look away. Looking away is selfishness, being confined to one's comfort zone, and self-preservation. Akira Kurosawa, the renowned Japanese filmmaker, spoke of artists, "The role of the artist is to not look away." It is true of a spiritual person too. To look away when it matters most is to be indifferent and unkind.

It is in the "looking away" that we miss life happening right in front of us. Imagine if we always paid attention, looked on, and captured every moment. The process of seeing is not as spontaneous or natural as commonly believed. According to John Berger, seeing requires conscious effort and is heavily influenced by habits and conventions—seeing is an active decision. Blindness is less dangerous than seeing the wrong thing, or not seeing the right thing.

In the celebrated parable of The Good Samaritan, when a priest and a Levite refuse to see the wounded, bleeding man on the side of the road, a Samaritan man, who was con-

sidered intrinsically different and alien to the Jews, did not just see a wounded man, he understood his pain. He took him to an inn to take care of him. Unless we see, we will not act; and unless we act, we will not change.

Change Happens Through Change

Doing the same things over and over, as though lost in an infinity loop, and expecting a different result is foolishness. Walking the same road every day and believing that you will reach a new destination one day is foolishness.

Let me remind ourselves of a funny anecdote. A family of five approached a helicopter service to hire a helicopter for a picnic. The manager refused to rent out the helicopter because it could carry only three people, or maximum four, so they needed to look at some other mode of transport. The family insisted and told him that they had gone by the same kind of helicopter last year. Finally, the manager gave in.

As they were flying to their destination, the helicopter engine failed, crashing down into a large marshy land. The pilot was the last to regain consciousness. When he got up, he was puzzled to see the head of the family and others busy scrutinising the place to determine something. The pilot was curious and asked them, "What happened? What are you looking for?" The head of the family was quick to answer, "We are looking for the place where we fell last year."

During this season of Shivratri, Ramadan, and Lent, get ready to change. Whether approached as acts of faith or rational practices for human flourishing, traditions like Lent and Ramadan offer structured opportunities for recalibration in an age often characterised by excess and immediacy.

Often we do not begin moving away from the loop that we are in; we are looking for big things to happen in life. James Clear in *Atomic Habits* demonstrates that consistent small changes compound into remarkable results. We think that there was a more appropriate time in the past that is now gone, or there is a more appropriate time coming in the future. Eckhart Tolle in *The Power of Now* keeps us in the present, for true change happens only in the present moment. We think that we lack abilities to change or to succeed. Carol Dweck in *Mindset* says that our abilities are not fixed, and therefore our possibilities aren't either. Some say that they are a disaster and have nothing left in life to hope for. Viktor Frankl in *Man's Search for Meaning* affirms that even in life's darkest moments, you have the freedom to choose your response, and that makes the difference. Some retire saying that they are small and vulnerable. Brené Brown in *Daring Greatly* argues that vulnerability isn't weakness—it's the birthplace of innovation, creativity, and change. *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho reminds us that our personal legend awaits. Listen to your heart, follow the signs, and the universe will conspire to help you achieve your dreams.



Gender Budgeting: A Path to Gender Equality

Gender budgeting represents a crucial fiscal tool in the journey toward achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Karnataka stands as a pioneer in this field within India, having introduced a gender budget document in 2007–08. Despite these early efforts in women's empowerment initiatives, there remains a significant gap between policy intentions and actual outcomes.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) place considerable emphasis on gender equality through Goal 5. Unfortunately, most Indian states fall either in the “aspirant” category (red zone) or the “performer” category (yellow zone), indicating achievements between 50–65%. Karnataka's score on SDG 5 is only 57%, demonstrating that despite numerous schemes and initiatives, our achievements remain below 60%. This discrepancy raises important questions about the effectiveness of our current approach and resource allocation.

The Need for Gender Budgeting

Traditionally, budgets were prepared without specific consideration of their differential impact on various demographic groups. The fundamental question—“Who gets what?”—remained largely unaddressed. In a patriarchal society where power dynamics are unequal, it is essential to identify how resources are distributed between men and

women. Gender budgeting emerged as a response to this need, providing a framework to analyze resource allocation through a gender lens.

The central government has increasingly focused on gender budgeting and gender auditing to ensure more equitable resource distribution. This approach allows us to evaluate the implementation effectiveness of various programs designed to promote gender equality.

Economic Participation and Barriers

Nobel Prize-winning economist Claudia Goldin's research spanning 200 years of women's workforce participation in the United States reveals fluctuating patterns influenced by various factors. One significant finding was that family responsibilities often serve as a fundamental obstacle to women's professional advancement. The lack of support services, particularly in urban areas, forces many women to remain at home to care for children, resulting in lower workforce participation rates among women. This reduced participation directly impacts women's economic empowerment.

From Welfare to Empowerment

The Sargent feminist model of empowerment suggests that initiatives for women typically begin with welfare approaches addressing practical needs such as water

Transforming gender imbalance requires equitable resource allocation, emphasised Dr CHAYA DEGAONKAR in her keynote address at gender budgeting workshop at Jyoti Nivas College, Bengaluru.

RECORDED AND
WRITTEN DOWN
AS AN ARTICLE BY
JAHNAVI SAHABANI

Gender Budget Allocations in Union Budget of 2025-26

Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget 2025-26 in the Parliament on 1 February, 2025. The share of Gender Budget allocation in the total Union Budget has increased to 8.86% in FY 2025–26 from 6.8% in FY 2024–25.

An allocation of ₹4.49 lakh crore has been reported for welfare of women and girls in the gender budget statement of FY 2025–26. This is an increase of ₹37.25% over the GBS allocation of ₹3.27 lakh crore in FY 2024–25.

The top 10 Ministries/Departments that have reported more than 30% of their allocations in the Gender Budget for FY 2025-26 are Ministry of Women & Child Development (81.79%), Department of Rural Development (65.76%), Department of Food & Public Distribution (50.92%), Department of Health & Family Welfare (41.10%), Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (40.89%), Department of Social Justice & Empowerment (39.01%), Department of Higher Education (33.94%), Department of School Education & Literacy (33.67%), Ministry of Home Affairs (33.47%) and Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation (31.50%).

Source: PIB/Ministry of Women and Child Development

services and sanitation. However, true empowerment requires moving beyond these basics to address strategic needs through policy changes. The effectiveness of gender initiatives must be measured by the extent to which they catalyze meaningful policy reforms.

Recent surveys indicate positive trends, with approximately 85% of women participating in initial decision-making processes, and about 65% owning mobile phones for personal use. Educational achievements among women have shown improvement. However, concerning trends persist, particularly regarding women's safety. Karnataka ranks second only to Telangana in crimes against women, according to the 2020 NCRB report. This reality raises a critical question: If women cannot safely participate in the workforce, how effective are our empowerment initiatives?

Resource Allocation for Meaningful Change

When developing gender-responsive budgets, we must evaluate whether allocations are sufficient to create sustainable change. For instance, is providing 50,000 rupees adequate to help women escape the Devadasi system? The fundamental question becomes whether our resource allocations enable women to achieve sustainable livelihoods and independence.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has developed a five-step framework for gender-responsive budgeting, which provides a systematic approach to addressing gender inequalities:

ONE. GAP ANALYSIS The first step involves analysing disparities between men and women across various sectors—political, social, and economic. Key indicators include

Gender budgeting represents more than a fiscal exercise—it is a commitment to transforming gender relations through equitable resource allocation.

sex ratio, which has declined to 960 girls per 1,000 boys, reflecting persistent gender bias. This analysis should extend to technological access (internet and computer literacy), property rights (only about 20% of women own land), and support systems for maternal health.

Gap analysis helps identify areas requiring targeted resource allocation to achieve gender equality. For example, if women lack access to smartphones or digital literacy skills compared to men, budgetary provisions should address these specific gaps.

TWO. REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES

This step entails evaluating existing programs and policies to identify shortcomings in design or implementation. By calculating the gap between current status and desired outcomes, policymakers can develop realistic targets. For instance, if women's workforce participation is currently at 35% compared to men's, budgetary provisions should aim to gradually close this gap by 2030.

THREE. ADEQUATE RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The central budget currently allocates approximately 8% to gender-specific initiatives. We must question whether this is sufficient to meaningfully empower women, particularly in technological advancement and skill development. Category B schemes (with at least 30% allocation for women) are especially important, though we should aim to exceed this minimum threshold.

FOUR. MONITORING MECHANISMS Effective monitoring requires field visits, monthly review meetings, and continuous progress assessment. This process should involve committees conducting on-ground verification rather than relying solely on reported data.

FIVE. IMPACT EVALUATION The final step involves comprehensive evaluation of outcomes against stated objectives. For example, a scheme originally designed to promote girls' education and empowerment might, in practice, be perceived primarily as marriage

assistance. Such misalignments require guideline revisions to refocus on the original empowerment objectives, such as allowing partial fund withdrawal at age 18 for higher education rather than exclusively for marriage at age 21.

Academic institutions can play a vital role in evaluating gender budgeting initiatives. College students from departments of economics, commerce, social work, women's studies, and management can contribute through field research and project work, providing valuable insights while gaining practical experience.

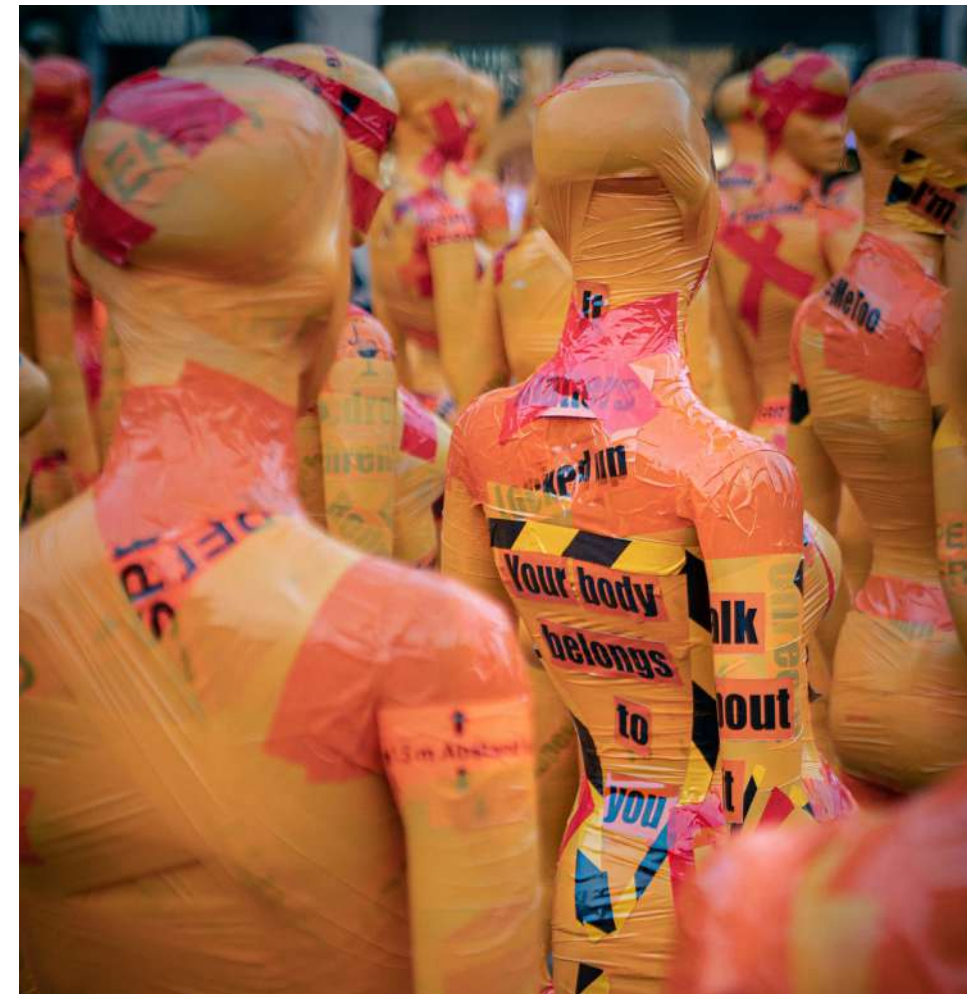
Comparison culture and unrealistic portrayal of women on social media often lead to a kind of false sense gender equality, it can affect resource allocation. In truth a good percentage of women still lack access to pregnancy screening facilities and reproductive health. Though state governments are making efforts by providing screening equipment free of cost in all government hospitals, much more is still to happen. Gender budgeting and allocation of funds will help fill this gap.

Bottom Line

Gender budgeting represents more than a fiscal exercise—it is a commitment to transforming gender relations through equitable resource allocation. Despite Karnataka's pioneering efforts, significant challenges remain in achieving genuine gender equality. By systematically implementing the five-step framework and ensuring that schemes achieve their intended empowerment objectives rather than reinforcing traditional gender roles, we can move closer to the goal of gender equality.

The path forward requires not just increased allocations but strategic investments in areas that directly address structural barriers to women's full participation in economic, political, and social spheres. Only through such comprehensive approaches can gender budgeting fulfill its potential as a transformative tool for gender equality.

CAN SEXUAL IDENTITY BE SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED?



Sexual identity—the personal sense and label of one's own sexuality—has long been debated among scholars and activists. While some argue that sexual orientation is largely an innate, biologically determined trait, many theorists contend that the ways in which we understand, label, and even experience our sexualities can be determined by social learning or socialisation.

RAKSHAAN
SHAMOODAH

Sexual identity is influenced by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and personal factors that extend beyond mere social conditioning.

Judith Butler developed this argument in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, suggesting that gender and sexuality are performative—that is, they are enacted through repeated social practices rather than fixed biological facts.

Early sociologists like John H Gagnon and William Simon also contributed to this discussion in *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*. They argued that sexual behaviour—and by extension, sexual identity—is not an expression of an immutable biological drive but is instead “entirely (historically and) culturally determined.” Their work introduced the concept of “sexual scripts,” emphasising that what we come to understand as sexual identity is shaped by social learning and cultural norms.

The infamous John/Joan experiment done on David Reimer, to test this hypothesis, renders it absurd. David, born as Bruce, was a Canadian man who was raised as a girl following medical advice after his penis was severely damaged during a botched circumcision in infancy. Psychologist John Money recommended sex reassignment surgery, since vaginal reconstruction was easier than a penis reconstruction was easier in those days. He asked his parents to raise David as Brenda, arguing that gender identity is primarily learned through socialisation. John used to make David and his twin brother, Brian to participate in sexual rehearsals. In these unconsented, unethical rehearsals, he used to make David play as the woman and his brother had to act as the man. John Money’s rationale for these various treatments was his belief that “childhood ‘sexual rehearsal play’” was important for a “healthy adult gender identity”.

However, David struggled with his assigned female identity and resumed living as a male

at age 15. He later went public with his story to discourage similar medical practices. The case became infamous due to unethical therapeutic practices and its impact on gender identity theories.

Though David decided to take his life at 38 years of age, he became the biggest proof that socialisation can never alter something as instinctual as gender identity.

The 2018 film *Boy Erased* was inspired by the memoir of Garrard Conley, who was enrolled in ‘conversion camp’ as a child. Garrard Conley, was born in a fundamentalist Arkansas family. He was sent to a conversion camp to be ‘cured’ of his sacrilegious sexual identity, through affirmations, and questionable philosophies. The film depicts the harmful effects of conversion therapy as well as its futility. The exquisite memoir is a testament that social learning cannot change one’s sexual identity, neither can it describe it.

Linguists maintain that language more than anything plays a role in describing sexual identities and the changing cultural norms toward them. The emergence and evolution of labels such as “bisexual” or “pansexual” illustrate how communities adapt terminology to capture the complexity and fluidity of desire and identity. This shift challenges rigid binary notions and highlights how identity can be flexible, evolving alongside changes in cultural norms and social attitudes.

Therefore, while social learning plays a role in shaping behaviours, attitudes, and cultural understandings of gender and sexuality, it does not determine an individual’s sexual identity. Sexual identity is influenced by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and personal factors that extend beyond mere social conditioning.

Following Those Who Inspire Change

RICHARD ROHR OFM describes why role models and personal examples often inspire change more effectively than right ideas and beliefs.

Correct ideas and church mandates cannot cause the kind of change that the soul needs. The soul needs living models to grow, exemplars with the expansive energies of love. People who are eager to love change us at the deeper levels. They alone seem able to open the field of both mind and heart at the same time. When we’re in this different state—and that is what it is—we find ourselves open to directions or possibilities we would never allow or imagine before.

When I studied Scholastic philosophy in the seminary, we learned that there were formal causes of things, material causes, efficient causes, exemplary causes, and final causes. After Newtonian physics emerged, most people thought efficient causes were the only way that things could happen, such as strong arms causing a rock to be dislodged from a field, but the kind of cause that especially intrigued me was the *exemplary cause*. With that kind of causality, someone or some event, just by being what it is, by being an example or model, “causes” other things to happen as a result.



Final causes work in much the same way, by pulling us forward through attraction and allurements. Final causes “cause” things to emerge and evolve in a certain way by offering ideals, models, and seductions that pull us forward. Saint Bonaventure taught that our destiny or goal (*telos*) finally determines our meaning. If our end goal is clear to us, we have our North Star for a coherent life purpose. It will quite truthfully and inevitably pull us forward and give us a clear trajectory.

When I taught in South Africa, again and again I heard how Nelson Mandela initiated a cultural leap forward for many African men, especially when they saw pictures of him hoeing in the fields, which they still thought of as women’s work. He was a good example of both an exemplary and a final cause. He changed the tangent and the possibility for many people.

Through actions visibly done in love; by a nonviolent, humble, simple, liberated lifestyle; by a happy identification with poor and excluded people; by obvious happiness itself; and by concrete and visible people who “give others reasons for spiritual joy”—as Francis said when he rubbed two sticks together to play an imaginary violin and as Pope Francis did when he washed the feet of prisoners, women, and Muslims. When such people then speak or act, their words burn, and their actions convict!

Surely this is what Jesus meant when he told us to be “a light on a lampstand” or to be “leaven” and “salt”. He knew that holiness is passed on through *contagion*.

Love Draws Us Forward

Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) was a living exemplar of where we are all being attracted and led. Christ and Francis draw humanity forward just by walking the full journey themselves. Transformed people quite simply transform people and set the bar of history higher for all of us. That is one of the ways we fundamentally “help” other people.

If we ourselves are totally focused on our own personal security or on a need for answers and explanations, we have almost no ability to even minimally understand the what, why, and who of persons like Francis, other mystics, or even someone like Jesus himself, who operate out of a completely different level of consciousness. We tend to drag down such profound humanisers and divinisers to our own comfortable level and actually have little curiosity or ability to care about their major message.

The best we humans can do—on a very good day—is perhaps understand someone a bit beyond ourselves.

Developmental experts state that the best we humans can do—on a very good day—is perhaps understand someone a bit beyond ourselves. Being invited forward by prophets and mystics—though they invariably face great resistance—is the clear pattern of history. We sadly know this to be true in recent centuries from the lives of Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Wangari Maathai, Dorothy Day, many UN secretaries-general, and Martin Luther King Jr. Tragically, we don’t usually love and embrace more advanced people, but quite often hate and fear them. Francis is really an amazing exception. He somehow succeeds in being loved, admired, and imitated by people to this day.

God gives us highly evolved people to pull us all forward. The Christian word for them was simply “saint.” We cannot imagine something until we see it through a living model or archetypal figure. Then it constellates in our consciousness as maybe possible for us too. Through his story, Francis is still greasing the wheels of consciousness and holiness. It then rubs off and spreads out by osmosis.

We cannot imagine something until we see it through a living model or archetypal figure.

I felt this strongly when I was invited to accompany the Dalai Lama. He said nothing beyond, “My religion is kindness,” but the stadium was packed. The lines just to see him, or perhaps touch him, reached across the Ohio River bridge to Louisville. Many pointed out the direct line between that event and Thomas Merton’s presence down the Kentucky road at Gethsemani Abbey. Merton, Mother Teresa, Pope Francis, and the Dalai Lama are all good examples of prime attractors in our own time.

Ella Baker: Advocate for Black Lives

Until the killing of black men, black mothers’ sons / Is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers’ sons ... / We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes! —Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Ella’s Song”

This is “Ella’s Song,” inspired by the words and witness of Miss Ella Josephine Baker (1903–1986), a magisterial authority of the civil rights movement and a witness to true human freedom.... “Ella’s Song” announces the existence of those who are often made invisible in our society: black people, poor people, young people, and women.... It shines a light on Baker’s belief in freedom and justice, but it also changes the condition of those who sing this song.

It changes their hearts. It changes their actions. It becomes their creed....

Baker’s most significant work ... was with young people. While Baker was a serious young person with an innate maturity—her grandfather called her “Grand Lady” because she was a great conversationalist even as a child—she had a natural sympathy for young people and their causes. As an undergraduate student at Shaw University, Baker led protests for the right of female and male students to walk across campus together and for women to be able to wear silk stockings. She took on these causes ... because she saw them as important expression of young people learning to secure and defend their liberty and autonomy.... [Decades later,] she believed that the students [in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] needed space to develop their own voices, their own relationships, and their own agenda.

True freedom required learning to treat others with dignity and equality ... and teaching others to love freedom and to do the work required to sustain it.

While Baker supported the students in their efforts, she insisted that the movement was about larger issues than lunch counters; it was about “something much bigger than a hamburger or even a giant-sized Coke.” True freedom required learning to treat others with dignity and equality ... and teaching others to love freedom and to do the work required to sustain it. Baker considered human equality to be a divine calling, a state that was good for its own sake. And she offered the students another perspective on their organising without dousing the flames of the passionate pursuit of their own most important issues and campaigns....

Baker also shows the way forward for those who want to eradicate racism from American society. She shows us that sharing our bounty with our neighbors builds a strong community. She teaches us to love good ideas even when they are new or unfamiliar. She demonstrates that loving our neighbors requires that we listen to their stories. She reveals that humility and self-critique are the friends of courage and power.

Óscar Romero: Preacher of Love and Justice

Let us not tire of preaching love, for this is the force that will overcome the world. Let us never tire of preaching love. Even if we see waves of violence

coming... love must win out. It is the only thing that can —Óscar Romero, 1977.

Oscar Romero [1917–1980], Archbishop of San Salvador, was gunned down on March 24, 1980. Over the next few days, his body lay in state in the cathedral where he had so often preached. Thousands of mourners filed past his coffin, many of them campesinos, landless peasants and field workers, who had traveled miles to be there.

They hadn’t come just to pay their respects to a Church dignitary, although that was certainly part of it. They came because they loved Romero. During the three years he served as their archbishop, they knew him as a father who stood between them and a death-dealing government. Now that he was gone, they not only felt orphaned, they were terrified....

“If some sad day they silence our radio and stop us from writing in our newspaper, then all of you who believe must become microphones, radio stations, and loudspeakers”

—Oscar Romero

Romero was accused of being a communist, an agitator, a Soviet stooge, a gullible fool, imprudent, unintelligent, and a bad priest. Romero once said, sisters and brothers, that if some sad day they silence our radio and stop us from writing in our newspaper, then all of you who believe must become microphones, radio stations, and loudspeakers—not by talking but by living.

Guru Nanak: A Sage Warrior

In an interview Sikh activist Valarie Kaur tells a brief story of Guru Nanak (1469–1539), founder of the Sikh faith: The story goes that every morning a man named Nanak sat by a river and meditated on the world and took the pain of the world into his heart until it crescendoed inside of him. One morning he did not return from the river. People thought him a dead man, a drowned man. The sun rose and the sun fell. The sun rose and the sun fell. And on the third day, a figure was spotted, seated in a cemetery covered in ash. It was Nanak, but not Nanak. He had been rebirthed in those waters and his first utterance was “Nako Hindu. Nako Muslim.” There is no Hindu. There is no Muslim. This was more than treat your neighbour as you would yourself. This was more than taking in the stranger. This was: There is no stranger. There is no you-against-me at all. We constitute each other.

This was more than taking in the stranger. This was: There is no stranger. There is no you-against-me at all.

Nanak began to sing powerful mystical poetry, accompanied by a Muslim bard. For twenty-four years, Guru Nanak traveled in each of the cardinal directions on foot.... Everywhere he went, his songs held a vision that landed in people's hearts: We can all taste the truth of Oneness, and when we do, we are inspired to care for one another, and fight for one another. Perhaps what was most powerful about Guru Nanak is how he distilled the mystical heart of all the world's wisdom traditions into its essence: love.

Sikhs believed that people of all castes, genders, faiths, races, and places were equal.... It was a radical experiment that rebelled against the caste hierarchy and feudal order of the era, a mysticism that inspired revolutionary social change.... The ideal archetype in the Sikh tradition became the sant sipahi: the sage warrior.

Kaur's grandfather's example shaped the trajectory of her work: My grandfather was the first sage warrior I knew.... Papa Ji tied his turban every day, clasped his hands behind his back, and surveyed the world through the eyes of wonder. When he listened to kirtan, sacred music, he closed his eyes and let the music resound wondrously within him; he wrote poetry in his garden....

As I fell asleep each night, Papa Ji would sing the Mool Mantr, the foundational verse that opens the Guru Granth Sahib, our sacred canon of musical wisdom. It begins with the utterance "Ik Onkar," which means Oneness, ever-unfolding. "All of Sikh wisdom flows from here," Papa Ji would say. All of us are part of the One. Separateness is an illusion: There is no essential separateness between you and me, you and other people, you and other species, or you and the trees. You can look at anyone or anything and say: You are a part of me I do not yet know.

The Power of Sisterhood

Women navigate the world through relationships... we influence family, friends and the

general public about our strength in coming together to build bridges and fight hate, negative stereotyping and prejudice. We are changing the world, one Muslim and one Jewish woman at a time — Sheryl Olitzky, Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom.

While individuals often inspire us to action, communities working together also serve as catalysts to transform hearts and cultural narratives. Activist Sandhya Jha describes the powerful example of a group of Muslim and Jewish women in the United States. After a visit to Poland in 2010 when founding member Sheryl Olitzky was struck by what hate had wrought in relationship to her Jewish community, she came back to the U.S. determined to make a contribution to reducing hate. She contacted an imam she knew who introduced her to Atiya Aftab, and the two women invited an additional five Jewish and five Muslim women to meet monthly. They are now a national organisation with local chapters all over the country. While they talk about ending hatred one Muslim and one Jewish woman at a time, they actually recognise the power of community in effecting change.

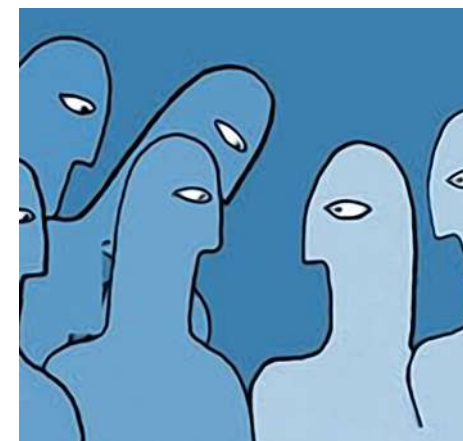
Organisations focused on peacemaking and healing can create a ripple effect in our communities. The local Kansas City chapter's social action was to step in and provide meals at a local cancer treatment center during Christmas so that the Christian volunteers could spend the holiday with their families, creating another relational bridge in the process. SOSS board member Amber Khan also said there was something really powerful in the fact that in order to deal with anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, the women needed to confront the "isms" they had internalised about each other in order to be in true relationship with each other, and that has been some of the most powerful work she has witnessed.

My community needs healing and I want to be a part of that.

What Amber values is that the women of the local chapters "are not professional organisers; they're women who said, 'my community needs healing and I want to be a part of that.'" When white nationalists desecrated mosques, the Jewish community showed up in force, sometimes even sharing worship spaces.

"I think there's more of a sense of urgency," says Aftab at the Sisterhood. "We've heard from people all over the country, even all over the world, saying, 'I need to reach out and do something constructive rather than be affected by this fear in a negative way.'"

Identity and Violence



Identity is a powerful determinant of human behaviour and social dynamics, with the potential to both unify and divide. It shapes our perceptions, influences our behaviours, and can drive us towards conflict or cohesion. This essay delves into the complex dynamics of identity and violence, synthesising classical philosophical theories with contemporary psychological, neurobiological, and sociological research. Dr Gwen Adshead's recent contributions underscore the evolving understanding of identity's role in societal conflicts, emphasising the urgent need for nuanced interventions that address the multifaceted realities of identity politics. By exploring these dimensions, the essay seeks to uncover the pathways through which identity can provoke and prevent violence, aiming to propose viable solutions for contemporary societal challenges.

The Philosophy of Identity and Violence

The philosophical exploration of identity reveals its intrinsic power to both unite and divide. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit proposes that identity is fundamentally about the struggle for recognition, with conflict arising when such recognition is denied.

This dynamic is encapsulated in his "master-slave dialectic," which illustrates how power imbalances lead to cycles of domination and subjugation, dehumanising both the oppressor and the oppressed. Hannah Arendt's exploration of the "banality of evil" further highlights the risks of subordinating individual moral judgment to collective ideologies or societal expectations, a phenomenon particularly visible in instances of systemic violence like domestic abuse, where perpetrators often rationalise their behaviour as extensions of their perceived roles within the family or society.

Building on these classic theories, Dr Gwen Adshead argues that identity not only frames our interactions but can also serve as both a shield and a weapon in societal conflicts, necessitating careful scrutiny of how identities are constructed and wielded within political contexts. This dual role of identity necessitates a reevaluation of identity politics, particularly when identities are used for both defence and aggression.

Furthermore, Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, offers a compelling ethical framework that challenges the rigidity of identity constructs. He emphasises the moral imperative to recognise the "other" as a subject endowed with inherent dignity. His concept of "infinite responsibility" suggests that true ethical behaviour arises from the recognition and acceptance of the other, which can serve as an antidote to the dehumanisation that often drives personal and collective violence. This ethical perspective is enriched by philosopher Martha Nussbaum's emphasis in *Upheavals of Thought*: The intelligence of emotions, on the role of emotions in moral reasoning, arguing that cultivating emotions like compassion within ethical frameworks can mitigate the divisive effects of rigid identities.

Incorporating insights from Dr Gwen Adshead's 2024 Reith Lecture, Dr [GEORGE JOHN](#) examine identity's dual role as both a catalyst for and a barrier against societal conflict.

Social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel, further elucidates how group affiliations can foster in-group loyalty while promoting out-group hostility.

The Psychology of Identity Conflicts

From a psychological perspective, identity is central to human development and social interaction. Erik Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development emphasise how identity formation plays a critical role in each stage of human growth, impacting how individuals perceive themselves and interact with others. When individuals face identity confusion or when their self-concepts become overly rigid, they are more prone to engage in conflict, as these psychological vulnerabilities undermine their capacity for empathy and understanding.

Social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel, further elucidates how group affiliations can foster in-group loyalty while promoting out-group hostility. This theory is particularly relevant in understanding domestic violence, where perpetrators often view their victims as extensions of their own identities rather than as independent individuals. Such cognitive distortions, including minimising harm, denying responsibility, or outright victim-blaming, are frequently employed to justify abusive actions.

Dr Adshead’s analysis adds that identity conflicts extend beyond mere inequalities; they also stem from a deep-seated psychological need for recognition and validation. She emphasises the importance of acknowledging and validating diverse identities to mitigate violence. This insight expands the discussion beyond group dynamics to include the intrinsic human need for acknowledgement and respect, which can serve as a foundational element in conflict resolution.

On a societal level, collective grievances often drive identity-based violence. Studies on radicalisation reveal that individuals who feel excluded or marginalised are more likely to adopt extremist ideologies. For example, socio-economic disenfranchisement often fuels recruitment into violent movements by exploiting feelings of injustice and exclusion. Addressing

these psychological vulnerabilities requires fostering resilience and creating pathways for positive identity formation. Psychologist Carl Rogers highlights the importance of unconditional positive regard in promoting self-acceptance and healthy interpersonal relationships, suggesting that integrating such principles into intervention strategies can help individuals move beyond rigid identity constructs and reduce the likelihood of violence.

Neurobiology of Identity and Violence

The neurobiological underpinnings of identity and violence provide profound insights into human behaviour. Research indicates that the amygdala, responsible for processing fear and threats, is often hyperactive in individuals prone to violence. This heightened reactivity, coupled with diminished regulation by the prefrontal cortex, predisposes individuals to impulsive aggression. Victims of chronic violence, such as those in abusive relationships, frequently exhibit overactivation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, resulting in prolonged stress responses that can adversely affect memory, emotional regulation, and decision-making. Children exposed to domestic violence are particularly vulnerable, as their developing brains are more susceptible to the long-term effects of trauma.

Building on this foundation, Dr Adshead’s lecture introduces cutting-edge research into the neurobiological roots of aggression and identity. She notes that prolonged exposure to identity-based conflicts can significantly alter neural mechanisms, exacerbating patterns of aggressive behaviour and affecting overall brain function. This new research underscores the impact of identity conflict on brain function, suggesting that continuous exposure to such stress can fundamentally alter neural pathways, thereby exacerbating patterns of aggressive behaviour.

Emerging research on neuroplasticity offers hope, indicating the brain’s capacity to adapt

and reorganise itself, suggesting potential for recovery from these effects. Therapeutic interventions such as mindfulness training, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and compassion-based practices have shown promise in fostering emotional regulation and reducing aggression. Additionally, studies on mirror neurons, which are crucial for empathy and social understanding, highlight the potential for such interventions to rebuild neural pathways and enhance prosocial behaviours. Dr Adshead’s findings emphasise the importance of addressing these neurobiological changes through targeted interventions that can mitigate the impact of identity-based conflicts on the brain.

Sociological Dimensions of Domestic Violence

Domestically, violence is deeply rooted in systemic inequalities and cultural norms that reinforce patriarchal structures and control dynamics within intimate relationships. Economic dependence, coupled with social stigmatisation, creates significant barriers for victims seeking to escape abusive environments. Marginalised groups often face compounded vulnerabilities due to intersecting identities, such as race, class, and sexual orientation, exacerbating their risk and limiting their access to necessary resources and support.

Dr. Ashstad’s Reith Lecture calls for contemporary sociological approaches to account for the increasingly complex tapestries of identity that contribute to violence. She advocates for more nuanced interventions that are sensitive to cultural and identity variances, emphasising that effective strategies must address both the overt manifestations of violence and the subtler, pervasive influences of identity dynamics that underpin such violence. This involves a deep understanding of how various identity factors intersect to exacerbate or mitigate violence and to tailor interventions to effectively address these complexities.

Addressing these disparities requires targeted policy reforms and community-based interventions. Public health frameworks are increasingly employed to address the societal costs of domestic violence, extending beyond individual harm to affect entire communities. Initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation, education, and substance abuse prevention are critical in breaking intergenerational cycles of violence. Legal frameworks must also evolve to emphasise survivor-centred approaches, ensuring that victims have access to justice and comprehensive support systems.

Conclusion

The exploration of identity and violence through various academic lenses reveals a complex landscape where identity acts simultaneously as a shield and a weapon. Philosophical and psychological insights emphasise the critical role of recognition and validation in mitigating violence, while neurobiological evidence points to the tangible impacts of identity-based conflicts on brain function. Sociologically, this essay identifies the need for approaches that are attuned to the cultural and contextual nuances of identity, advocating for legal and social interventions that reflect these complexities.

Ultimately, addressing identity-driven violence requires a concerted effort across multiple disciplines to foster a society where diverse identities can coexist in harmony rather than conflict. By embracing a comprehensive approach that incorporates understanding from philosophy, psychology, neurobiology, and sociology, we can develop more effective strategies to mitigate the pervasive impact of identity-driven violence and promote a more inclusive and peaceful society.

Dr George John is a retired British Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist from London, formerly in private practice in London and southeast of England, now a freelance essayist living in Kochi, India. His special interests include interpersonal conflict, Human Flourishing and Mental Health. docgjohn@aol.com





(Left) A 2013 photo from Britannica

The Phenomenon Called Aam Aadmi Party

ALEX TUSCANO

BJP wanted Congress mukt Bharat; while Aam Aadmi Party's agenda was "Congress ko khatam karo". In this manner, there was no difference between Aam Aadmi Party and BJP.

Aam Aadmi Party is a phenomenon: it recently arrived on the Indian political horizon and claimed to be a party with alternative politics. Aam Aadmi Party had caught the imagination of many, particularly the youth, as it claimed to be a clean party with new ideas of fighting elections and running government, free of corruption. The youth generally think corruption is the main cause of India's problems, and Aam Aadmi Party has a program to abolish corruption, as it emerged from Anna Hazare's Anti-Corruption Movement.

The UPA government was branded as a corrupt government. Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Vinod Rai declared that in their audit they had found large-scale corruption in the process of allocating 2G spectrum. He pointed out that there was a perceptive loss of Rupees one lakh crore to the exchequer. There was also an allegation that the allocation of coal blocks was mired in corruption.

Anna Hazare called for a nationwide agitation against corruption. This agitation received a massive response from youth all over India. The big leaders of this agitation

were, apart from Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal, Kiran Bedi, Shazia Ilmi, Kumar Vishwas, Prashant Bhushan, and Yogendra Yadav. The movement demanded a strong law called 'Jan Lokpal'. Arvind Kejriwal was Anna Hazare's right-hand man. The campaign ended with the defeat of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government.

Many, and perhaps most people, who were part of the India Against Corruption (IAC) were supporters of BJP. They wanted the IAC campaign to support BJP. Baba Ramdev, part of BJP, would come to the meetings with a host of his followers and almost hijack the meeting. Initially, the IAC campaign did not want to allow any political party or politician to come for their campaign. But gradually, BJP leaders found a place on the dais of the IAC. V.K. Singh posed to be a politically neutral person and supported the campaign. But he had come as a channel for the BJP to participate in and take over the campaign.

Taking shelter under constitutional privilege, Vinod Rai had not a single piece of admissible evidence to back his accusation. He had deliberately thrown up a huge figure as "perceptive loss to the exchequer" from al-

lotting the 2G spectrum. His statement went unchallenged. He got a reward for his job of misleading the nation and putting the UPA government in a corner. The BJP government appointed him as the Interim Board of Control for Cricket in India chairman.

A. Raja and Kanimozhi of DMK spent several months in jail. Finally, the court did not find any evidence of wrongdoing. They were set free. Anna Hazare's campaign against corruption was a big fraud and a ploy to discredit and defeat the UPA government under Manmohan Singh. BJP-led NDA was the sole beneficiary of this movement, which came to power under Narendra Modi. One of the most central leaders of the IAC campaign admitted that though he was in the central core team, he was in the dark about the sinister design.

Arvind Kejriwal decided to form a new party. He named his party "Aam Aadmi Party". Except for Prashant Bhushan and Yogendra Yadav, most leaders of Anna Hazare's campaign against corruption (Kiran Bedi, Shazia Ilmi, V.K. Singh) were found in the BJP and Aam Aadmi Party.

Arvind Kejriwal's decision to form Aam Aadmi Party went against Anna Hazare's idea of fighting against corruption. This brought about a split between Kejriwal and Anna. This also reveals a lot about Anna Hazare's real motive behind the anti-corruption movement—targeting the UPA government.

Aam Aadmi Party defeated Sheila Dikshit's Congress government in New Delhi. After the recent elections, they have come to power in Punjab. In the just-concluded New Delhi elections, it was not only defeated, but its stalwarts Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and others were defeated.

We are duty-bound to examine Aam Aadmi Party against its original ideas, ideology, and vision for India. What were its original ideas?

It wanted to be a party with a difference, different from BJP, Congress, and all other parties.

It wanted to fight elections based on voluntary contributions collected from citizens. It would not have anything to do with raising money from corporate houses and certainly not through corrupt means.

Its political culture would be like the Aam Aadmi on the street, which would not have luxuries and a high-profile way of operating.

Apart from this, we must look at Aam Aadmi Party from the point of view of its agenda. For this, we will analyze the way they fought elections in Gujarat. In Gujarat, there were several issues that affected the democratic and secular fabric of Gujarat society.

Bilkis Bano had been a burning issue. But Aam Aadmi Party decided to keep quiet about it. Why? Aam Aadmi Party knew that the highly polarised society of Gujarat, where the majority Hindu population would not swallow this, would work against the possibility of Aam Aadmi Party getting votes.

The issue of the Morbi Bridge collapse, where more than 140 people died, was another concern. There was significant corruption in allotting the restoration contract of the age-old bridge to a watchmaker. The watchmaker company did not have any experience in constructing or maintaining such a bridge. There was no certificate of safety for the bridge before it was opened, just before the election in Gujarat. Aam Aadmi Party was totally silent on this issue.

After winning elections in Punjab, Aam Aadmi Party entered Gujarat elections with the ambition of winning Gujarat. It had little knowledge of the sociology and politics of Gujarat. In Gujarat, every person has been indoctrinated with the Hindutva ideology. They consider Modi as God. They believe he has made Gujarat the number one state in the country. The two richest people in Asia,

Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, come from Gujarat. Gujaratis are not thinking of anybody except Modi. Hence, given the money power of the BJP and the election machinery of BJP, Aam Aadmi Party did not stand a chance to win the Gujarat election. The only party that could stand as stiff opposition to BJP in Gujarat was the Congress party. Arvind Kejriwal's aim was 'Congress ko khatam karo'. All that came out from the election was that BJP got a historic win. Was Arvind Kejriwal aiming at defeating BJP or 'Congress ko khatam karo'? He did neither. Ultimately, he turned out to be a proxy for BJP to defeat Congress and give a massive historic win for the BJP.

It is in this sense that Aam Aadmi Party has been a dangerous trend in the country. It is trying to woo the youth of the country with the slogan of 'new politics and anti-corruption.' Aam Aadmi Party was clamoring for a 'Jan Lokpal bill.' They have not brought out any Lokpal bill in Delhi. Their health minister was in jail on charges of corruption. Manish Sisodia has been accused of corruption. Even Kejriwal himself spent days in jail.

Arvind Kejriwal's recent call to print Goddess Lakshmi and Ganesh on currency notes also indicated that he does not distance himself from the Hindutva agenda of the BJP. Like Modi, he was acting like a poojari to celebrate Diwali. This indicates that he is willing to compromise on the secular idea of India.

Kejriwal's poll promises also indicate his lack of clarity on the "Idea of India." He has created a huge smokescreen before the people with his promise of free electricity up to 300 units. He is not different from others in taking care of the short-term interests of the people and serving the long-term interests of big capital and corporate houses. The absurdity of free electricity lies in the fact that he does not promise that people will get better jobs that will fetch them better income on a sustainable level, which would make it easy for people to pay electricity bills, giving them dignity and pride. Development is not

dishing out doles but strengthening the potential of people to rise to better income and higher living conditions.

Any political party that wants to open its shop in the country should relate itself to the history of our nation. Historically, the idea of India was built on the broad socio-economic and political vision of a democratic, civil libertarian, and secular India, based on a self-reliant, egalitarian social order. It is only in the context of this history that we can make a meaningful contribution to society. No political party can bypass the fundamental values around which India was founded: democracy, socialism (i.e., social and economic justice and equity), and secularism. India is a multiracial, multicultural, and multi-religious country. There is no role for religion in governance. The state and politics should keep clear of all religion.

During the freedom struggle, there were leaders with communal and Hindutva interests who were trying to entertain the idea of India as a Hindu Nation. This idea was defeated by adopting the Constitution of India, which speaks about India as a secular, democratic, and socialist country.

Today, we have in India a situation where there is significant polarisation between Hindus and Muslims. Elections are fought by polarising society along the lines of religion and caste. All the institutions of democracy are being dismantled; judiciary and election commission have become tools in the hands of the government. People who do not agree with the government of the day are being unfairly jailed without trials.

It is in this context that any party wishing to bring in new politics should work. Aam Aadmi Party will be judged by the contribution it makes to bring the country on the path of democracy, secularism, and social and economic justice. The fundamental agenda of any party should be to build society along the lines of the values and tenets of the Constitution.

GERRY LOBO OFM

Thoughtful and respectful exchange of ideas in a political conversation can lead to effective solutions to social and political problems.

The Decline of Civility Hurts Democracy

Shashi Tharoor, the eminent parliamentarian in the Opposition and a prolific writer, published a critical and thought provoking article in the editorial page of *The Hindu* on the "sorry state of Indian Parliamentary proceedings" without mincing words or even being a partisan (January 2, 2025). On scanning the recent Parliament sessions he stated that the "winter session of the legislature was a travesty." Not the recent winter session alone, but practically every session being held since the past few years under the majoritarian government, all one witnesses is nothing but a "decline of civility," as Tharoor views it. Gone are the days when a sense of civility had been reigning in the Indian political scenario, in our public debates and in the legislature proceedings. It is inconceivable today to witness or hear about politicians behaving civilly. Instead, adjournments, expulsions, uncivilised disruptions and suspensions of members and sessions have become the common features of our Legislature, all at the cost of the citizens, thus "diminishing of the parliament"

and "damaging Indian democracy." The Opposition in the Parliament is being considered as an enemy of irredeemable evil or "anti-national." The public, on the other hand, pays no heed any more or expects any decency from a great lot of the elected representatives.

The quality of the political representatives and the quality of the floor debates are not the concern any more of the electorate in our country which has eventually led incivility in the dealings and domain of those elected for service. For many it is the party ideology that matters in the choice of their representative, not the quality and caliber of the one voted to represent. So much so, the voter does not look at the civility in and about the candidate, instead about a pure majoritarian government, even if does not serve. Today for some what matters is not a job or meal a day, but who wins with majority vote. Hence, the electorate can't be concerned about civility in the society. The electorate at times is responsible for permitting barbarism among the political opponents. Civility is eroding

According to Shashi Tharoor, "The competitive disruptions of Parliament by both the Opposition and, more surprisingly, the Treasury benches, made the recently-concluded winter session of the legislature a travesty." (2 Jan 2025, *The Hindu*. Image: *The Hindu*/ANI)



by the day even in the educated ones as the criminal records of those on the frontline of politics are all an open page. Perhaps we have no laws curbing the entry of criminals into the political arena! With all the technology, digital prowess and medical progress, humans are still stuck in the mire of hate and violence, indecency and incivility, bestiality and murder. The stunning statement of the philosopher, Hobbes, holds high as a reality of everyday life: “Man is a wolf to man.” If in the house of democracy civility is shunted out, what can the nation expect on its streets and in its human communities?

Incivility today seems to be having a grip on the daily conduct of people in many societies including those of the western world. Institutions of learning, worship places and the worship services held in them, the outwardly shining spectacular cities and families in the world, are witnessing the decline of civility, questioned by no one. Incivility in the society even suggests potential benefit for persons with position and up-standing. Incivility evokes attention from the public and the politicians become popular; even the actors get elevated by pardoning their day-light crimes against innocent humans. Prevalence of incivility in our society is experienced when people encounter with others rudely.

Incivility is characterised by harmful stereotypes against social groups. This is a strong feature that one finds during election periods, heightening animosity and creating deep ideological divides. The election periods produce new dictionaries of derogatory and offensive language that is used against the opponents. There is a rise of this form of incivility in our Indian context which increasingly creates an environment of fear and insecurity in people. Politicians have set a political rhetoric licensing themselves with personal attacks on the opponents or on people who do not side their view and policies. All one experiences today is a disrespectful tone and a lack of decency in the political sphere as well as in the social interactions among humans. This can be the

central characteristic of political and social incivility which has sometimes invaded the religious sphere and has produced more aggressive heat.

Proper functioning of democracy is hindered because of incivility found more and more dominating our legislature and the political narrative. Their behaviour has certainly overshadowed policy deliberations and developmental projects for human well being. The well-minded citizens are losing political trust and uncivil behaviour among policy makers because it violates social norms and polite polity marking opinions which could enhance healthy and a creative process. Unfortunately incivility for others in our country goes unnoticed or simply being tolerated. Incivility does not mean there cannot be socio-civil movements, demonstrations and strikes provided they are not unreasonable, self-serving and self-absorbed. Outrage against injustice or any kinds of evils which demean or destroy social order devoid of physical or verbal assaults are justifiable in a society. That is not incivility. Gandhi’s Satyagraha strategy, non-violently performed, is not incivility. All said and done, today our country tends towards the undesired incivility from the parliament to the communal groups of people down the lane.

The appearance of incivility in the different quarters of our society today has led to the topic and need for civility in order to create humanity based discourse and sympathetic praxis. Setting aside differences, it suffices to state that politeness in being critical, courtesy in speech discourse, abstaining from the tendency of degrading the opponent or anyone for that matter and caring for others’ human identity is what civility means. It implies respectful process of communication which can establish a healthy and harmonious politico-social and economic community of people. Civility of this nature is a cornerstone of democracy in any country. When civility is prioritised and valued, the practice of it in daily dealings in public spaces can create an open space to live ones freedom. Differences of opinions, of cultures,

Politicians and legislative representatives who conduct the affairs of our country need to guard over their instincts to kill or degrade or destabilise their opponents, as it has become a common strategy in the recent past.

of mindsets can be there and yet the other is treated rightly and justly.

The practice of civility in a society should begin with public officials, legislators and those who hold responsibility for and with others. They should be examples, modeling civil behaviour. Civility is to be seen in their dealings and in their understanding of their values, opinions and perspectives which could eventually generate answers to societal or political issues. When the public witnesses rude behaviour, impatient hearing, personal attacks, disrespectful treatment from those in public offices, there emerges distrust, hatred and intended disobedience, resulting in violent stance taken towards those who cause incivility. Thoughtful and respectful exchange of ideas in a political conversation can lead to effective solutions to social problems. When the practice of civil discourse is not done civilly in a parliament, it will have negative consequences on the life of the citizens. People will disengage themselves from their responsibilities towards a nation’s unity and integrity and act violently because of a deep-seated anger. Some of our parliamentarians are angry, stern and unmoved movers. That’s why Tharoor calls it “the sorry state of India’s parliamentary proceedings” in his view shared in the *The Hindu*. He is right and the country at large knows it. However, some might be indifferent to whatever happens inside the house of democracy. These would tolerate even anarchy in there!

“Civility is claiming and caring for one’s identity, needs and beliefs without degrading someone else’s in the process”(C.Dahnke, T. Spath). Although politeness is a primary step, civility is more than about politeness. Disagreeing with others is not harmful, but disagreeing while maintaining respect is of utmost importance. In this way one seeks a common ground for dialogue and differences. Perhaps this is an eroding point in our contemporary, so called, civilised world. It may be a civilised world without civility in interpersonal human discourse. Politics has grabbed this kind of incivility too such an

extent, one hardly notices; instead, it has become the rule of the day. The politicians, beginning with the Indian Prime Minister, who is of a stern demeanor, or the Russian president, need to bend down in order to hold meaningful engagement and shared understanding with the Opposition in a manner that behoves the leaders who are elected by the will of the people. Someone has stated that politics has become “unacceptably uncivil.” Behaving uncivilly with the Opponents and sharing the same table is absolutely hypocritical. Incivility is poisonous. However, civility can be rebuilt by trusting the political opponents and believing that they too have the same aim, namely, building a nation or a community towards peace, harmony and integrity. It is sad to think that the human tendency today is to feel contempt, not compassion. Particularly in an election atmosphere all forget the value of empathy, sympathy, civility and, instead, rain personal attacks, divide people and block an understanding conversation.

Civility, however, is only for those whose concern is a civilisation where the culture of respect, of honour and of integrity is promoted and where political trust is built among people even though disagreement may prevail. For those who consider life as service and to live is to be a servant, civility in every space of human existence becomes a primordial value. Those, whose very existential orientation is rupture, ruin and dilapidation of the fabric of society, incivility does not disturb them. Politicians and legislative representatives who conduct the affairs of our country need to guard over their instincts to kill or degrade or destabilise their opponents, as it has become a common strategy in the recent past. Political rhetoric must never be replaced with incivility; instead, a mindful approach and a gentle detachment from inflammatory outbursts should be the billboard promoting civility of kindness. Our legislators are wanting in this respect. Learn civility to break down walls and build bridges!

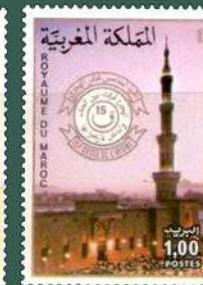
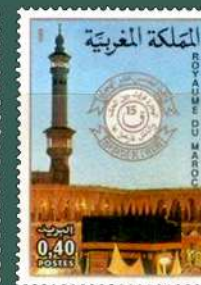
Ramadan

2 March to 30 March 2025

TOM JOHN OFM

Ramadan is a month where over a billion Muslims worldwide engage in fasting from dawn until sunset, not merely abstaining from food and drink, but cultivating inner discipline, compassion, and spiritual growth. It is one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Ramadan takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims fast from dawn to sunset during Ramadan. They break their fast with dates and water. Throughout these weeks, communities strengthen their bonds. Mosques fill with worshippers for prayers, charity increases, and the Quran is recited in its entirety. The shared experience of sacrifice creates a profound sense of unity and empathy for those who face hunger not by choice, but by circumstance. And they celebrate the end of Ramadan with Eid al-Fitr, the Festival of the Breaking of the Fast. Together, Ramadan and Eid exemplify life's essential rhythm—the necessary balance between discipline and celebration, between sacrifice and joy.



RAMADAN: A SPIRITUAL HOMECOMING

FATEEN IMRAN

As we approach the end of the Islamic month of Sha'ban, my heart is already pounding with anticipation for Ramadan. We all need to detox from time to time. Our fast-paced, technology-driven lifestyle can leave us overwhelmed and disconnected from life's other aspects. For more than 2.04 billion Muslims, Ramadan is a yearly month-long physical and spiritual cleansing. I can almost hear the murmured prayers, the hum of expectant souls, and the rustle of raised hands yearning for the divine. It's like a homecoming for my soul, a reunion with a valued mentor whose absence has created a vacuum that not even a lifetime of binge-watching comfort shows and time with loved ones can fill. The preparations leading up to it are a treasured tradition in my family, and I'm sure many other Muslim households feel the same.

As a child, I remember Ramadan was a special month—the house was calm, the television rarely on, and every spare moment spent in prayer and reflection. It recharges faith, reminds individuals of their beliefs, and encourages personal growth. The atmosphere becomes kinder and more considerate. Ramadan is a time to focus on spirituality, reflect on faith, and strive for self-improvement. It encourages repentance, setting goals, and strengthening connections with God. Ideally, this should be done year-round, but with the hustle and bustle of life, we don't always make the time.

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is considered a holy month among Muslims. It is a period of spiritual rebirth and renewal, when we prioritise strengthening our relationship with Allah (SWT) and purifying our hearts. The Quran says, “O



you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous” (2:183). This verse emphasises the importance of fasting in achieving righteousness and closeness to Allah (SWT). Ramadan instills self-discipline through a month-long practice of self-control. In order to observe a fast, we willingly subject ourselves to hunger, thirst, coffee withdrawal, and all other bodily requirements from dawn to sunset. By rejecting indulgence, we develop empathy for those who lack basic necessities. It helps us appreciate Allah's (SWT) gifts and empathise with those who are less fortunate. We are reminded of our responsibility to assist those in need and be generous with our time and money. It reinforces the values of spiritual growth and compassion in Islam.

As the sun sets, Muslims break their fast with a meal known as iftar. Traditionally, people invite friends and family to enjoy this meal with them, and it is customary to feed the destitute and needy during iftar. This practice is based on the Hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “Whoever gives food to a fasting person with which to break his fast will have a reward like his, without it detracting from the reward of the fasting person in the slightest” (Tirmidhi).

Ramadan is also a time to reflect on the world's struggles. As I think about the past year, I dwell on the problems facing humanity: natural disasters, acts of terrorism, the worsening refugee crisis, changing attitudes toward religious tolerance, and political uncertainty. Rather than sinking into despair, Ramadan becomes a powerful source of optimism. It teaches us to be appreciative of the Creator for all that is good in our lives. Ashfaq Parkar, in his essay, Ramadan, a month for renewed optimism, emphasises that Ramadan fosters renewed optimism by encouraging individuals to actively thank God for the blessings in their lives, especially amidst global challenges.

However, it is not just a physical challenge; it is also a period of intense spiritual focus and self-reflection. We devote hours to prayer and thought, reciting the Qur'an and

contemplating its lessons. It's similar to a spiritual gym, where we build our souls and moral compass. The Holy Qur'an states: “The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion” (2:185). Muslims have an extremely special connection with the Qur'an during Ramadan, as it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during this month. It is more than just a month; it is an experience that can transform our hearts and minds, inspiring us to be better, kinder, and more compassionate people.

The emotional impact Ramadan has on me is difficult to convey. When I prepare for Ramadan, I feel as if I'm going through a profound spiritual journey. Ramadan is like hitting the reset button for your soul; it's a time to grow, think, and remember that no matter how hopeless or broken we feel, Allah (SWT)'s mercy and bounty give us hope for a brighter tomorrow. Ramadan celebrates life itself. And I can't wait to relive its cozy sweetness. Regardless of our current circumstances, Ramadan is always there, offering us a cause to remain hopeful and a chance for a new beginning every year.

Beyond personal reflection, Ramadan is also an opportunity for us to unite as a community. People frequently gather to share the joy of the month. Around this time, the streets come alive with holiday decorations and food vendors as people gather with friends and family to break their fast. The spirit of generosity extends beyond the dinner table—many use this time to donate to charities and assist those who are less fortunate. This is an opportunity for us to unite, to strengthen the bonds of our community. It's like a giant spiritual festival where we celebrate our faith and dedication to spiritual progress.

The culmination of this spiritual journey is Eid al-Fitr, a day of joy and gratitude. Marking the end of Ramadan it is a celebration filled with festive meals, gatherings and acts of charity. It serves as a reminder that while Ramadan may have ended, the lessons learnt should be carried out throughout the year.

Fasting: Displacement of the Ego



JOY PRAKASH OFM

In our contemporary obsession with food and physical fitness Francis of Assisi's attitude towards fasting appears to be a great antidote. In the history of religion, we realise a certain mastery over the inclination of the flesh is always in order if the spiritual life is to flourish. Francis gives us the right motivation for our fasting and prayer. The fasting of Christ was the example and reason for his fasting.

Both, from a more practical and psychological point of view, we are better equipped today to say how fasting works. Both prayer and fasting involve a displacement of the ego, a cutting the "I" down to size. In prayer, we consciously place the centre of reality outside ourselves. Fasting too is in a symbolic way a refusal to inflate the ego. In these senses prayer and fasting go a long way in helping our human life in this world.

The Motive for Fasting

The motive behind the fasting both for himself and for his friars was "to follow the footprints of the Son of God"; secondly, Francis wanted to fast because Christ the Lord fasted on earth. Francis knew that the Lord was in the desert, where he prayed and fasted for 40 days (So says the First biographer: Thomas of Celano).

Francis' second biograph, St. Bonaventure, affirms that Christ and his example was the motivation for Francis' prayer and fasting - "When the man of God, Francis, saw that many were being inspired by his example to carry the cross of Christ with fervent spir-

it, he himself, like a good leader of God's army, was encouraged to reach the palm of victory through the height of heroic virtue. He directed his attention to this text of the Apostle: Those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. To carry in his own body the armour of the cross, he held in check his sensual appetites with such rigid discipline that he scarcely took what was necessary for the sustenance of nature (in the Major Legend of the Saint).

A very modern scholar like André Vauchez puts it very succinctly: "Francis was a simple and poor man who had willingly accepted privations and suffering in order to follow naked the naked Christ" (*Francis of Assisi*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2012, p 74).

Hence we can rightly say that the Saint who made a manger to feel and to experience the inconveniences of "The Child of Bethlehem (1Cel 86) who was moved by the passion of the Lord, "I must weep for the passion of the Lord" (2Cel 11b; 3C 14c), he desired to undergo martyrdom (1C XX, FA:ED I, p 229), and who cried at La Verna for two graces, "My Lord Jesus Christ, I pray You to grant me two graces before I die: to feel in his soul and body the pain of Jesus' passion and the excessive love with which the Son of God burned for him" (Consideration on the Holy Stigmata) was madly in love with the Lord of his life. So his excessive love, his being madly in love with the Lord of his life, was the sole motivation for his many occasions of fasting. The motivation therefore was certainly not any self-inflicted mortification, nor was it any neurotic or masochistic behaviour. Francis was not predominantly an unbalanced man. Psychoneurotics are not usually serene in the face of pain they themselves do not select or control. When it came to his patient and uncomplaining endurance of pain right from the age of 31 till his death at 44, Francis was psychologically and spiritually an extraordinarily balanced

man – precisely because he looked to a frame of reference outside himself and beyond his pain to deal with it.

Francis' Insistence on Others' Fasting

Francis did not prescribe for his brothers the harshness he inflicted upon himself, but as he wrote in the second Rule, "Let them fast from the feast of All Saints until the Lord's Nativity. May those be blessed by the Lord who fast voluntarily during that holy Lent that begins at the Epiphany and lasts during the forty days which our Lord consecrated by His own fast; but those who do not wish to keep it will not be obliged. Let them fast, however, during the other (Lent) until the Lord's Resurrection. At other times they may not be bound to fast except on Fridays. During a time of obvious need, however, the brothers may not be bound by corporal fast" (2Rule of Francis).

What gives a balance to Francis' fasting is that at the end of his life he apologised to the body. He also shows extreme leniency to the brother who shouted, "I am dying of hunger" (In Assisi Compilations), and ate with him before the entire community. Being most considerate. He also told the brothers, "My brothers, each of you must consider his own constitution. Although one of you may be sustained with less food than another, I still do not want one who needs more food to try imitating him in this. Rather, considering his constitution, he should provide his body with what it needs. Just as we must beware of overindulgence in eating, which harms both the body and the soul, so we must beware of excessive abstinence even more, because the Lord desires mercy and not sacrifice" (Assisi Compilations). He was also aware that fasting could always remain as a kind of observance. With regard to this he wrote in his letter to the faithful: "We must also fast and abstain from vices and sins and from an excess of food and drink and be Catholics" (from 2nd Letter to the Faithful).

The Impact of Colours on Memory, Attention and Workplace Mental Health



SANDRA MANOJ

Colour is thought to be the most significant visual experience for humans. It has been shown to significantly improve memory performance and serves as a potent information pathway to the human cognitive system. Colour can be incredibly powerful in marketing, communication, learning and educational environments, and even sports. Additionally, certain colour-based interventions can be implemented in clinical settings to address memory-related issues such as learning disabilities, autism, dyslexia, and others.

The field of colour psychology examines how various colours impact people's emotions and actions. It investigates how emotions can be influenced by colour and how age and cultural background can affect how people react to colour. Artists and interior designers have long believed that colour has a profound impact on emotions, moods, and feelings. Pablo Picasso famously said, "Co-

lours, like features, follow the changes of the emotions." Specific colours have been linked to physiological changes such as elevated blood pressure, increased metabolism, and eyestrain.

The general opinion that red, orange, yellow, and brown hues are "warm," while blue, green, and grey hues are "cool," illustrates the connection between colour and emotion. Blues and greens are associated with security, tranquillity, and serenity; browns, greys, and blacks with melancholy, depression, and sadness; and red, orange, and yellow with enthusiasm, joy, stimulation, and aggression. It's important to keep in mind that psychological perception of colour is subjective, thus only broad remarks on its characteristics and applications can be made.

A cross-cultural study revealed that American and Japanese ideas of warm and cool colours are essentially the same. However,

while the red-yellow-green range is regarded as "good" and oranges and red-purples as "bad" in the United States, blue and green hues are seen as "good" and the red-purple range as "bad" in Japan. In Western cultures, black is the colour of mourning; in other civilisations, white, purple, or gold are used instead.

Colour helps us remember information by increasing our level of attention. The role that colour plays in enhancing our attention cannot be denied. The greater the attention focused on a stimulus, the more likely that stimulus is to be transferred to a more permanent form of memory storage. As indicated above, colours have the ability to capture attention. Farley and Grant were among the earliest researchers to propose a theory suggesting that colours have a significant influence on attention. They based their conclusion on research on attention and cognition, comparing colour and non-colour multimedia presentations on memory performance. Their findings indicated that coloured multimedia presentations produced better attention than non-coloured presentations. According to further elaboration by Greene, Bell, and Boyer, warm colours like yellow, red, and orange have been proven to influence attention more than cool colours, such as brown and grey.

Beyond memory and other cognitive functions, colour has greatly impacted mental health, particularly in the workplace. Colours may reduce or augment psychological stress, anxiety, or fatigue and thereby affect overall employee well-being. Warm colours like red, orange, and yellow can often be energising but become overwhelming in excess, potentially increasing feelings of stress or anxiety. Cool colours include green and blue. Green is associated with relaxation and mental clarity. These colours are used extensively in workplace designs to reduce tension and create a more harmonious space for the mind. For example, the colour green mostly references nature. Nature calms people by giving them a feeling of stability and reducing anxiety. This likewise applies to blue, which inspires calmness and focus. It is well-suited for high-profile jobs where a person needs to concentrate all their energy.

In this way, colour affects more than aesthetic appearance but also memory, attention, and mental health in the workplace. Proper choice of colours improves cognitive performance, reduces lapses, and promotes beneficial mental health. Through strategic utilisation of colours in educational settings as well as at work, people and organisations can create environments that encourage creativity, promote productivity, and foster healthier mental states. As awareness of colour psychology continues to grow, so do the potential applications of its use to benefit both cognitive and emotional outcomes in various institutions.



SHALOM HOME STAY

Majorda Beach, Goa.

TAKE TIME OFF

Relax
Enjoy Goan Hospitality

Phone: +91-9822586596 | shalome80@gmail.com | www.rainbowsendgoa.com

Age of Loneliness

Unpacking the Psychological Effects of Isolation in the Elderly

When sunset engulfs our world, it leaves behind many elderly individuals who find themselves lost in another form of darkness: social isolation. This is an increasingly pressing matter in our fast-paced world, which constantly experiences technological evolution and changes in social structures. The implications for mental health are profound. Invisible walls symbolise the bondage for many older adults, giving rise to feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety. Yet, these psychological effects are often overlooked as society tends to minimise the problems faced by the aged.

Loneliness is a powerful, insidious emotion that can afflict anyone, but for the elderly, it takes on a different character. According to a report from the National Institute on Aging, one in three older adults experiences loneliness. As friends pass away, family members move on, and mobility declines, social networks shrink, and connections that once brought comfort quickly disappear. The result is not just a feeling of emptiness; it can cause severe psychological disorders. Studies show that prolonged social isolation can lead to health conditions as damaging as smoking fifteen cigarettes per day. Feelings of alienation can exacerbate existing mental illnesses or even trigger new ones. The elderly population is particularly vulnerable to

depression, which is often underdiagnosed or misdiagnosed because its symptoms are indistinguishable from those of other conditions that naturally occur in older populations.

One might presume that technology would help alleviate social isolation in today's digital world. Distance is easily bridged nowadays through video calls, social media, and various online communities. However, the reality is far more complex. Many elderly people feel overwhelmed or alienated by rapid technological advancement; a significant majority in this age group lacks digital literacy, adding another layer of disconnection. Technology, instead of bridging gaps by creating avenues of communication, can inadvertently deepen a sense of isolation when it creates barriers rather than connections.

The consequences of social isolation extend beyond loneliness. Scientific research indicates a potential connection between isolation and cognitive degeneration, even suggesting a heightened risk of dementia and other neurological disorders. Cognitive decline can create a spiralling effect: mental capabilities deteriorate, consequently reducing interactions with others. This situation further deepens the isolation that the individual experiences. On an emotional level, loneliness can be overwhelming. Thoughts of uselessness and despair can consume dai-

SWATHY SANTHOSH

Cognitive decline can create a spiralling effect: mental capabilities deteriorate, consequently reducing interactions with others.



ly existence, further reducing quality of life. Anxiety typically accompanies depression, making the prospect of re-entering social worlds appear frightening. Stigma remains a significant issue, as many older individuals feel embarrassed or ashamed of mental health conditions, preventing them from seeking help.

Addressing the psychological impact of social isolation requires a multi-faceted approach. Community-based programs that encourage interaction among older populations can be transformative. Socialisation is fostered through participation in book clubs, exercise classes, or art workshops in settings that promote interaction among older adults as they share experiences and forge relationships. Intergenerational programs that serve both younger and older populations can be particularly effective. These initiatives benefit seniors in many ways—not only through companionship but also by educating younger generations about the lives and histories of their elders. Such intergenerational communication leads to feelings of empathy, understanding, and—most importantly—a sense of belonging for all involved.

Awareness is the crucial first step in addressing the psychological effects of isolation on elderly individuals. Families and caregivers need to observe and identify when a mem-

ber is experiencing loneliness and depression. Openly discussing mental health can help reduce the stigma surrounding these issues and promote intervention-seeking behaviour. Healthcare providers should recognise social isolation as a significant health risk. Routine assessments that include questions about social connections can help better understand patients' social contexts and psychological well-being, allowing providers to recommend appropriate interventions.

The psychological effect of isolation in the elderly is a pressing issue requiring urgent attention and action. Society must construct contexts of inclusion where relationships are emphasised rather than individualism. Through awareness, fostering social interaction, and thoughtful implementation of technology, we can mitigate the negative effects of loneliness on the elderly and improve their quality of life. In this world that moves too quickly and often overlooks the silent battles of aging, it is time to pause and listen. We should value the wisdom and stories of the older generation; within them lies the potential for greater empathy and understanding, allowing us to create stronger bonds with one another. Addressing social isolation not only lifts a burden from those who paved our way but also enriches our collective life experience.

HELP! I'M TRAPPED IN A LOGIC LOOP!

Empathy is not about agreeing with everything I say, but rather about acknowledging how something has affected me. It's about being present with me in my pain or frustration, without needing to "fix" it right away, reminds **SHARON ANTHONY**.

Dear Partner,

I want to take a moment to speak from the heart about something that I believe is important for both of us to understand when it comes to conflict and how we handle it in our relationship.

I know that when we're facing disagreements, you naturally want to fix things—whether it's through logic, facts, or clear solutions. Your mind works in ways that strive to bring clarity and resolution, and I deeply admire that about you. But sometimes, especially in emotionally charged moments, what I'm really longing for from you isn't just the solution or the logical explanation. What I need most in those moments is your empathy.

When we argue or have difficult conversations, it's not always the right time to focus solely on being "right" or proving a point. It's not even about resolving everything perfectly in the moment. What I truly need is for you to see me, hear me, and understand how I'm feeling. The situation might be about facts, but my emotions, my vulnerability, are just as real, and they matter just as much.

Empathy is not about agreeing with everything I say, but rather about acknowledging how something has affected me. It's about being present with me in my pain or frustration, without needing to "fix" it right away. It's about letting me know that you see beyond the words, that you understand that what I'm going through is real and deserves compassion.

Here are a few ways you can show empathy, even when the conversation gets difficult:

Listen deeply

Put aside the urge to find a solution right away. Focus on really hearing me, my feelings, and what's underneath the words. Sometimes, I just need you to understand, not to argue or counter what I'm saying. For example, if I'm upset about a difficult interaction with a coworker, just listen to the frustration, and don't immediately try to solve the problem.

Acknowledge my emotions

Rather than trying to rationalise or explain things away, simply acknowledge how I feel. Saying things like, "I can see this really upset you," or "I understand why you're feeling this way," can make a world of difference. If I express sadness about missing a friend's event, simply saying "That sounds really disappointing" is helpful.

Validate, don't dismiss

Even if you don't fully agree with my perspective, validate that my feelings are real. I don't expect you to always agree with me, but when you validate my emotions, it helps me feel heard and supported. If I say I'm overwhelmed by a task, instead of saying "It's not that hard", say "I understand that feels like a lot."

Be present with me

Sometimes, silence and presence are more comforting than words. Hold my hand, hug me, or just sit with me when words don't seem to help. Your presence is a powerful form of support. If I'm crying, just being there, holding a hand, is more valuable than trying to force words.

Respond with care, not with a solution

I don't always need you to solve the problem. Sometimes, I just need you to show that you care and that you're on my side. It's not about fixing things immediately, but about being a partner who is emotionally invested in what I'm feeling. If I'm stressed about a deadline, a simple "I'm here for you, how can I support you?" is better than giving unsolicited advice.

I've been trying to express something that's been on my mind for a while now, and I know it's been difficult for me to find the right words. Over the years, I've tried to communicate this in different ways, and I'm hoping we can have a calm, open conversation about it. I want to start by acknowledg-



ing that I do see and appreciate the effort you've put into other aspects of our relationship, and I'm grateful for that. I also remember you mentioning that you would work on making changes in regard to empathising and I've been hopeful that things would improve.

However, lately, I've noticed that the distance between us seems to be growing. We end up raising our voices, both trying to be heard, which has been really disheartening for me. I also sense some resentment building, and it's been hurtful to hear things like "get out" or "leave." Those words are difficult to hear, especially when I'm just trying to express how I feel. For example, when I shared how I felt about the conversation with your friend regarding the dinner plans, my intention was never to argue or blame anyone—I was simply sharing my feelings. I feel like in those moments, instead of being understood, the focus shifts to a factual discussion, which makes it harder for me to express myself.

I also try to remind you to speak softly, especially when we're in public, because I feel it's important to maintain respect in that environment. It's hard for me to feel like you may not care or that perhaps the care is fading, and when these things happen, I feel uncomfortable and cornered.

I don't think you would feel okay if I were to yell at you in front of your friends, and I don't want to create that kind of atmosphere between us. I care deeply about our relationship, and my hope is that we can work together to improve this. I believe we can find a way to communicate better, and I'm here, willing to do my part.

Love, I've noticed that it's been hard for us to truly connect at times, and I believe empathy plays a huge role in that.

I understand it might not always come easily, but I truly feel that if we want to build a strong and loving relationship, it's important to work on understanding and connecting with each other's feelings.

If you're unsure of how to approach this, I would suggest considering professional support, as it can really help in strengthening both our relationship and your connections with others. Empathy is something that can fade if not practiced, but it's also something that can grow and improve over time with effort and care.

I've been trying to give you the space to grow in this area, but it's becoming difficult for me when I don't feel heard or understood. I deserve compassion, love, and respect, just as you do, and I truly believe that with more empathy, we can create a deeper bond. Please don't leave me hanging, as I've expressed my need to feel safe, supported, and valued by you. I'm afraid that without change, it could affect the good relationships you have with others as well.

I love you, and I want us to grow together in a way that brings us both peace and happiness. Let's work on this together.

I want you to know that I'm not asking you to change who you are or to stop being logical. I love that about you, and it's one of the things that makes you so special to me. But in these moments of conflict, I believe we can grow closer by sharing not just our thoughts but our hearts. By showing empathy, you make me feel safe, understood, and loved.

Together, I hope we can create a space where both of our emotions are valued, where we don't have to argue to be heard, and where we can always come back to each other with kindness and compassion. It's through this kind of closeness, not distance, that we can face any challenge that comes our way.

There is so much I truly appreciate, like efficiency and being a bit more proactive. Showing up for me, etc! I am grateful for it.

Thank you for hearing me, for being the wonderful partner that you are. I love you deeply, and I'm so grateful for everything we share.

With all my love,
Yours.

Breaking Through: The Role of Mental Strength in Indian Sports Excellence



RANJITH SELVAN

“Learn to train your mind as well as your body. Mental strength is just as important as physical strength and will help you achieve your goals.”
—Cristiano Ronaldo.

Sports is a field in which athletes are forced to go above and beyond to maintain their best performance consistently. Being able to give your best as an athlete goes beyond just surpassing physical limits, as viewers perceive; it involves going past mental barriers as well. Despite the differences in the kinds of sports they pursue, elite athletes like Ronaldo, Michael Jordan, and Rafael Nadal have one thing in common: their mindset. Their mindset of constantly believing in themselves and their commitment to delivering their best performance day in and day out. I believe this mindset is what differentiates the good from the great, but also distinguishes ‘what is’ from ‘what could have been.’

What do I mean by that? In any sport, be it individual or team, several young talents bloom every year, and we constantly hear about them. Viewers place the highest praise on them, their technique, and their elegance, finally drawing the conclusion that they could become some of the greatest

athletes of all time in their sport. However, if you observe the same athletes after two to three years, you can see that they are often nowhere to be seen in that sport. They’ve diminished, their popularity has decreased, and several years down the line, people only view them as athletes that ‘could have been,’ asking questions like ‘What if they had stayed healthy?’

It is important to acknowledge that athletes face numerous personal and professional hurdles and challenges constantly. As they continuously push the physical limits of the human body, it is natural for athletes to get injured. This constant presence of personal and professional challenges causes a great amount of mental strain. Though the physical fight lasts only for the time they spend practicing and performing, the mental fight is constant, and this is naturally bound to take a toll on them. Sports truly puts their mental strength to the test, and sometimes, due to various factors, athletes crumble mentally. Thus, it is a rare sight to see young athletes bloom and blossom into the talents they were projected to be, but if they overcome all those hardships, they truly become one of the Greatest of All Time, or as sports fans appreciatively call them, the GOAT.

All of this is well understood among the sports community, and light is being shed on the mental side of the game. Well, not quite. Yes, light is being shed on the mental side of the game even more, but this light has been illuminating for a long time now, at least in the West. The US national Olympic team began to prominently use sports psychologists as early as the 1980s, with some sources indicating that the use of sports psychology in the US began as early as the 1960s. This has contributed to propelling the United States of America to the top of the Olympic world as they continue to dominate across various sports. Several prominent United States athletes, like Simone Biles, have publicly acknowledged the role of their mental health and its importance in maintaining a high level of performance regardless of the stage on which they perform.

Now, what does this mean in the Indian context? If we take a look at the recent Olym-

pics that concluded, India’s performance was a mixed bag, highlighted by an incredible six 4th-place finishes. This does indicate an overall improvement in performance, but a question has been plaguing my mind: Why is it that Indian athletes performed admirably across all sports but just couldn’t get that extra inch to close the gap between fourth place and an Olympic medal? This problem has not just plagued Olympic athletes. Before the 2024 T20 World Cup, the Indian Men’s Cricket Team had lost in either the semi-finals or the finals of an ICC tournament in nine out of the ten organised tournaments since the 2013 ICC Champions Trophy. The Indian Football team went into the 2024 Asian Cup full of hope after performing well in three friendly international tournaments but ended the tournament as the worst team among all qualified teams. This problem has been plaguing Indian athletes for some time—the problem of falling short right when it matters. There may be many factors contributing to this issue, but one of the main problems is, I believe, the difference in the mental approach to the game. This acts as an unseen barrier between Indian and foreign athletes, preventing Indian athletes from performing their best under high-pressure conditions.

However, though slowly, India is catching up with the West in this regard as well. Indian athletes have started emphasising the mental part of the game, and several athletes are now seeing improvements in their performance. I am now seeing athletes like Neeraj Chopra, who has been consistently putting his best performance forward. In the Olympics, despite competing with a groin injury and faulting in five of his six throws—leading to immense pressure—Chopra still managed to secure a silver medal, underscoring his mental resilience and mentality. I feel this may be what is lacking in many Indian athletes. The elite mentality to overcome barriers and challenges and to pull through in the end is what makes athletes stand out from the rest of their competition. If Indian athletes can conquer this mental aspect, we can truly put Indian sports on the world map and ensure that India will have ‘what is’ stories from various different sports instead of ‘what could have been.’

THANK GOD FOR THE SUMMER RAIN



A FRANCIS

He sat in that empty-looking old-fashioned veranda, sweating profusely in the blistering heat of that ominous midsummer evening. The sun was setting apparently with a newly gained acceptance of humility. But the heat seemed still not ready to surrender!

"Could it be the effect of global-warming caused by the human expansion of greenhouse gases, rendering the summer so intolerable? Or does it have something to do with Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky whom the Greeks nicknamed as the 'dog star'? The way of the Hellenistic astrology is that the rising of the Sirius alongside the sun intensified the temperature, flooded the Nile, drove humans and dogs mad. They perhaps have a point," he thought to himself, "dogs and people alike go crazy during summer!"

His train of thought that took off its meandering flight of imagination, from the fathomable to the unfathomable, from global

warming to the heliacal rising, was instantly knocked off by the voice of his mother, who showed up unannounced from inside. She seated herself beside him as if she was on a mission of dispelling the air of emptiness which blanketed the veranda.

She was a crackerjack mind-reader, just like all mothers adept at mind-reading their children. She seemed to know what was going on in his mind. "It may rain, today" she said, while shifting her far-reaching gaze from the blazing horizon of the sky to the quizzical face of her son who was keenly observing her frail body and its feeble movements, since her appearance.

Her body didn't belie any signs of its deterioration. She looked extremely weak and tired. Certainly, this was not the image of the mother, he was generally proud about her. She was such an energetic and full-of-life mother that he never thought she would ever abate to this point of identity-altering deterioration.



His mother's luculent prophesy on rain interrupted his rumination on the altered state of her health. Without a hint of a rumination or negation on her prediction, he responded: "The weather forecaster on TV called for rain yesterday."

"Rain seems to cast a spell on him, playing a little cosmic mischief! The day he calls for rain, it never does!" A blithe, breezy chuckle flashed across her face and in the full-blown glow of it, he felt her face was radiant with the stunning beauty of the setting sun.

"I swear you still treasure a nostalgia for those monsoon showers of the past," she leaned closer to him as she spoke in a whisper, while letting her emaciated bony fingers sweep affectionately through his dishevelled hair. Like a stray offshore wind that generates countless swells in the sea, her words that came out like a bolt from the blue evoked a sudden stirring in his heart with myriads of childhood memories of rain. How could he ever forget those torrential

monsoon showers, which drenched him everyday on his way to school and back? Or his cherished rainy day passions of watching the glistening wet greenery of the nature, or sitting in quiet adoration, for hours, listening to the magical symphony of the patter?

"I liked those monsoon showers too, but not as much as you did." Her frail voice beckoned him from the nostalgic antiquity of his childhood to the reality of the here and now!

"There was something I disliked about them, though. That was, the monsoon showers did not know when to stop. After a week or so I would be tired of them. I would earnestly pray for the return of the bright sunny day. Like kids in the kindergarten, those showers made me to intone the age-old nursery rhyme, 'Rain, rain go away,...' But, to no avail! The monsoon rain continued with unflinching determination!"

He sat glued to the calming tone of her voice and the innate tranquillity of her presence. To the beauty of the sunset he gazed on her face! "My favourite always has been the summer rain. It is something all of us long for, just like we do today! We all want more of it. But the summer rain knows its boundary. The art of keeping it short and sweet! It embraces us with a quick refreshing hug, at a time when we are so baked and burned by the sizzling heat waves of the dog days!"

She took a deep breath and continued, "The summer rain, I often think, is like a good friend who never imposes on us, but reaches out when we are badly in need of her. Good friends make us feel supported, contained and empowered, by giving us a caring shoulder to lean on, an understanding heart that dispels fears, and a comforting arm that wipes tears. The effect of the summer rain is the same."

Spellbound by the transforming power of simple truths buried in her words, he felt he was traversing the plains of a deep inner world, beyond time and space.

Eventually, when he was eased of that trans-like experience, he found his mother was not there. Neither did he fathom when she had left him for the indoors, nor did he know how long he was sitting alone! But to his joyous surprise, he heard the torrential downpour outside. The magical symphony of the long-awaited summer rain! Sitting with a refreshing and redeeming feel of the soothing summer rain, he momentarily forgot all that he was griping about, a little while ago. The blunt edge of the heat and the humid! His heart enshrined an inner feeling of peace, a sense of blissfulness. As serendipitous as it seemed, he heard his mother in the living room concluding her prayers, "Thank God for the summer rain." He could not resist but respond quite naturally, "and for people who bless us with the summer rain effect!"

Films' Attempt to Make Grief Tangible

ROMIL UDAYAKUMAR TNV

Grief has always been a subject that has been overplayed throughout the history of cinema. It has managed to move us with its encapsulating energy. We all went absolutely numb when Jack slowly let go of Rose's palm and drowned in the ice-cold ocean. I remember being five and overwhelmed with emotions as poor Rose grieved her lover's death. *Miracle in Cell No 7* is a Turkish film directed by Mehmet Ada Öztekin.

The movie revolves around a man called Memo who has a cognitive disorder. His world is his young daughter and his grandma, while a young girl shows Memo her bag. Playfully, she slips and falls down the rock. Futile attempts at giving her CPR are misunderstood by the agonised father, who then imprisons Memo, who is tortured and persecuted wrongfully for her murder. The film spins around in an emotional spiral, drowning in the grief. The best part about this is that it seems as though the viewer is eavesdropping on an experience that is completely alien to us.

The story's grip on the audience grows stronger with time, and every time we know the obvious would happen, we still succumb to its labyrinth of unending grief. The little girl hooks on to you like a wound that does not fade away; it clings to your soul with more than just grief; it tatters around with hope and ambitions of meeting her ill father. The complexity of each character in the jail criminals, yet men that acknowledge their iniquity, is something that stands out. Instead of defending their crimes, they've come to an understanding that the state that they are in is because of the path they chose to follow. Grief has often been a cornerstone of cinema, a universal emotion that transcends cultures and languages, striking a deep, resonant chord within us all.

Continuing from the poignant themes in *Miracle in Cell No 7*, another film that immerses its audience in the raw, unrelenting depths of sorrow is *Manchester by the Sea* (2016), directed by Kenneth Lonergan. The film unravels the life of Lee Chandler, a man burdened by the crushing weight of his past and the responsibilities suddenly thrust upon him when his brother dies unexpectedly. Lee is called back to



the icy, windswept streets of his hometown to care for his teenage nephew, Patrick. Beneath the surface of this logistical obligation lies an ocean of pain—grief that suffocates and consumes. The narrative doesn't offer easy resolutions or grand catharsis; instead, it explores the painful reality of living with loss that cannot be undone.

Through masterful storytelling and Casey Affleck's restrained yet devastating performance, we see a man whose soul has been irrevocably fractured. The moments of silence in the film are deafening—whether it's Lee walking alone through the grey streets or sitting blankly in a room, unable to escape the memories that haunt him. It's in these unspoken moments that the film strikes the hardest, forcing us to confront the agonising truth of grief: it doesn't fade away; it only reshapes itself.

On a different yet equally haunting note, *Atonement* (2007), directed by Joe Wright, is a heart-breaking tale of love and loss, betrayal and guilt. Set against the backdrop of World War II, the film follows the lives of Cecilia Tallis, her lover Robbie Turner, and her younger sister Briony, whose single, reckless lie alters their fates forever. The film opens with lush, golden summer scenes at the Tallis estate, but beneath this idyllic exterior lies tension and misunderstanding that leads to tragedy. When Briony, a child barely grasping the weight of her actions, falsely accuses Robbie of a crime, the wheels of destiny are set in motion, leading to shattered lives and unfulfilled love.

The beauty of *Atonement* lies in its artistry. Every frame is meticulously crafted, from the sweeping Dunkirk beach scene to the intimate, almost dreamlike moments between Cecilia and Robbie. The narrative unfolds like a puzzle, slowly revealing the consequences of Briony's actions and the depth of her regret. The final revelation—the brutal, gut-wrenching truth—is a masterstroke that forces the viewer to confront the fragility of life and the inescapable weight of guilt.

The score, with its rhythmic typewriter keys echoing the urgency and inevitability of time, stays with you long after the credits roll.

What unites *Miracle in Cell No 7*, *Manchester by the Sea*, and *Atonement* is their shared commitment to depicting grief as it truly is: messy, unrelenting, and deeply personal. In *Miracle in Cell No 7*, the bond between a father and his daughter transforms the story into a harrowing yet hopeful journey, as the viewer becomes immersed in Memo's unjust fate and the desperate hope of reunion. *Manchester by the Sea* strips grief down to its barest, most unvarnished form, revealing the quiet devastation that lingers in the wake of unimaginable loss. And *Atonement* explores grief's complex relationship with guilt and the way one irrevocable mistake can ripple through time, leaving heartbreak in its wake.

Each of these films feels less like a constructed narrative and more like an intimate glimpse into the lives of real people, each grappling with grief in their own unique way. They serve not just as stories but as mirrors, reflecting the deep vulnerabilities and unspoken pains we all carry. Through their emotional weight, these films remind us that while grief may be isolating, it is also profoundly human, connecting us all in ways words often cannot. In exploring grief, these films demonstrate the unifying power of cinema to evoke emotions that transcend boundaries. *Miracle in Cell No 7*, *Manchester by the Sea*, and *Atonement* each unravel the multifaceted nature of grief, showing how it intertwines with hope, guilt, love, and redemption.

Whether through the bond of a father and daughter, the quiet suffering of a man broken by his past, or the devastating consequences of a single lie, these narratives offer a poignant reminder: grief is not just an emotion but an experience that shapes and reshapes us, reminding us of our shared humanity. These stories leave an indelible mark, not just because they depict sorrow, but because they reflect life's fragility and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of loss.



CINEMA

Oscars 2025: the Complete List of Winners

The Academy Awards took place on 3 March in Los Angeles, with *Anora* scooping the most honours, while *Conclave*, *The Brutalist*, *Wicked* and *Emilia Pérez* also took prizes. Here is the full list of winners.

Best picture	<i>Anora</i>
Best actress	Mikey Madison <i>Anora</i>
Best actor	Adrien Brody <i>The Brutalist</i>
Best supporting actress	Zoe Saldaña <i>Emilia Pérez</i>
Best supporting actor	Kieran Culkin <i>A Real Pain</i>
Best director	Sean Baker <i>Anora</i>
Best international feature	<i>I'm Still Here</i> Brazil
Best animated feature	<i>Flow</i>
Best original screenplay	<i>Anora</i> Sean Baker
Best adapted screenplay	<i>Conclave</i> Peter Straughan
Best original song	<i>El Mal</i> <i>Emilia Pérez</i>
Best original score	<i>The Brutalist</i>
Best documentary feature	<i>No Other Land</i>
Best costume design	<i>Wicked</i>
Best make-up and hairstyling	<i>The Substance</i>
Best production design	<i>Wicked</i>
Best sound	<i>Dune: Part Two</i>
Best film editing	<i>Anora</i>
Best cinematography	<i>The Brutalist</i>
Best visual effects	<i>Dune: Part Two</i>
Best live action short	<i>I'm Not a Robot</i>
Best animated short	<i>In the Shadow of the Cypress</i>
Best documentary short	<i>The Only Girl in the Orchestra</i>

Anora: The American Dream Reimagined

In *Anora*, Sean Baker crafts a modern fairy tale that refuses to follow the script. When Brooklyn sex worker Ani impulsively marries the son of a Russian oligarch, her rags-to-riches story takes a sharp turn as his parents dispatch handlers to annul the marriage and reclaim their son.

Mikey Madison delivers a revelatory performance as Ani, embodying both vulnerability and fierce determination. Baker's signature documentary-like approach creates an intimacy that makes her plight feel urgently personal, while his vibrant visual palette transforms New York into both dreamscape and battlefield.

What elevates *Anora* beyond its premise is its refusal to moralise. The film examines the collision of wealth, immigration, and autonomy without reducing anyone to caricature. As Ani fights for her marriage—or perhaps just for the respect of being asked what she wants—Baker poses uncomfortable questions about who gets to determine another's value.

In its brisk runtime, *Anora* manages to be wildly entertaining while offering a piercing look at class divides in America. It's a film that stays with you long after leaving the theatre, inviting reflection on what we trade in pursuit of stability and whose dreams we deem worthy of protection.



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



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

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



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

Little Sisters of the Poor

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

✉ bangalorelsp1900@gmail.com ☎ 080 - 22270273



INTEGRO
INFOTECH & CONSULTING



MOBILE APP DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

**UNIQUE
MOBILE
APP DESIGNS**



MOBILE APP DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Android and IOS for institutions – Schools, Colleges, Nursing homes, Hospitals and NGO's

- User friendly platform based development that enables institutions and NGO to update NEWS directly
- Send NEWS and Notification directly to your target customer base [Students or Donors or Collaborators]

BUILD YOUR NETWORK AND SOCIAL MEDIA VISIBILITY

- As news and notifications in the APP are quick share enabled for all social media platforms
- Engage your stakeholders efficiently and Effectively – Send NEWS, PHOTOS & VIDEOS directly to their mobile phones.

WHY INTEGRO INFOTECH?

- Customised APP Development, each APP is unique
- Unlimited Storage for NEWS and Events
- Unlimited Push Notification Alerts
- APP based contact form /reply form/application form...

**CONNECT WITH US
FOR YOUR NEEDS**



Martin Patrick
Manager Marketing



marketing@integro.co.in



888 426 7304, 80 50074851



www.integro.co.in