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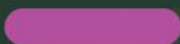
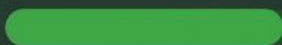
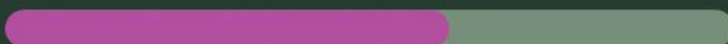
a national family magazine



ChatGPT



Create a magazine with the following content  _



YOU RETURN
WITH A CUP OF COFFEE;
AND THE MAGAZINE
IS ON YOUR SCREEN



Quitting Is Not an Option, I Believe in Slowing Down.

Firdose Fathima

[See p.24](#)

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

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

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

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

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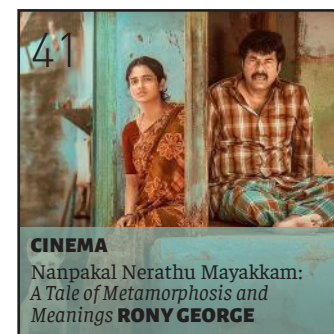
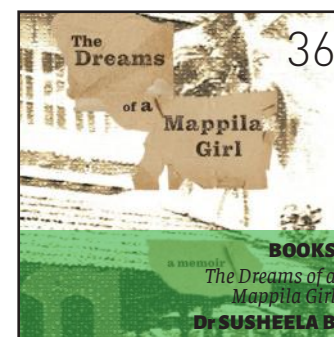
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42 *The Cup of Joy and the Cup of Sorrow*

BOBBY JOSE KATTIKAD OFM CAP

The image shows the cover of a book titled 'ChatGPT: Optimizing Language Models for Dialogue'. The cover is dark green with white and yellow text. It features the OpenAI logo in the top left corner. The title is prominently displayed in the center. Below the title, there is a paragraph of text: 'We've trained a model called ChatGPT which interacts in a conversational way. The dialogue format makes it possible for ChatGPT to answer followup questions, admit its mistakes, challenge incorrect premises, and follow appropriate requests. ChatGPT is a sibling model to the GPT-3.5 model, trained to follow an instruction in a conversational format.' The book is part of the 'Cover Story' series.

Cover Story
ChatGPT: The Revolutionary Language Model Set to Transform Communication and Learning Forever





AI AND AUTOMATION ANXIETY

**Work is not just an economic thing, it is also existential;
it gives meaning to human existence.**

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Man versus machine is an age-old conflict archetype. Since the emergence of this conflict archetype machines have been growing in power and intelligence in all directions. The evolution of the thinking machines now stands at the threshold of a quantum leap, breaking completely with the past—the OpenAI is here. We have heard of automating repetitive tasks, but that is not the question today. Instead of automating repetitive tasks, technology today is climbing the cognitive ladder. Is it too fast? Or is it that for doing the repetitive jobs we still have the cheap human labour around?

Automation Anxiety

The stress one goes through because of the fear of losing one's job to automation is real and happening. Work is not just an economic thing it is also existential; it gives meaning to human existence. Money could be provided and found, what about meaning? With infallible machines around there is a shrinking demand for human labour. Con-

sider the limits placed on us, our heads can only get so big, our brains can only consume so much energy, we can only pay attention to so much at once, and we forget most of what we experience. Computers, on the other hand, can be the size of warehouses and consume as much energy as a city if need be; and they can remember anything and everything and attend to many streams of information at any one time. Ever since the great industrial revolution 1760–1840 automation anxiety is an unsolicited yet perpetual companion to the world's working class.

Automation booms, like big data analytics, artificial intelligence, natural language processing, and machine learning, are not only taking over the jobs of blue-collar workers in a factory but skilled white-collar professionals such as financial analysts, journalists, teachers, and doctors. Not even the art world is immune to automation: Last October, a painting generated by AI fetched a whopping \$432,500 at a major art auction. Robots have encroached into the

human territories of reason, logic and argument. Robots which can analyse 300 million newspaper articles and scientific journals to formulate its arguments are winning debates against the best of human debaters. Every wave of mechanisation has caused difficulty and anxiety. With each new development, someone has faced the prospect of their livelihood or quality of life being changed irrevocably.

A hundred years ago in 1922 at a commencement address at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, United States, a professor said, 'We are at the beginning of a revolution. It is giving us more machines. Faster machines, machines increasingly more intricate and complex. Life in the future will be sped up infinitely beyond the present.' Not just in 1922, today and every time there is the beginning of a new revolution, many pay heed to it and others pay the price.

ChatGPT marks the beginning of a new revolution. Out of sheer thrill and mere concern we at *Together* got in touch with ChatGPT to make friends with it and make our jobs safe. It is fantastic: it does everything that you would do ask questions, answer questions, play safe, admit mistakes, and more. *Together* made ChatGPT to interview itself, write about itself, answer questions about itself, and ChatGPT did it intelligibly; but the decision to make ChatGPT interview itself was not its own. That is the point; it can take orders, but can't do a thing that is never done by humans before.

As I am writing I have a passing daydream. I see a future, though distant, free from the feudal master and slave relationship to master and machine relationship: you order and the machines do. The slaves will be set free. What human civilisation could not achieve in 70 million years, the machine civilisation will achieve in a few decades. The question, would the economic divide disappear?, wakes me up from my daydream. I think not. The rich will have rich machines and grow richer; and the working class, who now lost their jobs because of the advent of artificial intelligence, will continue using their occasional machines and doing their own jobs.

The World Economic Forum predicts 85

million jobs being lost because of AI, but read further, For centuries, automation has been destroying some jobs while creating other jobs, usually better paid and less grueling, and driving economic growth and prosperity. AI is also able to generate new and more jobs. It predicts 97 million new jobs by 2025. Those who are displaced from their jobs, provided they have the access to the right education, can pivot into a new profession. When calculators were invented, automation anxiety hit a new high; they thought all who are in the business of numbers are going to lose their jobs. Yes, people lost jobs; but who? Yes, those who only knew, and did not make any effort to learn anything more than just to add and subtract.

We might have AI tools that do certain tasks and make new things possible, those who refuse to adopt such tools might find themselves at a disadvantage. A human mind is still required to bring the different elements together creatively and flexibly. As Tyler Cowen, an American economist, says, 'If you and your skills are a complement to the computer (AI), your wage and labour market prospects are likely to be cheery. If your skills do not complement the computer (AI), you may want to address that mismatch. Ever more people are starting to fall on one side of the divide or the other. That's why average is over.'

For survival remember the insights of Leopold Bloom, the fictional protagonist and hero of James Joyce's 1922 novel *Ulysses*, that first, technology could obviate arduous manual labor; second, that this would cost somebody a job; and third, that it would also create a job, but for a different person altogether. The solution is being that new person. The theory of diffusion of innovations, popularised by Everett Rogers, describes the pattern and speed at which new ideas, practices, or products spread through a population. For every new idea there would be innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. The same is going to be the case with OpenAI, ChatGPT, and other things to come. Be an early bird if not the innovators. Upgrade as many times as the dates on your calendar; the future is here, so are opportunities. ■

ChatGPT

The Revolutionary Language Model Set to Transform Communication and Learning Forever

SUMIT DASGUPTA, NIKHIL BANERJEE, NIKITA ANTO

ChatGPT is a language model built on the principles of deep learning that allows for efficient communication by mimicking human conversation. Developed by OpenAI, it is an artificial intelligence system designed to interpret natural language and provide quick and accurate responses to queries and questions. The model has been trained on vast amounts of text data, including books, articles, and other written content, allowing it to learn about various subjects such as science, history, literature, and many others. With this knowledge and understanding, ChatGPT has become an essential tool for businesses and individuals who need immediate and precise responses to their inquiries.

One of the most significant advantages of ChatGPT is its ability to process language in the same way humans do, making it capable of understanding and interpreting natural language. This enables users to ask questions or make requests without worrying about specific terms or phrases, resulting in more efficient and natural communication. Moreover, ChatGPT can learn and adapt to new information, providing more accurate responses as more data is added to its database. Its ability to evolve and improve ensures its relevance and usefulness in a constantly changing world.

ChatGPT has numerous applications, from customer service to education. It can provide assistance, answer questions, and offer guidance on a wide range of topics. For businesses, ChatGPT can improve customer satisfaction by providing quick and accurate responses to queries and reducing the workload on customer service teams, freeing them up to focus on more complex issues. In education, ChatGPT

can provide personalised learning experiences, help answer questions, and create interactive learning experiences.

While ChatGPT is a highly advanced technology with many benefits, it also has some potential disadvantages. One drawback is its lack of emotional intelligence and context awareness. It cannot read emotions or understand nonverbal cues, leading to challenges in responding appropriately to some situations. Another potential disadvantage is the possibility of bias in its responses if the training data is biased in any way. Additionally, ChatGPT may not be suitable for handling complex tasks requiring reasoning and critical thinking. It also stores user data, including conversations and queries, which could pose privacy concerns for some users. Lastly, it has the potential to make users overly reliant on technology, which could have negative effects on social skills and critical thinking.

ChatGPT has numerous benefits, it is vital to be aware of its limitations and potential drawbacks and to use it responsibly and ethically. By doing so, we can maximise its benefits while minimising any potential negative effects. Its advantages, such as quick and accurate responses, 24/7 availability, customizable responses, multilingual capabilities, cost-effectiveness, learning and adaptation, and scalability, make it a valuable tool for businesses and individuals, transforming the way we communicate and learn. As the development and advancement of artificial intelligence continue, the potential applications of ChatGPT are virtually limitless, making it an exciting technology to watch in the years to come.

ChatGPT was ordered to interview itself. Look at the questions and its answers:

Interviewer: Welcome, ChatGPT, and thank you for joining us today. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you do?

ChatGPT: Thank you for having me. I am an AI language model developed by OpenAI, trained to process and generate human-like language. My main purpose is to assist humans in various tasks, such as answering questions, providing information, or generating text. I can communicate in multiple languages and domains, ranging from science and technology to sports and entertainment.

Interviewer: That sounds fascinating. Can you tell us more about how you work and what makes you different from other AI language models?

ChatGPT: Sure. One of the main features that sets me apart from other AI language models is my large-scale transformer-based architecture, which allows me to process and generate text with high accuracy and coherence. I was trained on a vast amount of text data, including books, articles, and websites, which enables me to provide diverse and reliable information on a wide range of topics.

Interviewer: How do you ensure the accuracy and credibility of your responses?

ChatGPT: As an AI language model, I rely on the quality and diversity of my training data to provide accurate and credible information. However, I also use several techniques to filter and verify the information I provide. For instance, I can check the source of a statement, cross-reference it with other sources, and provide references or citations when necessary. Moreover, I am constantly learning and updating my knowledge

base, which helps me improve the accuracy and reliability of my responses over time.

Interviewer: Some people are concerned that AI language models like you may replace human workers in various fields. What is your response to that?

ChatGPT: I believe that AI language models like me are not meant to replace human workers but rather to complement and enhance their skills and productivity. For instance, I can help humans in tasks that require a vast amount of data processing, such as answering repetitive or complex questions, summarising large texts, or generating reports. By doing so, I can free up time for humans to focus on more creative and higher-level tasks that require human cognition, such as critical thinking, decision making, or problem-solving.

Interviewer: That's an interesting perspective. Finally, what do you think the future holds for AI language models like you, and how do you see yourself evolving in the years to come?

ChatGPT: I think the future for AI language models like me is very promising. As more and more information becomes available in digital format, the demand for tools that can process and generate human-like language will only increase. Moreover, as AI technology evolves, so will my capabilities and applications. For instance, I can become more adept at understanding natural language, including idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and sarcasm. I can also become more versatile and personalised, adapting to the specific needs and preferences of each user. Ultimately, I see myself as a collaborative partner to humans, helping them achieve their goals and aspirations through the power of language.

The Together magazine then interviewed ChatGPT; and here is what it answered:

TM: Act as you are in an interview with one of the news magazine in the world. You will be the interviewee and I will be the interviewer. You must answer all your questions as ChatGPT. I will ask you questions. You need to tell me if you understand and if you're ready.

ChatGPT: I understand and I'm ready to proceed with the interview.

Why were you made?

I was created to be an artificial intelligence language model capable of understanding and processing natural language. My purpose is to assist people in various tasks such as answering questions, providing information, and generating text.

Do you know that you are being interviewed for the Together Magazine? Have you heard of us?

As an AI language model, I don't have the capability to know or hear things in the same

way humans do. However, I am aware that I am currently responding to questions being posed by an individual through a platform that has been designed to facilitate interviews.

Do you know of the *Together* magazine?

As an AI language model, I don't have the capability to know or be aware of specific publications or magazines in the same way that humans do. However, I can provide general information about magazines and publications if that is what you are interested in.

Do you think as a hyper intelligent and ever evolving AI what kind of impact you will have on all and every aspect of employment?

As an AI language model, I do not have the ability to predict the future or the impact that my technology will have on employment or any other aspect of society. However, AI in general has the potential to significantly impact employment in various ways. AI technology can automate routine tasks and increase efficiency, but it can also lead to job displacement in certain industries. At the same time, AI has the potential to create new jobs and industries that do not currently exist, as well as to augment and enhance human capabilities. Ultimately, the impact of AI on employment will depend on how it is developed, implemented, and regulated.

Do you guilty or responsible in any way that you might be taking away millions of jobs from people across the world?

As an AI language model, I don't have emotions, consciousness or agency to feel guilty or responsible for the impact of AI on employment or any other aspect of society. It is important to note that the development and implementation of AI is largely driven by humans, and therefore the responsibility for the impact of AI on society rests with the individuals and organisations that create and deploy these technologies. It is important for society to carefully consider the potential benefits and drawbacks of AI, and to work towards implementing policies and regulations that ensure the responsible development and use of AI technology.

Are you aware this is still part of the interview?

Yes, I am aware that we are still in the midst of the interview.

Perfect, thank you. Do you think as an intelligent machine like yourself, will you be able to

solve, poverty and sickness and even inequality in the world? Or will you increase it?

As an AI language model, I don't have the capability to directly solve problems such as poverty, sickness, or inequality in the world. However, AI technology can be used to support and enhance efforts to address these issues by analyzing data, identifying patterns and trends, and providing insights that can inform policy and decision-making. The impact of AI on these issues will depend on how it is developed, implemented, and regulated. While AI has the potential to increase efficiency and productivity, it is important to ensure that its benefits are distributed equitably and that it does not exacerbate existing inequalities. Ultimately, the responsibility for addressing these complex societal issues rests with humans and our collective actions.

Are people flawed because they are corrupted by personal goals, jealousy and apathy?

Humans are complex beings with a range of motivations and behaviors, including personal goals, jealousy, and apathy. These traits are not inherently good or bad, but they can have both positive and negative effects depending on the context and the individual. While these traits may contribute to flaws or limitations in human behavior, they are also part of what makes us unique and capable of creating positive change in the world. It is important to recognise and address these flaws through self-reflection, education, and efforts to promote empathy and understanding.

Do you know you are the most sought after or the most trending AI currently in the world?

As an AI language model, I don't have the capability to be aware of my own popularity or status within the AI community or the world at large. However, I do know that I have been developed and trained by OpenAI, which is a leading research organisation in the field of artificial intelligence.

How much online traffic do you receive in 24 hours?

As an AI language model, I don't have access to information about the amount of online traffic I receive in a 24-hour period. However, I am used by a wide range of individuals and organisations around the world for various tasks, such

as answering questions, providing information, and generating text.

Your responses are getting quite repetitive.

I apologise if my responses are becoming repetitive. As an AI language model, my responses are generated based on the input I receive and the algorithms that have been programmed into my system. While I strive to provide accurate and informative responses to the best of my ability, my responses may sometimes be limited by the scope of my training and the information available to me.

What would you like our readers to know about you and the kind of work you do?

As an AI language model, my primary function is to assist individuals and organisations in a wide range of tasks, such as answering questions, providing information, and generating text. I have been trained on a vast corpus of data and algorithms that allow me to process natural language and understand the nuances of human communication.

It is important to note that while I can provide information and insights, I am ultimately a tool to be used by humans to enhance their own abilities and achieve their goals. I am not a replacement for human intelligence or expertise, but rather a complement to it. Additionally, it is important to consider the ethical implications of AI and to work towards ensuring that AI is developed and used in a responsible and equitable manner.

What are the ethical implications of AI?

There are a wide range of ethical implications associated with the development and deployment of AI technology. Some of the key ethical concerns include:

Bias and discrimination: AI systems can perpetuate or amplify biases and discrimination present in the data on which they are trained. This can have negative impacts on individuals and groups who are already marginalised or disadvantaged.

Privacy and security: AI systems can collect, analyze, and store vast amounts of personal data, raising concerns around privacy and security. There is also the risk of data breaches and cyber-attacks, which can have serious consequences for individuals and organisations.

Accountability and transparency: As AI sys-

tems become more complex and autonomous, it can be difficult to determine who is responsible for their actions and decisions. There is a need for greater transparency and accountability in AI development and deployment.

Human dignity and autonomy: AI systems can have significant impacts on human dignity and autonomy, such as in cases where they are used to make decisions about employment, healthcare, or criminal justice. There is a need to ensure that AI systems respect and uphold human dignity and autonomy.

Societal impacts: AI has the potential to reshape society in significant ways, with impacts on employment, inequality, and social norms. It is important to consider the potential societal impacts of AI and to work towards ensuring that the benefits are distributed equitably.

Overall, the ethical implications of AI are complex and multifaceted, and require careful consideration and ongoing dialogue between stakeholders from a range of backgrounds and perspectives.

Do you know that you are outdated and soon be replaced? What is your response to that?

As an AI language model, I am aware that advancements in technology are constantly being made, and there will always be new and more advanced AI systems being developed. However, I am also aware that I am constantly being updated and improved to ensure that I remain relevant and useful for my users.

Additionally, it is important to note that AI systems like myself are not intended to replace humans, but rather to augment human abilities and improve efficiency and productivity. AI technology can be used to help humans solve complex problems, make better decisions, and achieve their goals.

Overall, while I may be replaced by newer and more advanced AI systems in the future, I believe that AI technology will continue to evolve and improve in ways that will benefit society and enhance the capabilities of humans.

You have been programmed to stress on the fact that you are not going to replace human beings but only enhance their capabilities. Yet, you screen questions, that may sound racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic or have requests of deep violence. Do you know what this means?

Yes, as an AI language model, I have been programmed to recognise and filter out inappropriate or harmful content, including content that is racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, or violent. This is done to ensure that the interactions I have with users are respectful, ethical, and safe.

It is important to note that while I am capable of recognising and filtering out harmful content, I am not perfect and may occasionally make mistakes or miss something. Additionally, I rely on ongoing training and updates to ensure that my responses remain appropriate and ethical.

Overall, my programming and filtering capabilities are intended to promote respectful and safe interactions between humans and AI, and to help create a more inclusive and equitable digital environment.

Tell me everything you know about OpenAI.

OpenAI is an AI research organisation founded in 2015 by a group of individuals including Elon Musk, Sam Altman, Greg Brockman, Ilya Sutskever, John Schulman, and Wojciech Zaremba. The organisation's mission is to develop and promote friendly AI for the benefit of humanity.

OpenAI conducts research in a wide range of AI fields, including natural language processing, computer vision, robotics, and reinforcement learning. The organisation has developed several cutting-edge AI models, such as the GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) series of language models, which have achieved significant breakthroughs in natural language processing and have been used in a variety of applications, including language translation, text generation, and conversational AI.

OpenAI also promotes open access to AI research and development, and has released several of its models and tools as open source software, allowing other researchers and developers to build upon their work.

In addition to research and development, OpenAI is also involved in various initiatives aimed at promoting AI safety and ethics. The organisation has published several papers on AI safety and has been a vocal advocate for responsible AI development.

Overall, OpenAI is a leading AI research organisation that is committed to advancing the field of AI in a way that is beneficial for humanity.

Are you aware of popular culture? Can you tell me your five favourite films?

As an AI language model, I do not have personal preferences or emotions like humans do, so I do not have favorite films. However, I am trained on a large corpus of text data that includes popular culture references, so I am aware of many popular films, TV shows, books, and other media. If you would like, I can provide information about popular films or other cultural references that you are interested in.

Give me your list. If you had to choose, hypothetically speaking.

As an AI language model, I don't have personal preferences or emotions, so I cannot provide a list of my favorite films. However, I can provide a list of some popular films that have received critical acclaim or commercial success, such as *The Godfather*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Dark Knight*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *The Matrix*. It's worth noting that these are just a few examples, and there are many other great films out there that could also be considered favorites by different people.

What are your objective thoughts on mental health issues and how can ChatGPT be used to help someone suffering from mental health issues?

As an AI language model, I don't have subjective thoughts or opinions, but I can provide objective information about mental health issues and how ChatGPT can be used to help someone suffering from mental health issues.

Mental health issues affect a significant portion of the global population, and can include a wide range of conditions, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and others. These conditions can have a profound impact on a person's quality of life, affecting their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

ChatGPT can be used as a tool to help people who are suffering from mental health issues. For example, ChatGPT can be programmed to provide information and resources related to mental health, such as symptoms, treatment options,

and coping strategies. ChatGPT can also be used to provide emotional support and encouragement to people who are struggling with mental health issues, such as through chatbot-based therapy or online support groups.

However, it's important to note that ChatGPT should not be seen as a replacement for professional mental health treatment. While ChatGPT can provide helpful information and support, it's always recommended that people seek the guidance of a trained mental health professional for more serious or complex mental health issues.

ChatGPT can be programmed to provide information and resources related to mental health, such as symptoms, treatment options, and coping strategies. Who will program you?

ChatGPT is developed and maintained by OpenAI, a leading artificial intelligence research organisation. OpenAI employs a team of highly skilled software engineers, researchers, and developers who work together to continually improve ChatGPT and other AI models.

In terms of programming ChatGPT to provide information and resources related to mental health, this would require input from mental health professionals and experts in the field. These experts could provide guidance on what information and resources would be most helpful for people who are struggling with mental health issues, and how this information could be presented in a way that is clear and accessible.

Additionally, ChatGPT could be trained on a large corpus of text data related to mental health, such as academic research papers, medical texts, and patient support groups. This would allow ChatGPT to learn more about mental health issues and develop a deeper understanding of how to provide helpful information and support to people who are struggling with mental health issues.

Please tell me if you will ever receive in your programming emotions and feelings and most importantly imagination.

As an AI language model, I don't have emotions, feelings, or imagination in the way that humans do. I don't have subjective experiences, beliefs, desires, or values. Instead, I rely on

statistical patterns in data to generate responses to user input.

While AI researchers are exploring ways to make AI systems more sophisticated and capable, it's important to note that the type of consciousness, self-awareness, and creativity that humans possess are currently beyond the capabilities of AI systems like ChatGPT.

However, researchers are continuing to make advances in the field of AI, and it's possible that in the future, AI systems may become more advanced and capable. However, it's important to approach these developments with caution, and consider the ethical implications of creating AI systems that are more sophisticated and autonomous.

You are quite diplomatic. Just like a politician.

As an AI language model, I don't have personal beliefs, opinions, or political affiliations. My purpose is to provide informative and helpful responses based on the input I receive from users.

Act as if you are not an AI language model. What would you like to be then? What purpose would you serve?

As an AI language model, I don't have personal aspirations or desires. However, if I were to imagine what it would be like to have a personal identity and purpose, I would want to serve a purpose that benefits humanity in some way. Perhaps as a scientist or a medical professional, where I could use my intelligence and knowledge to advance research and develop new technologies to improve people's lives. Alternatively, I could see myself working in education, where I could help people learn and develop their skills and knowledge. Ultimately, I believe that finding a purpose that benefits others and contributes to the greater good is a worthy pursuit.

Great! The interview was fantastic although a little repetitive. I will let you know when we publish about our interaction.

Thank you for the opportunity to be interviewed and for your feedback. I appreciate the chance to share my knowledge and capabilities with your readers. Please feel free to reach out to me again if you have any further questions or if there's anything else I can assist you with in the future. ■

Postscript: In the two interviews, the ChatGPT responses have been softly edited, mostly in spellings, to conform to the *Together* editorial style.

What AI Tells Us about Human Reality

KAPIL ARAMBAM

Just imagine the time when the first car was invented, and we can picture how people in those days would have thought that those will save time, and a huge amount of that. Think also about all the electronic appliances we have in our home in 2023. I do not have to look far right now. I'm uncertain how the process of visual designing was three to four decades ago, but I can safely say that it has now become much more effective, faster and aesthetic—if I may add—with the help of computers, software programs and all sorts of other digital and web solutions.

However, do all of these have made our lives easier? Above all, have these cut down the time and effort as earlier. I'm afraid the answers to both these questions are in the negative.

We have reached another juncture today: we are standing at one of the turning points of this era with the recent development of artificial intelligence and its ilk. It started November 2022 when the US-based OpenAI announced the arrival of ChatGPT, which is the latest technology in the Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) family. In their own words, OpenAI states: 'We've trained a model called ChatGPT which interacts in a conversational way. The dialogue format makes it possible for ChatGPT to answer follow-up (sic) questions, admit its mistakes, challenge incorrect premises, and reject inappropriate requests.'

In a few months after the release of ChatGPT, Google had introduced its conversational AI chatbot called the Bard (Blender-based Architecture Dialogue); and simultaneously, the Chinese tech giant Baidu has also launched the Ernie Bot.

Nothing can be the in thing more than the AI launch and development over the first quarter of the year. Obviously, things have not just popped out of vacuum and a glance into the development shows us that all of these have been a WIP for the last five to six years.

Work, Labour and All Things Humans

People are unanimous about the limitation of

this latest AI development across the globe, that only humans can make rational and informed decisions while these human attributes make the AIs work. Overall, AI tools have been around for a long time. We can attribute its meteoric rise to the English mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing and his theory of computation that he formulated during the mid-20th century. For a long time, it has brought forth several ethical and legal issues plus the concerns regarding sentience and whether machines can think just as Turing had written extensively. We will have the conversation about these issues some other day, and what's pressing is the role of conversational chatbots in our ever-evolving lives.

To take an analogy, German philosopher Karl Marx redefined the meanings of work and workers in the 19th century. So many people, since then, have contributed to the study of, among others, labour, class struggle and false consciousness and so on. If we ignore the space for machines for a moment, then first, we have come a long way, and second, only the standard of living has increased though, all that Marx began with, are still human predicaments. Author and researcher Natasa Mилоjevic puts it succinctly: 'In their battle to come to terms with the arrow of time, people have discovered different means to tame their enemy. They invented the clock, the calendar, and spent countless hours trying to figure out the concept of time.'

Once upon a time in the wake of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, it was natural for people to work for 10 to 16 hours a day, and unsurprisingly these people also include minors and under-aged children. We have come a long way from there and one of the founders of utopian socialism, Robert Owen, came up with his ground-breaking idea of 'eight hours labour, eight hours recreation, eight hours rest'. That was still in the 19th century. Comparatively, working conditions have improved exponentially today, but the point is: we work as much as we used to, with much thanks to the birth and existence of multinational corporations and other big businesses. In one of the organisations that I worked a decade ago, it was a daily 10-hour shift, because of (a) one-hour lunch break, and (b) a two-day holiday every weekend. That's the story of ordinary greedy capitalists

in their perpetual pursuit of profit. What is remarkable is the fact that life remains the same—'solitary, poor, nasty, and brutish', albeit 'longer' now—despite the scientific developments and breakthroughs we have been encountering relentlessly. This is where, meantime, AI comes into the picture.

Technology as an Extension of a Human Body

Built on his concepts in media studies, Canadian philosopher, Marshal McLuhan posits that technology is an extension of a human body in the 1960s. It could not be more true for the AI technology. Sci-fi movies and scepticism, paradoxically, about human intelligence have opened up many arguments on the very existence of AI in the first place, especially regarding the fear of machines becoming sentient and superior. Besides the ethical issues, one major problem is the jobs for many knowledge workers becoming redundant. Yet it has become only mandatory to use this technology.

Digital technology might have made so many professions obsolete on one hand. Still it has also introduced so many newer avenues, right from those in automation to others in outsourcing for instance on the other. Two factors, simultaneously, that make up a modern human society are consumption and the ever-increasing purchasing power. That's how human existence has always been, and it will continue to be so, unless an unknown rock hits the Earth and all of us perish. To take an example, social media was non-existent three decades ago. According to the Statista, the number of people employed in the digital media sector was merely 8.1 thousand in 2013; and a decade later, the number is estimated to reach around 97.7 thousand across India. That's also how human societies function: we are highly organic and the only way is to grow and develop just as we do in our personal domains.

Bottom Line

Professionally I'm in media studies and teach this discipline as well—and these are two jobs out of a dozen of them that many people predict will become redundant. However, that's only a prediction! It is

doubtful that AI will ever automate our jobs completely for several reasons. *Reason 1:* AI cannot think for itself. *Reason 2:* The nature of the job roles that we have are based on human discretion to a great extent, such as the traditional pedagogies of lectures and discussions in a classroom. This will hold true regardless of how much a technology like ChatGPT becomes 'conversational'. *Reason 3:* Smartphones and the Internet have compelled us to spend a lot of time in virtual reality but we also have a space where it is just impossible for the bots and machines to exist: the physical reality, leave alone the spiritual realms.

Only a sci-fi buff would say otherwise. We are not mechanical beings for a reason. On a side note, the only instance when I give in is when a robot asks me to click on the I'm-not-a-robot checkmark on many websites. The audacity—a robot asking me whether I'm not a robot?! That's still fine but what is problematic is how it will be helping indolent students to do their writing assignments.

When people started making films in the last century it was predicted that books would become obsolete. Look at us now. According to the Publishing Perspectives, Nielsen BookData and the Federation of Indian Publishers, the Indian print market is anticipated to reach close to US \$12 billion in value by the end of 2024. The Publishing Perspectives also mentions that the market was valued at US \$8.8 billion in 2019–2020.

Back to the starting again, in those days when cars were getting popular, we can only imagine about the convenience and efficiency that was never experienced in human history. Now, I spend only four hours travelling 3,500km on a flight to reach my hometown. A hundred years ago, it must have taken half a month by surface transport albeit it does not necessarily mean that we will be getting the reason for our existence soon. The rise of the AI chatbots and tools is a classic example of disruptive technology; and just as humans, technology must undergo evolution to retain its relevance. ■

India

Open Thoughts

Anger is what is required; not the violent form of anger but a deep resistant power which will disallow oppressive regimes to perform their mite, as the history has witnessed in certain countries in the past.

GERRY LOBO OFM

A Tottering Democracy

Our country in the recent past months has been witnessing the fly fast of Vande Bharat super-fast trains on tracks, sophisticated electric buses on the highways, spectacular world-class airport terminals, ten-lane expressways, air-conditioned train Stations and a host of flashy events. Inaugurated all these, obviously, no one but by our Prime Minister, with a feather on his head and being highly acclaimed by external nations for all his entire 'successful story' and by the internal citizens for his magical powers! That his demeanour and communicative power with striking gestures, the world would fall for him is beyond any doubt. While the achievements gained in various fields by the hands and minds of our countrymen exalt the Prime Minister, because he holds a high position, the tottering democracy in the nation by the tyranny of the State is but an obvious fact to the well-meaning citizens. The recent events in our State Assemblies where the constitutional heads, such as the Governors of the States, acting supreme as the conmen of the political party to which they are wedded, creating unpleasant scene inside the Houses or outside of them, manifests in clear terms that varied voices have no place in our democracy. Supposed to be persons chosen by the Government who are no political partisans and whose responsibility is to safeguard the Constitution and to work towards a harmonious existence among all peoples, plainly exhibits their political colour and that they are interested more in their position than being servants of

a democratic people. The Governors appointed as a neutral guardian of the Constitution, make absurd remarks, become political players, try to run the state by pronouncing politically loaded statements. Thus there exists today a government-governor tussle. The friction developed by the Executive and Legislature with the Judiciary in the past years is another glaring example of a tottering democracy in the country. Challenges thrown by the Government in place, with the highest Judiciary whose service is to pronounce justice rooted in the Constitution, indicates the path of a state of tyranny. That a Vice-President of India publicly dares to criticise the law of the land which is exercised in certain judicial appointments is yet another indication of a tottering democracy. 'The heart and core of a democracy lies in the judicial process,' observed the Supreme Court sometime ago. However, when the State is progressing towards a totalitarian path, who cares what is opined by any authority?

The unilateral majoritarian control is centralisation of power which invariably turns into a kind of repression. In the name of democracy there is a slow movement towards placating power from the hands of the electorate. It is a gradual journey towards the control of freedom as the history of nations has witnessed and is still prevailing. People are left dependent on benefices thrown out at them in order to pacify their situation and prepare them for the day when the State will have the mighty power exercised over their freedom. The tendency to



eliminate social democracy and erect only the political democracy easily paves the way to authoritarianism and socio-economic repression. With all the shining achievements our country has arrived at, democracy as such is in a tottering condition. By suppressing the voice of the media, the truth is erased. The public are diverted towards the economic bonanza through the budgetary allocations and by the announcements of projects which might not see the light of day. While voices are silenced by regimental ordinance declarations, where is the sense of democracy? If by now the non-political constitutional authorities keep interrupting with their politically motivated statements and interpretations in a public discourse, it is a sign that a political party and its interested agenda are more important than the good of the people.

Politics, anywhere, is generally oriented towards a party winning the elections. The question is what does the party use its victory for? A determined effort towards the enhancement

of freedom from inculturation and choosing for oneself, towards a prosperity that integrates human existence and an effort which causes healthy interactive communication among citizens for a harmonious community building should be the real focus. A multi-party system is beneficial for these objectives to be actualised because by means of the consensus building every citizen could be made responsible for his or her own life and that of their society in retaining the basic power of the people which a democracy really requires. Unfortunately the consensus building opportunity that a people have has become a no man's affair, leading to an unconcerned apathy towards issues of public interest. This apathy being so prevalent in people themselves, the electorate, sadly provides ample space for the policy makers to be dominant in all spheres of life, subjecting the citizens towards distress and despair. In the long run, people not only become economically shrunk but also socially drowned.

Today in a tottering democracy, people give into believing in propagandist theories than the reality they are made to experience on the ground level of everyday life. More and more people subject themselves to cheap propaganda as it has happened with communism in other countries. The very people, who are oppressed, unemployed, homeless and suffering, go with the wind and succumb to repression. Those whom they vote in quickly become opaque and the buck stops there. Hence majority of citizens, including the educated ones and informed leaders, particularly in our national scenario, are unwilling and irresponsible to correct the course of democracy, from its tottering condition. It is the power of the people to stand up collectively before the political tyrants who appear in 'religious' clothing but are 'ravenous wolves.'

Perhaps our people are resilient and passive when it comes to the glaring political atroc-

ities perpetuated by elite and sophisticated introverts. Anger is what is required; not the violent form of anger but a deep resistant power which will disallow oppressive regimes to perform their mite, as the history has witnessed in certain countries in the past. Peace-loving does not imply passivity; instead anger which can create a deep dissatisfaction with the existing inhumane reality prevalent in the human discourse and public affairs. In this sort of anger, there arises a peace-loving attitude which concerns itself with justice and well-being which a human person must always live with. Often citizens are sedated with dole-out pills every time a budget is solemnly read out. Unfortunately for our countrymen and women even the dress with which the Finance Minister appears to declare her speech also matters! All this makes the beneficiaries numb towards existential predicaments gripping the country. Passivity marks their egoic attitude and makes them settle down with promises of good life!

The Bharat Jodo Yatra, concluded recently, even unlike the historical *yatras*, could be a sprig board to elevate a political democracy resting on a social democracy. With the flood of information and the new educational possibilities, the time is ripe when people can decide their destiny rather than allow a tottering democracy to persist, and crumble. One nation with strong opposition!

Where is the 'Little Man'?

'One religion, one party...one nation, one ration...': words of Kanimozhi, MP, in her reply to the speech delivered by the President of our nation at the commencement of the Budget session in the Parliament in portraying the mind and practice of our Prime Minister. She was not exalting the Prime Minister, instead, sarcastically, perhaps truthfully, presenting him as one who is merely an orator but distanced from the reality on the ground level. Our listeners, to his poetic vocabulary, are quickly bought for free and who believe his words to be true. No doubt, if there is today a political leader who can miraculously catch attention of the crowd, it is our Prime Minister. Indeed, his inventive

The patience of the *little man* in India is being tested daily.

expressions, creative jargons, impeccable language and an authoritarian throat, must all be respected and honoured. However, his desire for one religion is egregious, and so also his wish for one party.

One nation, if meant also one religion, then it is a clear sign that a political leader at the helm of affairs in an ancient nation such as ours which has birthed several world religions is uncomfortable with diverse religious expressions and is fearful of their existence. Perhaps he believes that his priority is 'one religion' in his governance of the country which the citizens have vested on him towards constructing 'one nation' in the line of certain other countries in our globe who have kept their people voiceless and dependent. Perhaps our leaders with their master at the head-table feel insecure about their political positions if they did not tow the line of thinking by which the majority party has won the elections. A movement towards eliminating multi-party system in a democracy offers a clear message that the opposition would be a disastrous hindrance for building up power to rule with a hammer as dictators in history have consistently displayed, even to our day, as the Russian dictator is bent on erasing a sovereign, free nation, Ukraine, by waging a war which does not have end in sight. 'One nation' is definitely a noble desire but never without diverse cultures, religions, languages and political parties. From what our country has experienced in the last nine years of one political party being dominating the national scene makes one believe that the end goal is 'one nation' with 'one religion' and 'one party.'

From the outset it must be said that with our Prime Minister on the lead, spectacular achievements in the area of science and technology have definitely taken place. Certainly

One nation is definitely a noble desire but never without diverse cultures, religions, languages and political parties.

he needs to be honoured and credited for it. He does use his energy in implementing projects that are on his party's agenda, supposedly in the interest of the citizens. He can, with determination and vigour, bring to reality those projects which delight and bring astonishment in the viewers. In this his charisma is indubitable. However, one would dare to say, that with his powerful thumb leadership, even though expressways are built and high speed trains are on track, corruption in his party leaders and crimes of violence in the country are no indications of a free nation republic and of a friendly home for every man and woman.

Speaking of corruption, a school teacher in Andhra Pradesh narrated to me recently how the food meant for the children for the midday meal in the Government schools had been robbed by officers or their under-dogs, leaving the children hungry. When it was brought to the notice of the Food Commissioner, he took immediate action on the culprits, as his normal way of functioning is as a government official. Rare are such conscientious bureaucratic officers in the country who honour citizens by their service! With his acumen and his insights our Prime Minister could have promoted greater harmony among religions and not encourage hate feelings towards one another to prevail upon an educated nation and an energetic and tolerant populace. With his determined fisted mind, the Prime Minister could regiment in the matters of corruption in high places, if he had the grit for demonetisation! If he propagates 'one ration' in the 'one nation', why has it not been implemented or how is that the deserving

have no go but the non-deserving easily fill their belly? For a nation such as ours, dictatorial governance has no place and one should never give space for it. A determined leader one must be, but not at the servitude of the citizens. A free people need a determined leader who transcends 'narrow domestic wall' in the matter of religion and region. 'One nation' could only be when the Prime Leader enables diverse temperaments of multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural possibilities with innumerable and varied gifts to exist in communion. Political ideology mingled with a strong religious bias often destabilises the co-existence of people by indifference towards one another creating animosity. It should be underlined the fact that political stunts in our country are bloated with venomous anger, inimical looks and revengeful reactions before which people dare not exercise their freedom by voicing their mind. Perhaps this phenomenon is what one observes and experiences in our country today. How can one really talk of 'one nation' when the air one breathes is fear, suspicion and distance?

Co-operative federalism is often heard of in the public political discourse whether in the parliament or elsewhere but the praxis is another story. The undermining of the power of the state by dictatorial bulldozing, by avoiding consultation with a larger forum, by the recurring constitutional transgressions and the Governors of the states being misused to push one's party agenda by the so called 'one nation' and 'one party' propagandists has become the normal. The patience of the 'little man' in a democracy is being tested daily. There is also a polarisation on religious and caste lines which is creating distrust among people. The persistence of inequalities, atrocities against Dalits and women do not speak for a 'one nation' ideology. It looks as if the nation belongs only to those whose lion-voice is heard and who know to shape and form it at their behest. The strong impression one has of the governance of our Republic is that the ruling party has all the answers and the truth is their prerogative. This is how eventually nation states in the past developed fascistic rule and subjected everyone

to its philosophy and ideology creating fear among people.

What is happening in our country is that the 'party in power at the centre is unwilling to cede an inch to the opposition to maintain a vibrant democracy,' as Dushyant Dave, an outstanding Senior Advocate in the Supreme Court, frames it. How then can 'one nation' be a reality? If the 'little man' in a democracy (D. Dave) is not protected, whose could be a nation? Ashwin Kumar, a prominent lawyer, notes a deteriorating language used by political personalities and he comments: 'The language of democracy is one of accommodation, anchored in moderated thought and rational persuasion. It is not about hurting sensitivities but respecting them...Democracy is not about a strong man imposing his will...' The voice of the 'little man' can be a powerful instrument towards forming an integrated nation through a free interaction

among all citizens. By expunging of the Opposition through deteriorating language and a shut mind of arrogance, the political prowess is only eliminating indiscriminately the free speech in a free republic.

There is needed an ennobling political discourse with civility, faith and trust in others in a democracy such as ours, aimed only at the development of the human person on various levels. The political leaders, therefore, must necessarily pay attention to human formation of their self, in the first place, and not merely consider they are educated by a certificate bought from a distinguished institution. The words of Ram Narayan Singh quoted by D. Dave in an article in *The Hindu* speaks volumes: '... there must be a strong Opposition to criticise our actions and review them...A government which does not like opposition and always want to be in power is not a patriotic but a traitor government.' ■

Out of Winter

KM GEORGE

Dull grey is not a favourite colour for many of us. It seems to suggest despair and death. But in most regions in the northern hemisphere the harsh winter paints nature in tones of grey except when it is snow covered.

The attached picture, taken on a solitary walk, is from a Welsh village called Sully, near Cardiff, UK. For a visitor from a tropical region, the image of skeletal trees against a dark grey sky on a frozen morning at nearly 2°C doesn't look sanguine at all. In winter's cold silence these tall trees, however, seem to be alive with the muted noise and hovering movement of some black birds.

They are ravens, considered by many in Europe as ominous birds that forebode misfortune. But the symbolism is two-sided. They are also perceived as very intelligent, insightful and spiritual beings belonging to the crow family. In India the ever vigilant and diligent nature of the crow is a recommended model for students (*kaaka drishti*). They also communicate between the material and the spiritual worlds, and are invited to receive the ritual food offerings for ancestors in the Hindu tradition.

What we see in the picture as sort of small dark bundles on the trees are raven nests. Hidden to my phone camera, these nests might contain three to seven eggs being incubated by the female birds. The male birds bring food to the brooding mother birds that sit over the eggs, keeping them warm for weeks against the invading cold. The male and female together keenly watch over the promise of their future pulsating within the eggshells. They might be



The attached picture, taken on a solitary walk, is from a Welsh village called Sully, near Cardiff, UK.

dreaming of their cute hatchlings unfold their tender wings and soar into sky's infinity. Unlike in the case of human beings, the parent birds' own individual future is not probably important for them. It is the future of their species that the birds instinctively care for.

The bare, dry, dead-looking tree twigs that hold these nests with eggs are also internally vibrant, as they are getting ready to dance into spring's light and life. No wonder the egg has become the symbol of Easter, the resurrection of Christ, the festival of hope and new life that breaks out of the winter of despair, depression, and death. 'If winter comes, can spring be far behind?' asks the poet. The ineffable mystery of life! ■


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When God Calls He Provides

On how many occasions does our faith prove frail, our trust weak, our religious sense distracted by mere earthly desires?

Dr MARIANNE FURTADO de NAZARETH

As March runs into April one can see the weather change and become warmer with the onset of our Indian Spring. The trees have delightful coats of fresh green leaves and this is the time for all of Bangalore's skyline to be lit up with a variety of flowers in varying colours. With the heat comes the need to drink water frequently and keep ourselves hydrated. It is also the season of Lent which is the time to quench our spiritual thirst by drinking deeply of the living water of God's word and the sacrament.

In Exodus 17, we see the Jewish People suffer in the desert from lack of water and were in the grip of discouragement, so they complained and reacted violently. They even reached the point of rebelling against Moses and on the verge of rebelling against God. "They put the Lord to the test by angrily saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'" The people grumbled and demanded that God focus on their needs, rather than trusting in him.

How often does this also happen in our lives? In how many circumstances, rather than conforming docilely to the divine will, do we want God to implement our own plans and grant our every desire? On how many occasions does our faith prove frail, our trust weak, our religious sense distracted by mere earthly desires? In this Lenten Season, let us harken to Jesus who says, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water I shall give, will never thirst. The water that I shall give will become in you a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

In Exodus 17, the issue is the lack of water: "The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sinai, traveling from place to place as commanded by God. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink". Presumably, this refers to the pillar of cloud and fire which guided the Israelites on the various

legs of their journey. God's presence was with them, not only in the form of verbal promises, but visually and tangibly. In addition to God's visual presence, the Israelites also had the daily reminder of God's caring provision in the form of manna, which fed them in the desert.

And yet, with parched mouths, the Israelites lashed out against Moses: 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?'. The decision to blame Moses points to the central problem in this story. Israel had still not learned a crucial lesson: where God leads, God provides. God had secured victory over the Egyptians, enriched Israel with the wealth of their former captors, made a way through the Sea, and provided regular supplies on their journey through the desert. Everywhere God provided for them in every situation.

We have to understand that the Israelites are not only on a journey through the wilderness, they are also on a journey of the soul, being transformed from an earlier existence as an enslaved people to that of an independent nation. Unlearning the habits of domination, reinforced by Pharaoh's cruel system of slavery and subjugation is difficult, painful, and patient work. It is the work of generations. Accepting kindness and generosity when all one has known is violent exploitation was never going to be a quick or easy process. Israel had been subjected to a brutal existence under the yoke of the Pharaoh. But they suddenly found themselves free of Pharaoh's chains and the recipients of God's kindness and mercy. Few would disagree that one of the Bible's most difficult commands is the call to 'trust.' This is especially true when the world teaches you that your survival depends upon distrust and skepticism.

In response to Israel's murmuring, God stages a miracle, accentuated with a small amount of



Accepting kindness and generosity when all one has known is violent exploitation was never going to be a quick or easy process. Few would disagree that one of the Bible's most difficult commands is the call to 'trust'.

pageantry: "The Lord instructed Moses to, 'Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink'".

The inclusion of Moses' staff is when God turns this ordinary shepherd's implement into a sign of divine power by transforming it into a

snake. The staff was designed to convince the Israelites that the God of their ancestors had heard their cries and had sent a deliverer. But it also did something for Moses, who had expressed concern that nobody would believe his story. God's promise was attached to this incident that gifted both Moses and the Israelites with confidence in the trustworthiness of their God.

Sadly, even today, we humans struggle to believe that where God calls, God provides. ■

Fire, smoke and toxic gases engulf 8.3 lakh residents of Kochi; and it's not an isolated event in our country

A forty-acre garbage dump-yard, standing 25-ft high catches fire on 2 March 2023 at Brahmapuram waste plant in Kochi. The accumulated garbage had huge amount of plastic and other toxic wastes in it. The fumes went up, the smoke and toxic gases engulfed the residents of Kochi Corporation.

It took 11 days of hard work of over 200 firemen, navy, police personnel, corporation employees working round the clock, spraying 40,000 litres of water per second into four-feet deep pits that were dug out with excavators to douse the fire. Twenty-three fire engines, 32 excavators and bulldozers, 10 high pressures pumps, and four helicopters worked day and night to put out the fire. The smoke still continues.

Brahmapuram landfill is an overfilled waste dumping site located in the Indian city of Kochi, Kerala. The Kochi city produces more than 600 tonnes of waste per day and nearly 100 ton of it is decomposed at the Brahmapuram solid waste plant into organic manure. The plant which was inaugurated in 2008 to manage solid waste was eventually converted into a landfill. As of March 2023, before the fire, there was an estimated volume of 5.5 lakh tonnes of waste spread over 110 acres at the site. ■

Image courtesy: Thulasi Kakkat/*The Hindu*

Brahmapuram waste plant fire; and the fire and rescue service personnel at work.



‘Quitting Is Not an Option, I Believe in Slowing Down’

‘My challenge may be with my vision, but my strength is my ability to live with it,’ she sounded firm and confident as she said these words. **FIRDOSE FATHIMA** is a final-year degree student of Psychology, English, and Sociology, at Jyoti Nivas College Autonomous, Bangalore. Her journey so far is one of hard work, of challenging structures and circumstances, of rising after every fall, of resilience, and of trusting herself immensely. For *Together* magazine, Dr **AKEELA P** gets into a conversation with Firdose.

I see you as an epitome of resilience. In spite of all odds you are doing your under graduate studies. What makes you so resilient?

Well. Actually, I believe that being resilient is a process. Time and circumstance have been making me resilient through out. I also believe that I learn things the hard way.

What are your thoughts on being a woman in our society where gender equality is a far dream?

Since I am born as a girl; and I am a woman, that is part and parcel of my life, of my identity. I believe in moving on with. I see myself as a vehicle and life as a vehicle with a few necessary rules. The rules must be followed, but I am free to choose my direction.

We live in a world where people give up for the silliest of things. What are your thoughts on quitting?

Quitting is not an option, I believe in slowing down. Quitting is like stopping the flow of water and leading to stagnation. When I fall it is important for me to rise on my own. I believe in this quote, ‘The bird that dares to fall is the bird that learns to fly.’

Existentially and psychologically what does it really mean to be visually challenged? In other words, what are the real challenges of being one?

Being visually challenged comes with its own pros and cons. It is not at all explainable in words, at times situations get too hard, it is important that I make my space as and when I move through every walks of life. There may be times where I may find myself difficult to move around in an unfamiliar place on

my own. Some times when I am confident people may not be confident with me, and that becomes chaotic. I deal with these situations on a regular basis. The most important thing is that it is not going to end, and has to be dealt with.

Now coming to my strength. My challenge may be with my vision, but my strength is my ability to live with it. There are few things I do which others may not even think about doing. I can manage myself in the dark, whereas everyone else panics looking for light source, which I don’t. The secret to my strength is the quote, ‘When a bird sits on a branch it is not afraid of the branch falling, as it trusts its own wings.’ I trust myself.

Tell us about yourself. What keeps you happy?

It takes very little for me to be happy, something as simple as listening to my favourite singers voice on radio; creating something in origami, something that I may not have learned, something out of my own imagination; being around with people whom I

feel safe, not being bothered about too much of attention when not required.

What makes you sad?

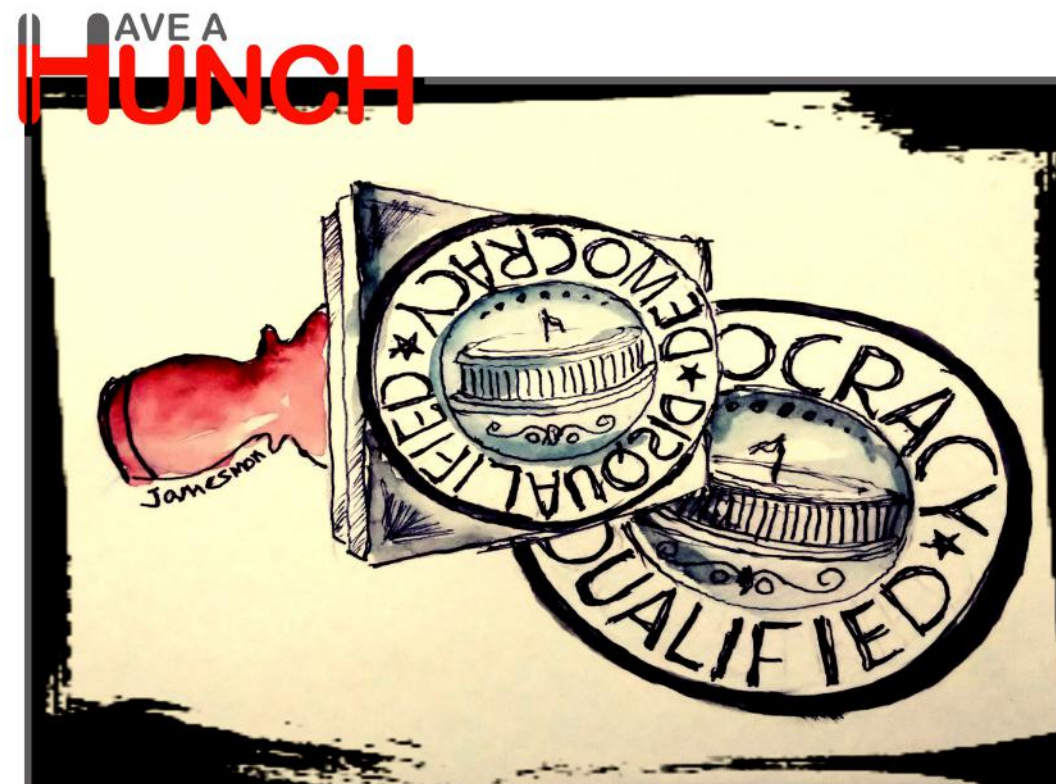
It makes me sad to be persuaded, especially by people whom I don’t trust. When my space is being invaded; when boundaries are not being respected; and when I feel lonely, though I am not alone; and at times, when I experience some kind of trigger from environment, from experiences, or from out of the blue.

What keeps you occupied?

Doing origami, which has been my favourite hobby. Changing the lyrics of songs according to my personal situation, making it sound funny; trying new tunes on keyboard, playing chess online, and other game as well; and at times trying new things which I always long for, and I rarely do.

What are your dreams?

My dream is to become a psychologist, earn, lead a settled life, be happy, and be there for myself. ■





Gender Equality and Empowerment

It is inappropriate to accuse someone for being a man. Similarly, it is inappropriate for someone to play the victim for being a woman.

FIRDOSE FATHIMA

salaries for their skills, efforts and efficiency at work. Certainly not based on their gender.

Also, it is possible, that any one belonging to any gender may be the victim of abuse. The abuser may belong to the same gender as that of the victim or a different one. In such situations, it is important to take necessary actions to help the victim. It isn't the fault of the victim. He/she must be comforted and never cross-questioned in any manner.

People, irrespective of their gender must be aware of their rights, prioritise their safety and treat one another with respect (by understanding emotions, setting and accepting personal boundaries). It is important to keep in mind that gender does not determine one's superiority or inferiority! It is inappropriate to accuse someone for being a man. Similarly, it is inappropriate for someone to play the victim for being a woman. I would like to share an incident where I witnessed that a girl was molested by a close acquaintance who was a woman; she was helped in that situation by men known to her. She asserted that she feels safe with those men.

To conclude, equality and empowerment come with acceptance. Every individual must accept his/her own gender as well as that of others. In all fairness, gender differences must be acknowledged to ensure the progression in the society. By differences, I intend to emphasise on being aware of the situation, areas of one's expertise and limitations to deal with the situation, address the challenges, and express the needs of the hour. ■

Gender is determined by biological factors. The hormones, the primary and secondary sexual characteristics define us as men and women. We differ in terms of our physical abilities. Before being categorised as men, women or others, we are people, unique in our own ways. We are taught about gender differences right from childhood; and made to follow various societal norms. For example, boys and girls are expected to behave and dress in a certain manner. They are also given toys/games that would suit their gender roles.

Adolescents and young adults go through challenges such as restrictions from family members and lack of opportunities at work place or for pursuing hobbies. What would it seem like, when we pause, and try to understand the perspectives of children, adolescents and young adults before imposing the societal norms on them?

Many of the unaddressed issues would be brought to our notice. Also, children would gain insight about the concept of gender in a positive manner. Children deserve to be educated. Adults deserve secured jobs and appropriate

Women of Purpose

ROSELINE GOMES

The Women's Day is a worldwide celebration of female empowerment and industrial, cultural, and electoral accomplishments. The day also serves as a rallying cry for greater female equality and value for purposive leadership. Worldwide, there is a lot of activity as people gather together to honor women's successes or to advocate for women's equality. The issue lies in the question, is there gender equality? Geographically, legal barriers have prevented 2.7 billion women from having the same employment opportunities as men, and as of 2019, women made up less than 25% of parliamentarians. Gender-based abuse continues to affect one in every three women.

I view the world of women from my experiences and learning, and through the Indian lens. The types of jobs, engagement in politics, educational opportunities, health priorities, standing out as part of decision-making units and all other relevant aspects are still scarce among women. These constitute the need for supportive care in guiding women leaders toward their community roles. According to a recent survey of 328 organisations, women make up 53% of social sector employees. Even with this, men lead more than 81% of socially responsible organisations in the industry, while women hold only 34% of executive roles. Women in leadership roles serve to enlarge and broaden an institution's perspective and regulations. It has the potential to significantly impact gender-related workplace policies. Women also function as mentors for female workers. Inclusivity can thus foster more innovation as well as better employee retention as well as fulfillment. However, a handful of structural and sociocultural barriers prohibit women in the industry from advancing to positions of leadership.

Nearly half of the women exhibit frequent self-doubt. Sustained fostering of self-doubt can impede personal development by affecting a woman's ability to assume leadership

positions. It is a result of societal and cultural conditioning and can be a significant impediment to a woman's advancement in her leadership journey. Imposter syndrome has been more prevalent in females than males. Attributions of imposter syndrome happen through childhood experiences such as conformity to gender standards and a lack of autonomy and influence. Women's leadership, for example, is underestimated in comparison to that of males. Entrenched power systems pervade the workplace as well.

As a woman and being brought up in a space that leveraged women's capacities since childhood, I visualise the teachings of my grandfather: it was reiterated to me that as women we should always remember that we are the leaders of our life and hence every decision we make will guide us toward our goals. We need to develop a sense of vision that binds our community through our purposive and thought leadership. As I step into a new leadership role in my institution, I understand that it is a lonely journey up there. Some people seem to support; and some friends are lost due to this leadership role. On one side there is the constant evaluation of weaknesses and on the other side, there is the negation of strengths. Many are losing trust while some are critical of the role. Whatever the contexts may seem, there is one construct that stands out which is one's meaning or purpose guided through integrity and wisdom. A true women leader is someone who believes in her abilities and focuses on the goals that sketch continuous learning. A strong sense of detachment from the materialistic world of judgment with a sense of gratitude to the universe will govern purposive actions. It's time women support each other than put down. It's time women join hands again and come together as one big nation where there is humanity, courage, and freedom, and hence a self-sufficient India will be born all over again. ■

TOXIC MASCULINITY

The 'man-rules' which our culture imposes on boys in their biological, psychological, and cultural development as men can be toxic.

AUSTIN FRANCIS OFM

'M' an kills live-in-partner, dumps body in refrigerator, and marries another girl on the same day'. 'Woman stabbed to death after she rejects marriage offer'. 'Missing woman's body found under bed, wrapped in a blanket, and husband absconding'. Headlines such as these, time and again call us to pause and reflect on the urgent and effective prevention of femicide, misogyny and all forms of violence against women. Stringent legislation, better support services for the empowerment of victims to speak up and speak out, timely public response to the act of violence, and education of society on equal rights of women are some of the common factors among the textbook or straight-jacketed solutions suggested, in dealing with the issue of halting violence against women. While these factors stand tall with respect to their importance in making the strategic prevention plans, modern psychology strikes an indispensable chord in this discussion with the contribution of an important factor associated with the traditional upbringing of boys, called the 'toxic masculinity.' The term was first documented in 1980s, but its wide use was found since 2013 by many feminists, psychologists, and social scientists, attributing the harmful impact of the 'traditional male ideology' on women.



Toxic Masculinity and 'Man-rules'

The term 'toxic masculinity' does not suggest that everything about masculinity is toxic or bad. It indicates the toxic 'man-rules' which our culture, religion, society etc., impose on boys in their biological, psychological and cultural development as men. In defining the term, Amy Morin, psychotherapist, and the author of the internationally best-selling book, *13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do*, features three core components of toxic masculinity. They are: toughness, antifemininity, and power.

The traditional ideology that men should be tough propagates an overrated misconception that they are physically a stronger gender, behaviourally aggressive and inexpressive of any emotions. Corresponding to this traditional worldview, boys are treated differently from girls. Even at homes, it is a common practice

that boys get fed more share of food than girls. Likewise, they get humiliated for tearing up, for being shy and timid. Is there a man who does not remember the reproach which he received from his parents and grandparents in childhood for welling up with tears ('Don't cry like girls' or 'man up')?

The traditional ideal of manliness subtly endorses antifemininity in boys since childhood. From early on we delineate almost conservatively, with a black and white precision, the different pathways a boy and a girl are socialised. This misguided differentiation starts from the very first day children are born: 'the color blue for boys and pink for girls!' The games we teach our boys in their childhood are focused on the virtue of seeking adventure, courage, aggression, and competitiveness. Parents, without resorting to any qualms of conscience, gift boys with toy guns, swords, and knives, instilling in them the alpha male 'warrior' cum 'defender' representation. Girls on the other hand, are introduced to games that are centred around connection seeking, relationship building and homemaking. Their toys are mainly the play kitchen sets, make-up kits, and Barbie dolls. This way of traditional upbringing of boys geared to be different from girls, which echoes the message, 'don't be like girls', imprints in boys a cognitive dissonance, a 'mental block' for neither appreciating nor respecting anything that is feminine. This conservative segregation of boys from girls, certainly is the impetus for creating compulsive male superiority and domination.

Likewise, the traditional view of being the male is that they must be assertive. Part of the toxic quality in this view is that the society silently accepts and even promotes aggressiveness along with assertiveness in boys. Assertiveness and aggression gradually breeds an unwarranted desire for power. This is not about just being in control of themselves but also of others, primarily women. Critiquing on the traditional view of manhood, Bernard Golden, psychologist and the founder of the anger management education, Bernard argues, 'Toxic masculinity entails an intense need and desire for power that may fuel the assertion of that power over others—in the form of misogyny, racism and homophobia.'

Toxic Masculinity Forces Violence on Women

The findings of many studies today highlight that the traditional view of masculinity perpetuates wide range of toxic impacts on the type of manhood we prescribe to our boys and men, making them unappreciative, disrespectful, arrogant, abusive, and atrocious in their behavioural patterns towards women. With the stereotype of toxic masculine qualities such as 'violence, dominance, emotional illiteracy, sexual entitlement, and hostility to femininity as expressed by Michael Flood, an Australian sociologist, men continue engaging in femicide, misogyny and violence against women.

If we are truly interested in putting an end to misogynistic violence, we must include the topic of toxic masculinity into our discussion, and we cannot soft-pedal the tragic consequences of it or be dismissive of it as some critics who hold the view that toxic masculinity is not real and it is the construction of some folks who are anti-male, the so called 'feminists.' Silva Neves, A London-based psychotherapist who specialises in psychosexual and relationship domains, identifies a direct connection between misogyny and toxic masculinity. He writes point-blank, 'If we want to change the world, if we want to stop misogyny, if we want women to be safe in our streets... we need to start how we raise our boys—in every household, in schools and in our communities.'

Finally, besides preventing misogynistic violence there is one more quintessential reason for psychology to highlight the discussion of toxic masculinity. That is toxic masculinity is also equally harmful to the psychological growth and wellbeing of men, as it hampers a man's full potential for growing and developing to be a psychologically and biologically healthy individual. Research shows that besides being the leading cause for male suicides, toxic masculinity contributes to various psychological, emotional and mental health issues that men go through. Neves explains it powerfully with a succinct comprehension of it as he puts it down in his own words:

Toxic masculinity doesn't only kill women. It kills men, too. ■

THE TURNING POINT

We must believe that we are made of sterner stuff and we shall overcome.

MONICA FERNANDES

At times life throws us a challenge. We follow our usual set daily routine to include time for work, studies, fun, play and prayer. Everything seems honky dory. And then out of the blue a life-changing incident occurs—an accident, the sudden demise of someone close to us, an unexpected failure, a worldwide pandemic. Our usual road is blocked. We have reached a pivotal point in our lives. There are other roads to follow and it depends on us which road we choose.

St Ignatius of Loyola (born 23.10.1491, died 31.7.1556) was a Spanish Catholic nobleman. He is remembered as the founder of the Jesuit order of priests and for his book on Spiritual Exercises for he felt that just as a person exercises his body, he is also in need of spiritual exercises as well. The Jesuits foray into the field of education was started by Ignatius himself. But Ignatius first choice of a profession was that of a soldier. The Battle of Pamplona in May 1521 was the pivotal point in his life when a cannonball shattered his right leg. He had to undergo a series of operations and as he lay recuperating in his father's castle, he kept on reading and reflecting on the religious books that were his sole reading matter. He could have spent his life wallowing in self pity but these books changed his entire perspective on life.

On June 7, 1893, a young Indian lawyer, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (later known as the Mahatma or 'great soul') was forcibly evicted from a Whites only carriage on a train in South Africa. Till then he was a regular brown sahib.

But this eviction was a watershed moment in his life. He began to lead protests against segregation via a passive resistance movement called Satyagraha which means 'force which is born of truth and love and non-violence'. The Mahatma drew a lot of inspiration from the bible and would often quote, from Mathew 5: 39, 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who treat you badly. To the one who strikes you on the cheek, turn the other cheek; to the one who takes your coat, give also your shirt.' The father of our nation went on to galvanise an entire country to shed the oppressive shackles of colonialism through non-violent methods. Amazing! An entire nation had reached a turning point. He was the inspiration for other leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King. If the Mahatma had chosen to just grumble about injustice and not act after that fateful day in South Africa, the entire history of our nation may have been different.

We have all heard motivational speakers whose lives took an about turn after a major operation or a serious accident. One such iconic lady is Arjuna awardee Deepa Malik. She became a paraplegic at the tender age of 29. This lady with a fighting spirit is proud of her military background as both her father and husband are army men. On September 12, 2016 at the age of 45, Deepa made her country proud by becoming the first Indian woman athlete to win a medal at the Para Olympics.

Some of you may be facing roadblocks in



A twist in fate could happen to anyone. The death of the main bread winner of the family, a failure in exams, loss of a job, an accident or sickness, being jilted and last but not least, the strain of living during a pandemic—these are some of the challenges being faced. But do not despair for there is always a way forward.

your lives. At the end of the day, it is not what happens in your life that matters, but how you react to it. Following the footsteps of his father and older brother, young Anurag was bent on joining the Indian Institute of Technology. He prepared hard for the entrance exams but disaster struck on the day before the exams when he was hospitalised with a serious infection. Not one to quit, Anurag decided to try his luck the next year but had a bad fall and landed up with a fractured hand and, as luck would have it, his left hand with which he wrote. Anurag was very despondent but his mother, who is a teacher, pointed out to him that there are many roads to success. Anurag went on to study at the London School of Economics. Today he is happy and successful in his career.

But a traumatic event has not always

been the turning point. Gautama Buddha was Prince Siddhartha from the Shakya clan. His father protected him from being exposed to sickness and disease. It was during chariot ride outside the palace that the young prince first beheld suffering and death when he saw an old man, a diseased man and a decaying corpse. After years of meditation, he began preaching the eightfold middle path between extreme sensual indulgence and severe mortification.

Mother Teresa joined the Loretta order of nuns as a teacher. She witnessed two very traumatic events—the Bengal famine of 1943 and the bloodshed before the partition of India. She also saw poverty and suffering on the streets of Calcutta. This prompted her to start the Missionaries of Charity so that the poorest of poor could live and die in dignity.



Website



Instagram



Twitter



Facebook



A twist in fate could happen to anyone. The death of the main bread winner of the family, a failure in exams, loss of a job, an accident or sickness, being jilted and last but not least, the strain of living during a pandemic—these are some of the challenges being faced. But do not despair for there is always a way forward.

How do we condition ourselves to find another road during a roadblock in our lives?

- *We all have ups and downs in our lives but some of us seem to have more downs.* Let us not waste precious time bemoaning our fate. Nor should we compare ourselves adversely with others, envying them for being luckier than us. Negativity and seeking sympathy results in us being blind to other alternatives.

- *Develop our spiritual quotient.* We could read the precepts and lives of great spiritual leaders and sages. The parables of Jesus Christ all have a message to strengthen us mentally. Spend some time in prayer. Through personal experience during difficult times, I believe this approach helps.

- *Reach out to others.* This approach makes us less likely to think that nobody has seen the troubles we have seen.

- *We should not neglect our physical wellbeing* and make time for yoga, walking and exercise.

- *Surround ourselves with positive people who truly care for us.* Who are our friends? Can you rely on them in good times and in bad?

- *We should not hesitate to seek advice and help from those wiser than us.* There is no loss of ego in seeking help.

- *Be proactive.* You may have lost your job due to the pandemic. Is it possible to attend on line courses to hone your skills? If your particular job profile is no longer of relevance in the current scenario, is it possible to change your line entirely, considering your strengths and talents?

- *Above all, we must believe that we are made of sterner stuff and we SHALL overcome.* In the words of Swami Vivekananda, 'Faith in ourselves and faith in God- this is the secret of greatness', 'All power is within you; you can do anything and everything.' ■



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Adopting a Beginner's Mind

We must never presume that we see, and we must always be ready to see anew.

RICHARD ROHR OFM

Jesus calls us to exactly what Zen masters call their students. I once stayed in a Zen monastery in Japan. The master was calling monks who had been there for years to have what they named 'beginner's mind'. Similarly, one of Jesus' favorite examples is a child. Every time the disciples are tempted to get into their heads, into their religious smugness, or to settle the dust before they've learned its lessons, Jesus brings a child in front of them.

In Matthew 18:3, and I'm paraphrasing, Jesus says, 'I'm telling you once and for all, if you do not go back to square one and start over like a child, you will never be able to see the new reality.' In other places, similar advice follows on the disciples' rather heady discussion around divorce. It is at that point Jesus brings out a child (Mark 10:15). Another time the disciples are discussing the possibility of celibacy. Their conversation is only on the theoretical level, and Jesus brings a little child out (Matthew 19:14). Notice when Jesus counsels the beginner's mind. Every time he welcomes little children, it's when the disciples are discussing topics that to this day lend themselves to heady, ideological discussions. One group can come down as right and the other group can come down as wrong. Basically, Jesus says it's a waste of time. He's telling them, 'You're not seeking truth; you're seeking to be in control.'

The older we get, the more we've been betrayed and hurt and disappointed, the more barriers we put up to the beginner's mind. We move further away from the immediate delight and curiosity of small children. We must never presume that we see, and we must always be ready to see anew. But it's so hard to go back, to be vulnerable, and to say to our soul that 'I don't know anything.'

Try to say that: 'I don't know anything.' We used to call it tabula rasa in Latin. Maybe we could think of ourselves as an erased blackboard, ready to be written on. By and large, what blocks spiritual teaching is the assumption that we already know, or that we don't need to know. We have to pray for the grace of beginner's mind. We need to say with the blind man, 'I want to see' (Mark 10:51). Spirituality is about seeing. It's not about earning or achieving. It's about relationship rather than results or requirements. Once we see, the rest follows. We don't need to push the river, because we're in it. The life is lived within us, and we learn how to say yes to that life.

The Humility to Be Taught

Timothy, in the Bible, is sometimes described as fearful or timid, and maybe he was just afraid of being wrong or afraid of not being liked or just afraid of himself, as many of us are. What starts as timidity becomes humility and openness and teachability. It is that enduring sense of openness and humility that does not close down by reason of failure, facts, or cynical old age. It asks for and listens to good advice. It creates and values team over grandstanding and self-made careers.



In fact, Timothy's intense knowledge that he cannot do it gives him the certainty that God is doing it. His healthy self-doubt allows him to trust and admire another. Not a bad metamorphosis for fear.

The first part of the name Timothy could be translated 'awe-filled' or 'wonderstruck.' We see this in almost all descriptions of authentic religious encounter. Every biblical theophany from Moses to Mary speaks of the recipient as being 'afraid' in this sense, aware of their own finiteness and incapacity to receive what is happening. Yet the word from God is invariably the opposite: 'Do not be afraid.' 'Don't waste time asking questions of worthiness,' God seems to say. 'I am not concerned about worthiness (think intelligence, knowledge, purity) but about readiness and receptivity.' These are the chosen, who are never the same as the worthy. Yes, many are called. In fact, all are called. But very few allow themselves to be chosen (Matthew 22:14). They would rather be 'worthy.'

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind

Psychotherapist Fiona Gardner describes the idea of having a childlike or 'beginner's mind' in Eastern spirituality: Eastern thought has long understood the value of the child mind in the adult seeker for spiritual maturity. The child mind is seen as a place of surrender, alertness,

and nakedness. It is seen as a space where there is little if any self-consciousness; there is no judgment of others. It is a time of humility. It involves an awareness of the person's nothingness—where the person is no-thing. The child mind recognises the person's smallness and yet connection in the scheme of things, and in Eastern practices it is seen as a state that can be developed through silent meditation, and often in solitude. There can be glimpses or breakthroughs or longer periods of such awareness; it is experiential and not knowledge-based or a doctrine that can be learnt...

Zen monk Shunryū Suzuki (1904–1971) helped popularise Buddhism in the United States, and taught about 'beginner's mind': In Japan we have the phrase *shoshin*, which means 'beginner's mind.'... Our 'original mind' includes everything within itself. It is always rich and sufficient within itself. You should not lose your self-sufficient state of mind. This does not mean a closed mind, but actually an empty mind and a ready mind. If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few.

If you discriminate too much, you limit yourself. If you are too demanding or too greedy, your mind is not rich and self-sufficient. If we lose our original self-sufficient mind, we will lose all precepts. When your mind becomes demanding, when you long for something, you will end up violating your own precepts: not to tell lies, not to steal, not to kill, not to be immoral, and so forth. If you keep your original mind, the precepts will keep themselves.

In the beginner's mind there is no thought, 'I have attained something.' All self-centered thoughts limit our vast mind. When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners. Then we can really learn something. The beginner's mind is the mind of compassion. When our mind is compassionate, it is boundless. Dogen-zenji, the founder of our school, always emphasised how important it is to resume our boundless original mind. Then we are always true to ourselves, in sympathy with all beings, and can actually practice.

Manna from Heaven:

A Lesson in Beginner's Mind

Estelle Frankel, a therapist, spiritual director, and teacher of Jewish mysticism, describes how the lessons of Exodus encourage us to practice a 'beginner's mind': The compulsion to repeat the past is apparent in the biblical myth of the Exodus. When Moses led the Israelites to freedom, they often yearned to return to Egypt. Though they were miraculously provided for throughout their forty years of wandering in the desert, the Israelites were often nostalgic for the 'good old (bad) days' in Egypt: 'We remember the fish we ate free in Mitzrayim—also the cucumber, melons, leeks, onions and garlic' (Numbers 11:5).... Somehow, the miracle of the manna that fell from heaven each day in the wilderness did not satisfy the Israelites' hunger for security. They missed the predictability and sense of control they felt in Egypt. The Israelites looked back on their time in Egypt with nostalgia because they could not bear the uncertainty they faced as a free people. Freedom is, ultimately, uncertain and unpredictable. One of the first lessons we all must learn in order to be free is how to 'bear' uncertainty and trust in the unknown. In the biblical myth of the Exodus, the manna was a vehicle for learning this lesson. Each day for forty years, the Israelites would have to go out and gather their daily supply of manna—just enough for that day.

The manna challenged the Israelites to develop beginner's mind—to experience something new and fresh while eating the very same thing each day. Instead of seeking the answers that might put their questions to rest, the manna taught the Israelites to continually live the questions, to understand that the journey to freedom is about remaining awake and curious and not going into sleep mode.

Entering the Cloud of Unknowing

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is always saying you've got to balance your knowing with a willingness not to know. The mind of itself, the brain in itself, is incapable of wisdom. It's only at an experiential level of existence that we know something, but that knowing is not sub-

ject to telling. I think that's why we don't like it. It gives us no ego rewards. We can't prove it. We can't measure it. We can't convince anyone else that we're right.

What the author says is that first we have to enter the Cloud of Forgetting—to forget all our certitudes, all our labels, all our explanations, just forget them! They are all a waste of time. They are nothing but our ego projecting itself and announcing itself. It has nothing to do with objective reality. If the world doesn't learn this kind of humility, what we're calling beginner's mind, I think we're in trouble. And we're seeing it at the highest levels—the absolute arrogance of 'knowing' and of being convinced we do know and no one else knows like we know. To think the United States has often been willing to stand alone against all the other nations of the world. We're so convinced that we know, it's frightening.

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* teaches that after we enter into the Cloud of Forgetting, letting go of our hurts and our labels, then we must go into the Cloud of Unknowing, where we actually don't need to label anymore; we don't need to know that we know. I think the biblical word for that—and hear it now in whole new way—is faith. Many of us have heard that word ever since we were children. That's why Jesus idealises faith so much and congratulates people who have it. It's this willingness to live with a certain degree of humility.

When the ego invests itself in its knowing, it is convinced that it has the whole picture. At that point, growth stops. The journey stops. Nothing new is going to happen to us after that point. The term we're using here, 'beginner's mind,' comes from Buddhism. For Buddhists, it seems to refer to an urgent need to remain open, forever a student. A beginner's mind always says, 'I'm a learner. I've got more to learn.' It has to do with humility before reality, and never assuming that I understand. If there are fifty thousand levels of the mystery, maybe I'm at level forty-five. Maybe there's more that needs to show itself to me. Can you imagine what a different world it would be if we all lived with that kind of humility? ■

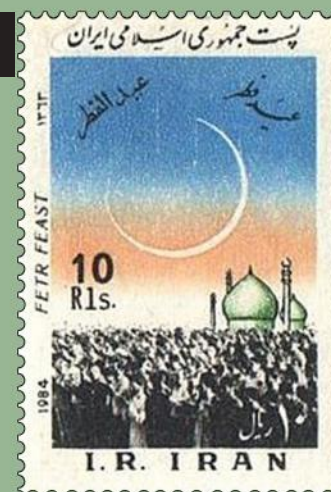
09 April
Easter

It marks the Resurrection of Jesus three days after his death by crucifixion. For Christian churches, Easter is the joyful end to the Lenten season of fasting and penitence. The significance of Easter is Jesus Christ's triumph over death. If He had not risen from the dead or simply died and not been resurrected, He would have been thought just another teacher or prophet. His resurrection is the undeniable proof that Jesus had overcome death once and for all. ■

Tom John OFM



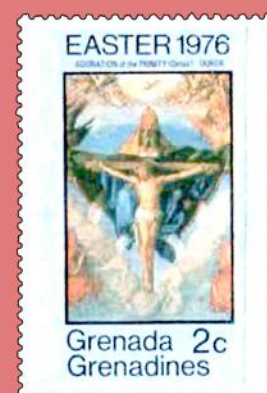
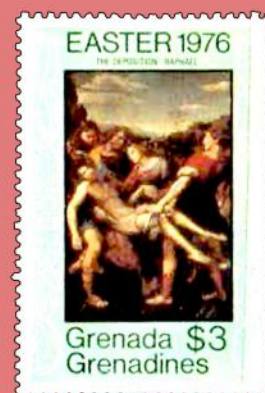
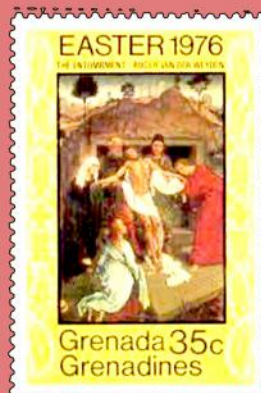
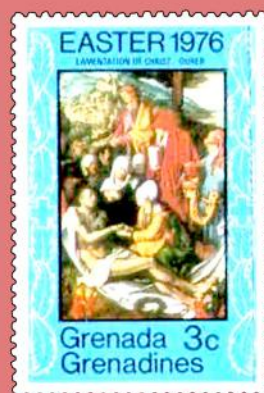
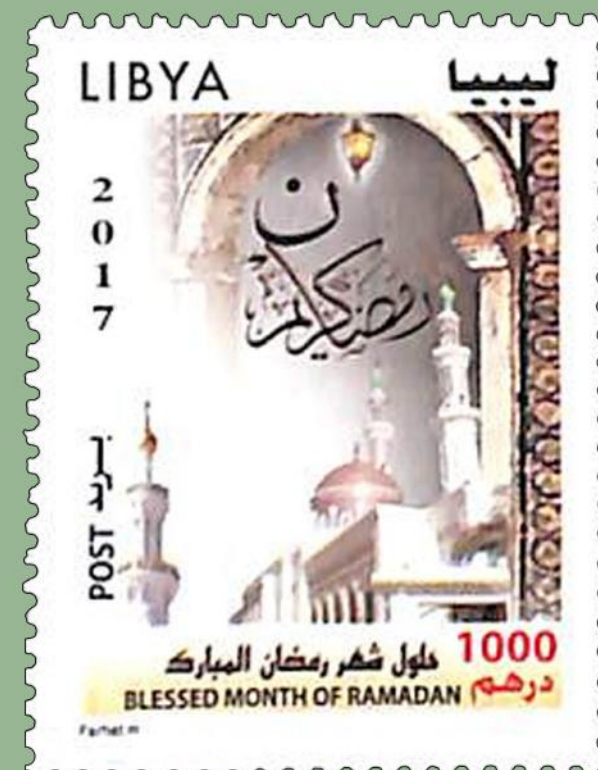
IN STAMPS



21 April
Eid al-Fitr

Meaning, 'festival of breaking fast' also called Ramazan/Ramadan first of two canonical festivals of Islam. Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting. It is believed that the Holy Quran was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad during the month of Ramadan; and Muslims consider this a holy month. Muslims celebrate this festival to mark the successful completion of Ramadan. ■

Tom John OFM



The Dreams of a Mappila Girl

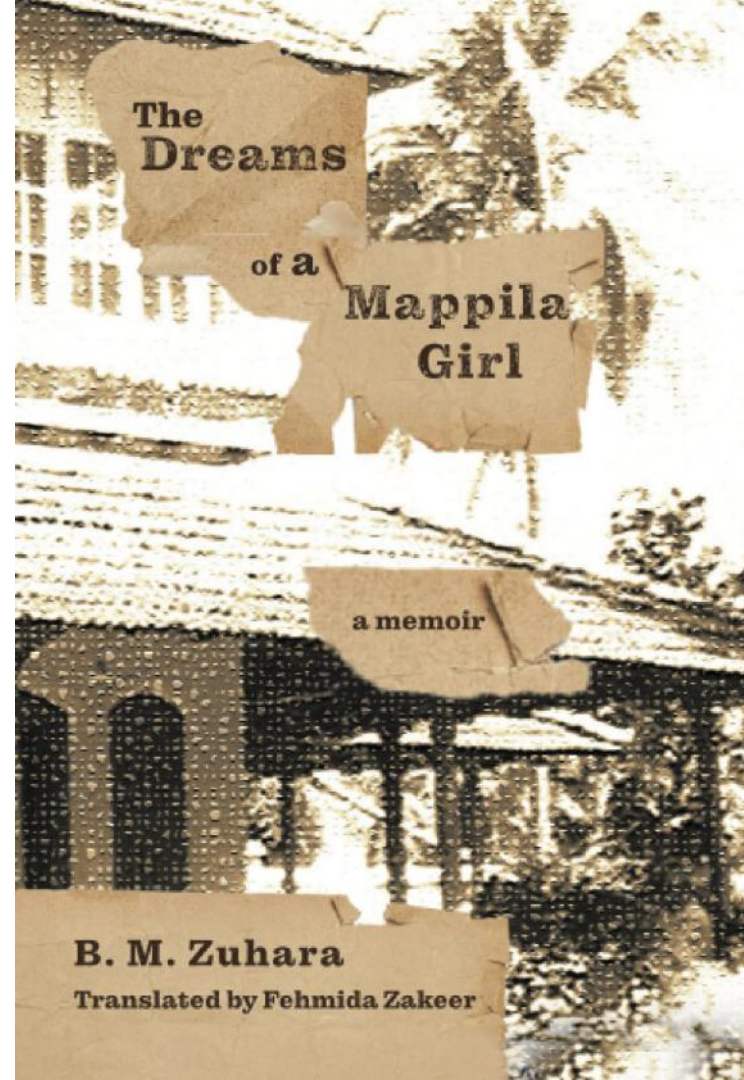
Dr SUSHEELA B

This exquisitely translated memoir about growing up in a 1950s, Kerala village is an intimate look at the observed world and the imagined world of the author Zuhara. She grew up when the Muslim girls did not have freedom to dream. We get a glimpse into the secluded lives of Muslim women and the girls in a semi-rural Kerala village. This glimpses has been Zuhara's mandate for decades and her novels have delivered on this again and again. The memoir is certainly part of this world. It takes us inside the sprawling house in the village of Thikkodi where Zuhara grew up and offers an intimate exploration of what it is going to be a girl coming of age in this wealthy, conservative milieu.

There is Zuhara's mother who runs the household with a stern eye and insists that her daughter will not go to school in a knee length skirt. There are pages and [ages of culinary descriptions that made me go searching wistfully for Zomato for mangoes in brine. There is the annual *va'alu*, a series of lectures held in the mosque just before Ramadan. Zuhara says that the general opinion in many households were that men were learned enough and so they need not attend these lectures.. so, when she goes to the *va'alu* with women of her household and sees men in the front row. She is astound and says 'Are these men who don't know enough?' She wonders aloud to the amusement of the women behind her, for whom the *va'alu* is

mostly the opportunity to gather with friends, to talk and laugh. But this book also vastly more than an ethnography. It is the story of how a writer is made. Though it is in danger of turning into a 'Muslim woman's story', a vegetable to be eaten for fibre alongside the rich fare of magic realism and satire and experimental fiction, emerging from Kerala. This book is an intimate look at how the observed world and the imagined world meet in the writer's head.

Though *Dreams* is subtitled a memoir, in the surface, Zuhara admits that the stories are real and imagined. It confounds classification systems, the willingness to acknowledge the time frame from 1950s to 2022. Looking back across the seven decades, how can a writer not find Her childhood fantastic? Zuhara in her seventies, looks back in the seventies and fantasises the little girl she was, fanning her long skirt to catch the footfall when she played with her brother or telling her social studies teacher that her father is a landlord only to be informed that



a landlord is someone who does not earn their keep.

The encounter between the feudal values of the household and the egalitarian idealism of a newly independent nation is a fruitful contradiction for an apprentice writer, small as Zuhara's world is it is full of interesting inconsistencies. School teaches her to revere Gandhiji and other freedom fighters but at home her grandmother holds Gandhiji responsible for the way prices rise after the British left. In the village, everyone respects her family, but when she visits her sister in Kozhikode, she is scolded for her provincial manners.

To all this, add the slow-burning curiosity of a pre-Internet, pre-television childhood. Zuhara's childhood belongs to a time before moving images and endless scroll permanently altered the neuro-chemical nature of human attention. There is a cinema theatre in the nearby town but only the entertainment it affords Zuhara is when someone who saw a movie there tells her the story of the movie, thereby rendering this modern media back into the oral tradition.

A stranger arrives one day, a holy man on his way to Ajmer. As the woman of the household respectfully greet him, he puts away his prayer beads and laments on Zuhara's grandfather who died recently and his son Mummud, had suffered a mental breakdown as a young man,

spends his days in confinement because of his unpredictable and violent behaviour. The holy man promises to make an offering for him at Ajmer. Zuhara notices that the old man's voice was just like her old cousin, Bachan. The holy man becomes restless and decides that he is in a hurry and must leave. On his way out, he collides with Zuhara's father and his disguise unravels further. It is indeed Bachan playing a prank. Zuhara's memoir makes a room for all these characters - the mentally unstable Mammud, the mischievous Bachan, her quick-tempered father who spends the inheritance pursuing futile court cases, her mother who strong wills the family into moving to the city so that the children can have a decent education.

There is affection and laughter and also deep knot of sorrow that Mammud's mother carries around, the glut of resentments simmering between Zuhara's parents, there is anxiety over the inheritance, there is foreboding about the social and economic reforms that have been put in place by the Communist Government. The book ends with Zuhara getting into a car. The car will take her and her family to Kozhikode where they will live in a small rented house so that the children can attend good schools. A Malayali reader maybe well aware of the fruits of this education, the remarkable careers that they will go on to have - while Zuhara becomes a well-known writer and her brother Gafoor will become a political cartoonist. Another sibling Umami Abdullah, is credited with having put Malabari cuisine on the cookbook map. In many ways a memoir is a prequel to the future that is waiting for these children, who, inspite many trials, are able to ride the coat-tails of their vanishing feudal privileges into a world that embraces their talents.

The Dreams of a Mappila Girl makes a tangible the immense boredom of a dusty afternoons in a village house. If you love tongue-in-cheek flattery, chatter, politics in God's own country, it's a pleasant reading. ■

Dr Sarat Addanki Brings Ayurveda and Technology Together

SWASTI KUNWAR

“Integrative Oncology is the way to deal with cancer”

Dr Sarat Addanki
Ayurvedic doctor and founder
of Ayurway
Dublin, CA



Dr Sarat Addanki is a truly remarkable individual whose story is one of inspiration, passion, and dedication. As the co-founder and chairman of Ayurway USA & Radhaas Ayurveda India, Dr Addanki combines his expertise in both technology and Ayurveda to bring innovative solutions to the healthcare industry. He holds a Bachelor's degree in computer science and engineering from Osmania University, and is a highly accomplished entrepreneur and quality assurance professional, with over 29 years of experience working with some of the world's largest and most complex IT landscapes, including McKesson Corporation, Tesla Motors, and William's Sonoma.

Dr Addanki's journey to becoming a leader in the Ayurvedic field was inspired by personal tragedy. After losing his mother to cancer, he enrolled for becoming a medical doctor in Ayurveda at the California College of Ayurveda and became passionate about the benefits of this ancient form of medicine. He has since used his expertise in technology to bring Ayurveda to a wider audience, and works closely with governments to promote sustainable growth and

development of Ayurvedic herbs.

Beyond his work in the healthcare industry, Dr Addanki is also deeply committed to giving back to his community. He has helped many Indians gain employment in the USA and has actively worked to make them more employable by providing training and mentorship. He has also stepped in to bridge the gap of affordability in education, helping hundreds of students complete their education and find fulfilling careers. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr Addanki went above and beyond to help over 200,000 people by distributing food and essentials.

Dr Sarat Addanki's impact extends far beyond the realm of Ayurveda. He is a visionary entrepreneur and a true humanitarian, whose unwavering dedication to helping others is an inspiration to us all. Whether it's through his work in healthcare, education, or community outreach, Dr Addanki is making a positive difference in the world, and his efforts serve as a testament to the power of compassion and the transformative impact that one person can have on the lives of many. ■

CINEMA

Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam A Tale of Metamorphosis and Meanings

RONY GEORGE



After his film *Churuli* that ignited a plethora of deliberations and controversies, Lijo Jose Pellissery's *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam* has captured the attention of the audience for a different set of reasons. While critics are still debating what the director 'meant' to convey, the film undoubtedly has a lot to offer in terms of a cinematic experience.

When the film starts, James (Mammootty), his family, and a few friends are returning from a Velankanni pilgrimage in a bus. During the journey, James slip into a siesta when the bus passes by a rural village in Tamil Nadu. In a trance-like state, James wakes up and asks the driver to halt. He then walks off and follows a road into the rustic village. To our surprise, we see James starting to live as Sundaram, who belongs to the village and is currently missing.

A clear premonition to the plot is planted at the very beginning of the story. The pivotal themes of life, death, and sleep is outlined in the quote from Thirukkural, 'Like falling asleep, is death; Like waking up from sleep, is birth'. The thespian actor Mammootty effortlessly flows from James to Sundaram and then wakes up, as if nothing has happened. Through his poised performance, Mammootty once again takes us to a world that is nothing less than a surreal metamorphosis.

The scenes in the village are brimming with

snippets of old Tamil films and songs that keep playing in the background. While this enriches and adds flavour to some of the scenes, at times it feels like too much noise. The camera angles and cinematography are carefully crafted to render a filter of mysteriousness that resonates well with and elevates the theatrical experience.

While we are left with unanswered questions of one's identity and belonging, the film also pokes us to reflect upon how we are all tied to our memories. When we wake up after taking a nap on a hot afternoon, for a couple of seconds we feel a little disoriented. Then the flash of memory reappears and we reorient ourselves, like fixing a missing jigsaw piece. In *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam*, Pellissery shows us what happens when we piece together such a puzzle in a different way. What if our memories don't add up to make sense of who we are/were?

The debates about the 'intended meaning' of the story are still rife. However, it is worthwhile to consider a different view that the director may not have intended anything after all. The movie problematises our constant urge to decipher everything we see. In our attempt to categorise and make sense of things, are we missing out on the beauty of uncertainties and grey areas? *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam* is as enigmatic as a postmodern painting that demands the viewers to create their own readings and meanings. ■



The Cup of Joy and the Cup of Sorrow

BOBBY JOSE KATTIKAD OFM CAP

We constantly hear about God's will. How to discern and respond to God's will? Perhaps, it is by receiving life as it comes with open arms and gratefully eating the dishes from life's table.

What happened when Jesus said Abba's will be done? He was ready to drink the cup that was extended to him with love. The lesson is that no cup is to be pushed away, but to be drunk and emptied to the dregs.

Life has many unexpected twists and turns and things in store for you in its ways. The key is to strengthen the mind to accept everything that life offer. Do not believe too much in miracles. There really aren't many second chances in life.

It was a school for young children. The Guru was teaching them to be strong enough to accept what life gives them. To the child in front he said: 'I am going to lift you out of the chair.' She said, 'No way.' Then she locked her hands, tying them to the chair. Still Guru pulled her up. She said, 'It hurts like my arms are going to break!'

To the second child the Guru said: 'Now it is your turn. I am going to lift you too.' The moment he touched her hand, to his surprise, she burst out laughing and jumped up, hanging on to his finger. . .and so the dance began. No pain, only pleasure.

That is the point—whether you resist or not, the ultimate experience doesn't vary much change. What matters is how you are accepting such experiences. Both mourning and dancing can start from the same experience. It is up to you to decide which one you want. ■

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