

# together

a national family magazine

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# together

**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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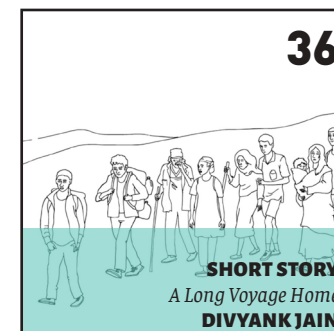
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# Ecce Homo

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

May is hot; not just because of the rising mercury levels across India and elsewhere, but also because of the elections in Karnataka, which is arguably, an important state for the existence and rise of BJP in the South, because of the ongoing ED raids and political arrests, and of course, because of May Day –the day we appreciate the constitution of the eight-hour working day. The workers today, as in every age, are in a permanent revolution, lest the bosses take advantage of their powerlessness, and make them machines.

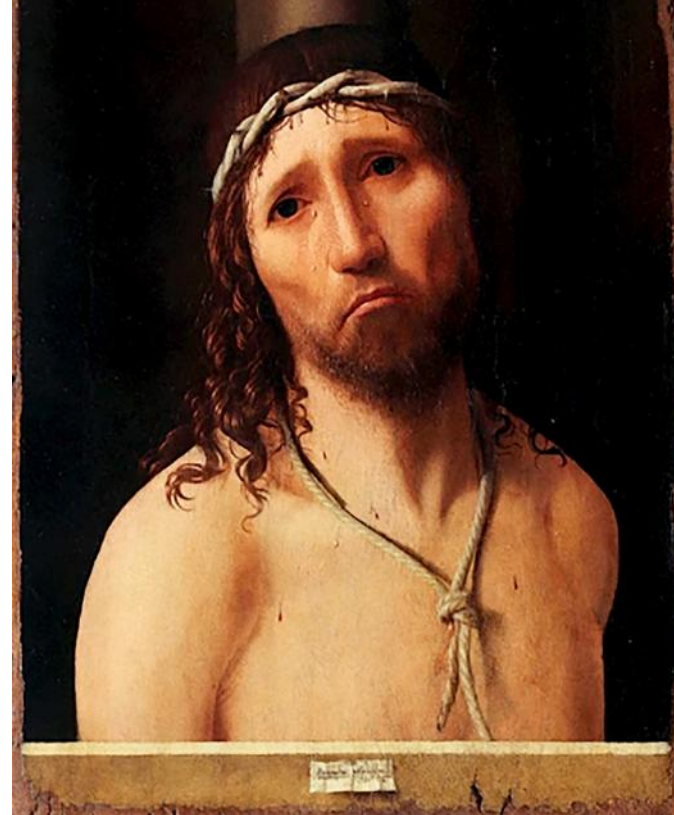
There has been no other movement as the workers movement, which made the world take notice of people and their struggles. May is a month to notice humans, look at powerless humans more genuinely, more seriously. I borrow a conversation from Bobby Jose Kattikad which happened during the Kerala Literature Festival. He began his conversation with a rather old expression, 'Ecce Homo', meaning, this is human, this is human condition, or behold human. The first occurrence of uttering these words was by a Roman governor in the very beginning of the first century. He brought out a young man who was falsely accused, arrested, and stricken, out to the full view of a large frenzied and frantic crowd, and stated, 'ecce homo' –behold man. It was a call to look seriously at that man again. Do not pretend not to see him, bleeding, made naked, put to shame, and crucified.

Much later, in 1888, just a while before Friedrich Nietzsche collapsed into madness, almost like his autobiography, he writes the book, 'Ecce Homo'. Nietzsche was someone who noticed man, one of his engaging hobbies was to go to the street, sit there, and watch people. Genuinely noticing people also takes you down to many other layers of seeing. One day as Nietzsche was sitting by the street, he sees a man intolerably beating up his horse, Nietzsche runs and stands between the man and the horse, and began pleading for

the horse. The pleading for the dumb animal may not have gone on without a few beatings falling on him too. And his life story says that soon he was taken to an asylum. Nietzsche was even apprehensive of people pretending to see god but ignoring to see humans. Perhaps his claim, 'god is dead' was a tactic to make people to stop looking heavenward and start seeing humans on the plains of the earth. Ecce homo is a call to look at powerless humanity, trafficked, used and made to overwork for profit, left unemployed for greed, dominated and muzzled by authoritarian and patriarchal regimes, and desecrated in the name of religion.

## Power and Powerlessness

The world is a power structure; a social, political, economic, religious, and gender power structure. There are entitled people in and on top of the pyramid. Those at the bottom seldom get counted. The structure is narcissistically controlled by those wielding power. The powerless only get to hear of it from the textbooks: authoritarianism (the rule of one), which if goes unchecked can become totalitarianism, and eventually fascism. It is the absolute rule and control by one man, one force, and one regime, though the degrees of power may vary. They want a country to be in one colour, speak one language, profess the same creed, and have only one choice while electing its leader and in running its affairs; any opposition is anti-national. Today oligarchic (rule of the few) too is getting momentum. Authoritarians and fascist have come to know that they need huge wealthy corporations and propagandist media on their side for a presumptuous rule. Some, thankfully, still believe in the rule by all (liberal democracy). Being liberal is also a power structure with a hierarchy, but here the people have rights: right to speak, right to ask questions, and the right to respond. The masses have faces, names, and voice.



Antonello da Messina, an Italian renaissance artist painted, *Ecce Homo* (1475), the image of a man condemned to death in the early first century.

One is powerless when one is inescapably in a system, but can see its flaws and tyrannies, yet has no right to question or correct it. I live in a house, I know it is filthy and toxic, but I can't clean it, I can't even talk about it. This problem seems just hypothetical but not so. No country or systems must be blindly considered great because you are born in it. For example, If I am born in a fascist country, is it right to glorify fascism? Is it criminal to question fascism? Do I become an anti-national by doing it? Because I am part of a country, or system, can I not question it? Is it my problem that I was born in it, and I can see its flaws? The argument goes true also with religion, gender, and the rest. It is a myth to consider that asking questions and holding a conversation would weaken a system or a country. Shouldn't the right to ask questions and respond be fundamental rights for the health of a system.

Power structures are complex. We often live in an illusion of having power, but the reality may be far from it. Michel Foucault talks about power making its social presence in two kinds of garbs, repressive power and normalised power.

Normalised power is ingrained and relatively allusive. It's what makes us exist within a society, and within the underlying norms of a society, as accepted in a specific social context, and do the things that we need to do. Contrasted to this, a more obvious form of power is repressive power, which is power that is actively asserted. Consider a situation where a teacher threatens a student with detention if they don't stop speaking in class. This would be an example of repressive power, meaning that it was actively asserted.

Normalised power, on the other hand is so normal to us that we don't even realise that we don't talk in the class (we don't talk anywhere). Here too, our aim of not talking in the class is the same, namely, not to be detained in the same class. This power structures are so internalised and normalised that our beliefs, desires, and decisions are shaped by it, and they appear normal.

May Day is a reminder of sacrifice, struggle, and revolution. Here is the greatest lesson of May Day, when the masses are not given ordinary powers to question, respond and correct their course, they will forcefully take it through extraordinary means. ■

# Human Trafficking: A Journey Against Their Will

Called as 'modern day slavery', the unfortunate victims of it are stripped of their autonomy, choice of work, freedom of movement, and are compelled to do jobs in dangerous and hazardous conditions.

LIYA THOMAS

The occurrence of human smuggling and human trafficking increased manifold in the first two decades of the present century. Regional conflicts, economic crises, social unrest, and globalisation forced people to look beyond, flee for safer locations and greener pastures, and make a living, which gave opportunity for transnational organized crime groups to indulge in smuggling people across national boundaries through corrupt means. Migration is a natural human process across time and space. Contemporary migration takes place, primarily, as a result of the increased demand and supply world over, especially in the developed world, and the illicit human trade is hidden in this vast movement of people. The economic crisis of 2008, conflicts in Africa, Middle East, Asia and elsewhere, and the impact of globalisation with regard to economic and demographic imbalances between the developed and the developing world are examples, which causes these upheavals in society. As a result, transnational organized crime groups have become more active and their tentacles are spread far and wide. National governments are not equipped to deal with them as the operating area of traffickers is spread across the globe, and the absence of any effective legal framework for coordinated effort make the situation more difficult. Therefore, it is important that the issue is of utmost seriousness for nation states and international agencies to work together to evolve a system to deal effectively with the menace.

Human trafficking booms on the demand and supply principle of modern economics. There have been correlations between human trafficking and uncontrolled and free consumerism. Particularly in a globalized world, when people's only aim is to increase profit, cheap goods and services are sought after. Demand for cheap labour, commercial sex services, etc. are met by services supplied by victims of human trafficking. This exploitative economic model increases the profit of corporations and other

business firms. Of course, there are many more causes for human migration and trafficking. Much of controlling of human trafficking will depend on the way the world consumes. Along with globalisation, spread of internet and growing awareness among people for a better life made openings for people to take risk and move around for better life and livelihood, thus, in some sense, even people from remote parts of the world becomes victims of demand and supply chain of the world, driven by consumerism. The well to do and talented people moved to wealthier countries for better prospects. That opened avenues and paths for others to follow. At the same time many others also aspire for such opportunities to come their way due to various other reasons. Natural disasters, global warming, displaced and impoverished people due to various causes are all reasons that added to the human migration and that gave opportunity for human smugglers, big and small, to venture into trafficking.

Though human trafficking is widespread, it does not affect those in the upper strata of the society and consequently not much attention is given to the severity of the problem. The modus operandi followed by traffickers vary from place to place. Human trafficking brings huge profits and less risk for the traffickers as compared to drug trafficking, which is dealt with much more harshly around the world. There has been a visible increase in trade in human persons. This has been the fastest growing kind of transnational crime, which has an annual profit of \$10 to \$32 billion. Such easy profit without much threat of severe punishment or consequences attracts many into the field of human trafficking.

## Human Smuggling and Human Trafficking

It is important to understand the terms 'human smuggling' and 'human trafficking' at the outset to appreciate the subtle differences between them. Human smuggling is the smuggling of human with their consent by involved organi-



Share of detected trafficking victims, by form of exploitation, 2018 (or most recent)

Image source: Global Report on trafficking in persons 2020 by United Nations

sations, from one place to another illegally for financial benefits of themselves, for example, illegal border crossing; whereas in human trafficking, persons are being trafficked or acquired forcibly and kept in a very degrading, dangerous conditions for various purposes such as prostitution, slavery, cruelty, violence etc. But both the concepts are somehow interrelated. Human smuggling is one of the wide and emerging hot topics at the global level, which involves almost all the human rights issues. Human trafficking is forcible acquisition of people from various sources and getting undue gains for the trafficker. Smuggling does not necessarily involve coercion, whereas trafficking involves coercion and violence. Both are illegal activities and treat people as commodities.

Human Trafficking occurs in every region of the world. The traffickers lure the victims through fake employment agencies and bogus assurance of jobs and education. It is the recruitment, transportation and use of people through coercive and deceptive means for exploitation and to make a profit that makes it a crime. There are three main elements – recruitment of people, by coercive means and for the purpose of exploitation. When these elements are present it is considered as trafficking. Men, women and children of all ages are victims of this heinous crime.

### Human Trafficking Exploits The Economically Vulnerable for Profit

One of the major factors in the growth of human trafficking is the rise of globalisation, which put the people of the developing world in touch with the developed world and the markets worldwide. The rise in the standard of living and growth of economy in general gave hope to the poor, the marginalized and even others to seek opportunities to live and work in the developed world. Though trafficking existed always, the globalisation process speeded it up, made it open, freer and more enticing. Globalisation facilitated faster movement of people, commodities and services. Free market and free trade are special features of globalisation which resulted in lesser state control. However, richer countries though have more opportunities and demands for people, have stricter rules for entry. Therefore, the transnational criminal groups enter the scene to facilitate the entry of people into such countries. The well-organized and widespread groups or people behind these profitable crimes take benefit of vulnerable persons, who are despairing or just looking for an improved life.

Migrants who are faced with unfavorable circumstances in their search for migration or job opportunities seek the services of the smugglers to achieve their goals. Such people are mostly from Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, sub-Sa-

haran Africa and Latin American countries. Smugglers mostly share the cultural background of those migrating and they seek people through Internet, employment agencies and local contacts. They assist them in obtaining fraudulent passports, visas and such documents.

A major factor that render humans vulnerable is the prolonged conflicts in countries around the world which gives rise to refugees. Conflicts and unrest in Middle east, Africa, Asia and the Latin American countries created many refugees in refugee camps where many who are unable to return to their traditional homeland in turn becomes victims of criminal gangs for trafficking. The richer among them try for political asylum in other countries and many others become victims of criminal gangs. The poor and the marginalized have a different problem; they depend on the criminal gangs much more to get a job or settle down, and as a result they are exploited much more. They may be sold to similar criminal gangs operating in those countries. The recent armed conflict in Ethiopia, the civil war in Syria sometime back are good examples of situations where people wanted to flee and traffickers became involved in dangerous attempts to take people across the national borders.

Many people from Africa and elsewhere migrate due to severe draught conditions, loss of livelihood and epidemic that occur from time to time. People from Sudan, sub-Saharan Africa are examples of such migration and subsequent exploitation at the hands of criminal gangs. Social situations in the Latin American countries and east European countries create atmosphere conducive for human trafficking. The conditions prevalent there are apt for trafficking and servitude. Victims are controlled and subjugated by intimidation, threats, torture and extreme violence. Confiscation of travel and other identity documents render the victims helpless; such victims rarely seek assistance from anywhere. Repeated threats of violence to self and family far away make the victims to comply with the dictates of the traffickers.

Often people who are victims of human trafficking are targeted on their vulnerabilities and marketed between nations and expanses using fraud documents, deception or force. After arriv-

ing at their endpoint, these unfortunate people are stripped of their autonomy, choice of work, freedom of movement, and are compelled to do jobs in dangerous and hazardous conditions. These people are meted with numerous forms of bodily and psychological abuses. Human trafficking is connected with a number of other crimes, like, illegal money transfer, making and using of fake travel documents, and a many kind of cybercrimes. Yearly hundreds of thousands of victims leave their home states to getaway from conflict and abject poverty. These are ready to do any thing in the expectations of finding an improved life. Transnational organized criminal units are aware of it and take maximum advantage of these victims' desperation. They assist the moving of migrants across borders with less or no respect for their security and welfare. What matters for them is the money and profit.

### The South Asian Case Study

The countries in the South Asia are some of the most populous countries with multiple social and economic problems. India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal has multiple problems like forced labor, forced marriages, sex trafficking and many other ills. Indian economic policies made great advancement in the middle class growing into a substantial force, but human trafficking is major issue facing them. With the economic uncertainty many from villages migrated to cities for jobs. Along with-it brothels and sex trafficking increased tremendously. The biggest and the smallest South Asian countries – India and Nepal - are taken to study the human trafficking problem that they face.

### Nepalese Women and Girls Are Trafficked for Profit and Consumption of the Sex Industry

In the past women and minor girls were sourced and sold to brothels in India from Nepal which was accepted as normal by some section of Nepalese society. However, with the advent of the Palermo Protocol, public opinion in Nepal began to change. Even after twenty years of Palermo Protocol, Nepal is still a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children who are subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Nepali women and girls are

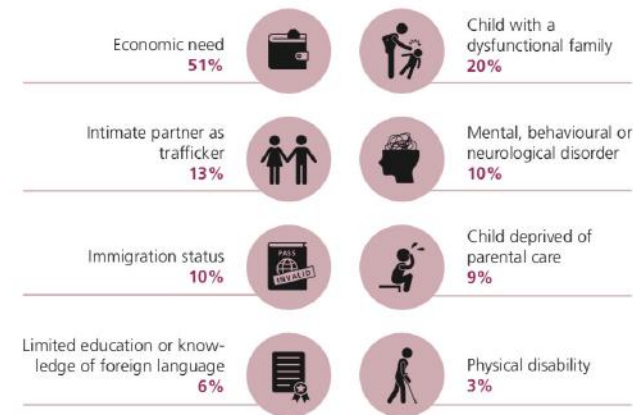
subjected to sex trafficking within Nepal, particularly for the adult entertainment industry and massage parlors, as well as to India, the Middle East, China, Malaysia, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Sweden. Men, women, and children are subjected to forced labor in Nepal, India, the Middle East, China and Malaysia. The main reason for trafficking is for corporates and businesses to make get cheap labour and make huge profits; and other reasons are unemployment, social exclusion, poverty, corruption, conflict, harmful cultural and religious practices, natural disasters and lack of awareness. The Nepalese women lack property rights and economic rights. Norms and rules of the place that are not modern enough lead to human trafficking; even family members and husbands sell off their women and girl children.

In the aftermath of 2015 earthquake in Nepal, many women and girls were sold to brothels in India. Various sources estimate that 5,000 to 15,000 women and girls are trafficked annually to India for purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. Due to the deteriorating unemployment situation in Nepal, people have been seeking employment in other countries and the number of girls and women going has increased.

Nepalese women have been part of Mumbai sex industry since very long and the Nepalese society accepted and approved it as a matter of fact. In the late 1990s the attitude and approach changed and focus on sex trafficking came into prominence. The old school of thought made a distinction between 'sex trafficking' and 'migration for sex' to Mumbai. Many women wanted to protect their right to migrate for sex. The fact remains that the migration process involves deception, fraud, force or violence. The central districts surrounding Kathmandu are severely affected by sex trafficking. Because they are backward, rural, and superstitious; they are easily enticed by traffickers and are taken to brothels in India. The awakening since the Palermo Protocol has made a difference. Nepal Government in its anti-trafficking effort has much to do to bring the laws in tune with the Palermo Protocol and focus on effective implementation, enforcement, monitoring along with sufficient budgetary provision to prevent their

women and children being trafficked for profit and consumer interest of the entertainment and sex industry.

**Case Study of a Trafficked Girl in Jharkhand, India**  
Human trafficking is the second major planned crime in India. In India most of the human trafficking happens from rural and extremely poor regions in India. Individuals are not fully aware of the profiteering intentions of the middlemen, thus it is difficult for the government to intervene. Often by the time the case comes to light it is too late for anyone to act. A typical trafficking case from the state of Jharkhand on the central-eastern part of India is an eye opener for everyone to see how traffickers operate, and and trafficking takes place in India and neighboring countries. Sumanti (name changed), a 11-year-old school girl from Bhoot village, 35 kms away from Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand, on her way from school was approached by a middle aged woman with an offer to study and work outside Jharkhand. The girl agreed and she was sold to a middle man for \$24. She was taken to New Delhi by train and sold to someone to work as a domestic help. They did not send her to school. Sumanti lived in an area where an Indian insurgent group known as the 'Maoists' operate. Because the villagers were threatened by the insurgents and the police alike her parents thought she was picked either by the insurgents to join them forcefully or by the police to question her. The parents lost hope of getting their daughter back after their frantic search. One day when the girl was sent to buy vegetables from the market, Sumanti along with another girl from the same state took a train and reached Ranchi, the capital of the state. The police took them and sent them to a shelter for the destitute. Through the effort of non-governmental volunteers she was returned to her family. Several weeks of conversation with the girl revealed her harrowing experience. She was accepted back by the family; but there are cases where families reject the girls! According to the government statistics nearly 100,000 girls are trafficked from Jharkhand state and Sumanti was one of them. Majority of the girls belong to tribal communities.



Percentage of cases by pre-existing factors that traffickers have taken advantage of  
Image source: Global Report on trafficking in persons 2020 by United Nations

### Mindless Profit, the Chief Cause of Human Trafficking

Arpana Bansal of Guru Kasahi University identifies two broad factors for human trafficking in India; and both in some way of the other are connected with profit makers exploiting the have-nots. She calls them push factors and pull factors.

Push factors are given rise by abject poverty in the rural regions of India; the poor are forced by circumstances to succumb to human trafficking. Poverty almost blinds them that they become mindless of the consequences. Thus intervention by authorities becomes difficult and even impossible.

Pull factors are set in motion by demand for cheap goods and services. Solely profit driven business establishments promote human trafficking to make cheap labour and maximum profit possible; and this is quite possible with free flow of personnel, goods and services due to the globalized world. Many are trafficked for the purpose of procuring human organs for transplant in very cheap price.

In conclusion, human trafficking and human smuggling have many causes from cheap labour to commercial sex services; but there is something that underpins all the obvious reasons

-the corporate and individual desire for more and more profit on the one hand and human craving for mindless consumption on the other. Perhaps much more time and coordinated effort is needed to deal with such an international problem with the perpetrators hiding under the large umbrella of corporate businesses.

A sure solution can come about only from the fact of financial and social security for all; and by big businesses becoming more ethical and humane. Twenty years of the Palermo Protocol has achieved success, but the widespread trafficking in recent times is enough reason to make urgent efforts and develop more scientific ways to tackle them.

Political consumerism, in short is the choice by consumers to purposefully buy, or refuse to buy, certain commodities after assessing the process and people who have worked for its production. Thus consumers become the latest activists in the struggle against this current sort of slavery. Memories of slavery of the past is unsavory, if human trafficking is the modern version of it, it is time to curb it for all to hold their heads high with respect in the future. ■

**Liya Thomas** is an academic scholar of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Glasgow, Scotland.

# Overworked

## May Day Puts a Stop to It

May Day is celebrated by workers around the world as an expression of the international solidarity and shared political aspirations for freedom.

In 1884, the U.S. Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions had passed a law declaring that, as of 1 May 1886, an eight-hour workday would be the full and legal workday for all U.S. workers – the ruling class had that much time to recognise this new law and put it into effect. The owners refused.

On May 1, 1886, workers took to the streets in a general strike throughout the entire country to force the ruling class to recognise the eight-hour working day. Over 350,000 workers across the country directly participated in the general strike, with hundreds of thousands of workers joining the marches as best they could.

In what they would later call the Haymarket riots, during the continuing strike action on May third in Chicago, the heart of the US labour movement, the Chicago police opened fire on the unarmed striking workers at the McCormick Reaper Works, killing six workers and wounding untold numbers. An uproar across the nation resounded against the government and its police brutality, with workers' protest rallies and demonstrations throughout the nation set to assemble on the following day.

On May 4, the International Working Peoples' Association organised a rally of several thousand workers at Haymarket Square to protest the continuing police brutality against striking workers on the South Side. As the last speaker finished his remarks that rainy evening, with only 200 of the most dedicated workers remaining at the rally, 180 armed police marched forward and demanded the workers to disperse. Then, deep within the police ranks, a bomb exploded, killing seven cops. The police opened fire on the unarmed workers – the number of workers wounded and killed by the cops is un-

known to this day. Eight anarchists were arrested on charges of 'inciting riot' and murder. The retaliation of the government was enormous in the days to follow, filling every newspaper with accusations, completely drowning the government murders and brutality of days past.

Eight workers were convicted as anarchists, were convicted of murder, and were convicted of inciting a riot. Only one of the eight men accused was present at the protest, and he was attempting to address the crowd when the bomb went off. In one of the greatest show trials in the history of the working-class movement no evidence was ever produced to uphold the accusations, though all eight were convicted as guilty. Four of the prisoners – Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel and Adolph Fisher – were executed, Louis Lingg committed suicide, and the three remaining were pardoned due to immense working class upheaval in 1893.

On May 1, 1890, in accordance with the decision of the Paris Congress (July 1889) of the Second International to commemorate the Haymarket martyrs, mass demonstrations and strikes were held throughout Europe and America. The workers put forward the demands for an eight-hour working day, better health conditions, and further demands set forth by the International Association of Workers. The red flag was here created as the symbol that would always remind us of the blood that the working-class has bled, and continues to bleed, under the oppressive reign of capitalism.

From that day forward (starting in 1891 in Russia, by 1920 including China, and 1927 India) workers throughout the world began to celebrate the first of May as a day of international proletarian solidarity, fighting for the right of freedom to celebrate their past and build their future without the oppression and exploitation of the capitalist state. ■

Text from **Marxists Internet Archive** ([www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org))

## Decent Work and Economic Growth in Sustainable Development Goals

KAPIL ARAMBAM

The SDGs are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. Goal #8 is *Decent Work and Economic Growth* that aims to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.



### GOAL 8 TARGETS Decent Work and Economic Growth

#### Information Sources

- Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations
- The SDG Report 2022

Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals is about promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all. The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated the worst economic crisis in decades and reversed progress towards decent work for all.

Although the global economy began to rebound in 2021, bringing some improvement in unemployment, recovery remains elusive and fragile.

**8.1 Sustain per capita economic growth** in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries

**8.2 Achieve higher levels of economic productivity** through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors

**8.3 Promote development-oriented policies** that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

**8.4 Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production** and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, with developed countries taking the lead

**8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men**, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

**8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth** not in employment, education or training

**8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking** and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

**8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments** for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment

**8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism** that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

**8.10 Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions** to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all

**8.A Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries**, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries

**8.B By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy** for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organisation



### Facts & Figures

- Global real GDP per capita was projected to increase by 3 per cent in 2022, but the Ukraine crisis will likely hold growth to 2.1 per cent.
- The real GDP for least developed countries is projected to rise by 4.0 per cent in 2022, and 5.7 per cent in 2023 – still below the 7 per cent target under the 2030 Agenda.
- In 2021, global output per worker rebounded sharply, rising by 3.2 per cent; however, productivity in least developed countries declined by 1.6 per cent.
- The average worker in a high-income country produced 13.6 times more output than the average worker in a low-income country in 2021.
- The global unemployment rate is projected to remain above its 2019 level of 5.4 per cent, at least until 2023.
- In 2021, unemployment declined slightly to 6.2 per cent.
- In 2021, 4.3 per cent of global working hours were lost relative to the fourth quarter of 2019.
- Worldwide, 160 million children (63 million girls and 97 million boys) were engaged in child labour at the beginning of 2020.
- Globally, nine million additional children are at risk of being pushed into child labour by the end of 2022, compared to 2020, as a result of rising poverty driven by the pandemic. ■



# THE SIGNS OF DIFFICULT TIMES FOR A LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

ALEX TUSCANO

I hear the chorus of people 'we are living in difficult times'. There is a spectrum of fear among many people; and they have reasons to fear.

Elections are being undermined: People may elect any party to power with majority; but it is BJP that will form the government. In 2008 BJP did not get clear majority in the state assembly. To make good Yeddyurappa got the legislators from other parties who resigned from their respective parties and through byelections got elected under BJP banner to consolidate his majority in the assembly. This was the beginning of what is called 'Operation Lotus'.

In Goa Congress was the largest party elected to the assembly. But BJP brought the legislators from the Congress Party and formed the Government. In Manipur too BJP followed the similar tactics and formed the government. The present government in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra are again the governments with stolen mandates.

In Karnataka the congress party in alliance with JDS formed a government with clear majority and Kumaraswamy became the chief minister. But soon the BJP managed to get several of the legislators from the Congress party and Janata Dal Secular party and brought down the government elected by the people and installed the present BJP government.

In Madhya Pradesh BJP managed to make Jyotiraditya Scindia to cross over from the congress



party to BJP. He came out with thirty legislators and brought down Kamal Nath's government and put in place the BJP government with Shivraj Singh Chouhan as the chief minister.

There were some feeble attempts made by the BJP to sponsor the discontent of Sachin Pilot's revolt to bring down the Rajasthan government. But with Ashok Gehlot's political skill and Farooque Abdullah's advise to Pilot that did not come through.

In Maharashtra BJP and Shiv Sena was in alliance in the state election. BJP had promised that Uddhav Thakare would be made the chief Minister. But when the results were out BJP refused to make a Shiv Sena person (Uddhav Thakare) the chief minister. Uddhav Thakare, then aligned with the Nationalist Congress Party and Indian National congress and formed the government. BJP split the Shiv Sena party with the help of Eknath Shinde and brought down the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government. Eknath Shinde was given the chief ministership and Devendra Fadnavis was made a deputy chief minister.

Today this government is under the threat of Supreme Court's possible judgement declaring the Shinde's vote of confidence null and void. If this happens then Eknath Shinde's government could come crashing down. Eknath Shinde not only broke Shiv Sena party he also went against the anti-defection law. The anti defection law mandates that trust vote cannot be taken with the disqualified legislators; and no government can be formed with disqualified legislators.

In the three big states, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra BJP did not form the government by winning elections. Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand are the only two governments where the BJP had clear mandate and formed the governments. Other states, like, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh there are non-BJP governments.

Minorities are targeted: Since BJP has come to power directly or indirectly the minorities such as Muslim and Christians are persecuted. The cow vigilantes have attacked number of people with the suspicion of either carrying or possessing beef. Just because they are Muslims

without making any enquiry, they are attacked and killed. In many cases they did not even possess beef. There are incidents of dairy farmers who were intercepted, attacked and killed while transporting those to their homes. Many places of worship of the Christians were vandalized and desecrated in many parts of the country. In the name of 'Ghar vapasi' huge number of Dalit and Adivasi Christians were attacked and forcefully converted to Hindu religion.

Attempts to eliminate the opposition: Narendra Modi's slogan, 'Congress Mukh Bharat' is a mighty one. The implication of the slogan goes long and deep. India won freedom from the British under the leadership of Congress Party. Congress initiated the process of forming a constituent assembly by bringing together all sections of the people of India to draft the constitution of India. It is Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar's leadership the saw that the draft document of the constitution was presented in the constituent assembly. In the freedom struggle and in the constitution of the Indian state we find no share fo Rashtriya Swayambhu Sevek (RSS) and its leaders; some even did not agree with the secular nature of the state and they opposed it vehemently. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in the process as he was seen as soft on the Muslims.

When Modi gives a call for 'Congress mukh Bharat' he would like to eliminate not only the congress party but also the entire history of freedom struggle and the formation of democratic, secular, and socialist state of India.

Now from 'Congress Mukh Bharat' Modi is moving towards 'Opposition Mukh Bharat'. This is clearly visible from the way Enforcement Directorate and Central Bureau of Investigation is chasing after the members of the opposition parties. Manish Sisodia and Satyendra Jain of the APP are in jail over the excise policy. They tried to target Sanjay Raut of Shiv sena. But finally they had to release him for lack of evidence of any wrongdoing. They have targeted Tejaswi Yadav of RJD party and the deputy chief minister of Bihar. They even tried to get Sharad Pawar of NCP. D.K. Shivkumar, the president of Karnataka Pradesh president, had to experience the torture of ED for several years.

But on the contrary the politicians of the BJP

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**There was a direct response from the Modi government to Rahul Gandhi, in the form of reviving a defamation case filed in Surat. In 2019 Rahul Gandhi had given a speech in Kolar of Karnataka. He had said Lalit Modi is a thief, Nirav Modi is a thief, Narendra Modi is a thief. How come all the thieves have Modi as a common surname?**

are not the target of the ED or CBI. In Karnataka one minister and his son was found with huge amount of bribe money. No enquiry was made. Eshwarappa of the BJP was accused of 40% commission on the government work given to the contractors. This issue came out after one contractor committed suicide citing Eshwarappa's demand for 40% commission to be the cause of his extreme step. If the tainted politicians join BJP then all their cases would be swashed. Suwendu Adhikari, Mamata Bannerji's right hand person, while being in the Trinamool Congress party was accused of corruption; but the moment he joined BJP his charges were dismissed. BJP was hoping to win West Bengal with his help. He defeated Mamata with a margin of one digit number votes but BJP could not shake the Trinamool Congress from power in West Bengal. Mukul Roy is another person who has been under the scanner of CBI and ED. He joined BJP. After Mamata won the election he returned to Trinamool Congress. But he takes turns to be in BJP and in Trinamool party.

Finally, Modi and BJP have succeeded in getting at Rahul Gandhi. After his massively successful Bharat Jodo Yatra, during which he gave innumerable press conferences, he raised the people's issues like unemployment, price rise, social inequality, ruling government favouring Gautam Adani and him returning the favours. Rahul had become a source of anxiety to Modi's government. They tried to disrupt the yatra by compromising the security arrangements. When he reached Kashmir the security for the yatra had almost disappeared. Only when the congress par-

ty raised this issue that the security was restored. His yatra has been getting next to no attention on electronic media, which are almost entirely beholden to the BJP. BJP also own an aggressive IT cell.

In the Parliament Rahul Gandhi gave a historic speech. He asked Modi questions on his relationship with Gautam Adani. Every time Modi went on his foreign tour he was accompanied by Adani or soon after Modi returned from his foreign tour Gautam Adani was visiting that country. Sri Lanka government has stated that it was under the pressure from Modi they had to give its electricity generation project to Gautam Adani. Bangladesh electricity project was also given to Adani. Adani could mine coal from Jharkhand Adivasi area by displacing the Adivasis with little or no rehabilitation package.

There was a direct response from the Modi government to Rahul Gandhi, in the form of reviving a defamation case filed in Surat. In 2019 Rahul Gandhi had given a speech in Kolar of Karnataka. He had said Lalit Modi is a thief, Nirav Modi is a thief, Narendra Modi is a thief. How come all the thieves have Modi as a common surname? And if you search you may find some more who will have Modi after their names.

One Purnesh Modi filed a defamation case against Rahul Gandhi. Parvesh was not even remotely connected to this remark. Since Rahul Gandhi did not appear before the court and Purnesh had to regularly attend the case, he decided to get a stay on this case from Gujarat high court. The matter came to rest there. But as soon as Rahul Gandhi gave his speech in the

Parliament Purnesh Modi was asked to go to the Gujarat high court to restart the case against Rahul Gandhi. The case went on under a new judge with supersonic speed and Rahul Gandhi was convicted. He was fined with ₹15,000 and two years' imprisonment. Two years jail in such case is the maximum sentence to be given. No one in the history of India has served such a strong sentence for defamation. He had 30 days to file an appeal. As soon as he received the sentence, with a lightning speed he was disqualified from the Parliament and he was asked to vacate the bungalow he was staying for past eighteen years. When Rahul went to the session court a judge who was a lawyer of Amit Shah dismissed his plea.

Modi is in no way a name of any backward class. There are many people, Parsis, Muslims and traders by name Modi. The dismissal of Rahul Gandhi from the Parliament, (through a process of law) has not only shut the mouth of Rahul Gandhi but also the opposition at large. The hind side of this is that the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi from the Parliament has brought together the opposition parties, such as AAP, Trinamool Congress who were not inclined to do business with Congress party, in the fold of Opposition Unity.

There is still a demand from the opposition parties for a joint Parliamentary enquiry into the affairs of Adani and the Hindenburg report. The Second half of the budget session was washed out by non-other than the members of the treasury benches who are actually responsible to see that the house runs smoothly. Rahul Gandhi throughout his Bharat Jodo Yatra was giving a call to the people 'Daro mat'. Probably following this line people are becoming outspoken.

Satyapal Milk's revelation: Satyapal Malik is a member of Bhartiya Janata Dal Party. He was the governor of Kashmir from August 2018 to October 2019. During his tenure the special status of Jammu and Kashmir was revoked on 5th August, 2019. In his recent interview to the Wire, with

Karan Thapar, he had made several interesting revelations.

Phulwama attack, in which a convoy of vehicles carrying Indian security personnel on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway, was attacked by a vehicle borne suicide bomber at Lethapora in Phulwama district. Forty CRPF Jawan were killed. The CRPF had requested for four jet planes to transfer the Javans to Srinagar. But this request was denied by the then Home minister Rajnath Singh. Secondly the vehicle involved in the suicide attack was making rounds in the area for three days loaded with 350 kg of RDX explosive.

In conversation with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi Satya Pal Malik pointed out that 'it was a mistake on our part not to have provided the jet planes to carry the Javan to Srinagar. Secondly it was a gross intelligence failure not to have anticipated this attack, in spite of the fact that a vehicle with RDX was making rounds in the area of attack. To this, Satyapal Malik says, Modi told him to keep his mouth shut. Similarly, Ajit Doval, National Security adviser, too phoned him up to say he should keep his mouth shut. By this way Narendra Modi could use this incident in his 2019 election campaign, which he did and got a name for a true defender of the nation against Pakistan.

Another important revelation he made was from his experience he has seen that Narendra Modi is not too much concerned about corruption. It is proved by one incident in Goa and another incident in Jammu and Kashmir related to the Reliance Insurance, where Ram Madhav and Modi would give Rs. 300 crores to Satyapal Malik to implement the project.

The third thing he revealed was that his access to the president of India Mrs. Droupadi Murmu was blocked by the Prime minister's office. After these revelations by Satya Pal Malik the youth have come on the Delhi Road demanding security to him as his life is in danger. This was responded only by CBI calling Satya Pal Malik for enquiry. ■

# Muzzled. But Not Quiet Yet.

Vindictive politics has been rapidly spreading through the country like a wild fire in these years.

GERRY LOBO OFM

Our national politics, these days, is rapidly becoming a war of words with no beginning and no end. Political discourse is losing its public decency and, as the jungle war is going on, democratic conduct is battered and broken as if there are no rules of the game anymore. Roaring and tearing, biting and bashing have been heard inside and outside the Parliament so much so that the basic respect towards humans is being annihilated by the wagging of the tongue of politicians who have forgotten they are leaders first of the masses. The wisdom of our revered past Prime Ministers such as Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Manmohan Singh, in particular, and their gentle but strong interventions are shunned or deliberately forgotten; instead arrogance and inimical feelings are made public

as the normal manner of communication. Anything and everything is spat upon in public discourses. While speaking aloud the voice of justice is perfectly right, vomiting out poisonous and hateful statements on elevated platforms is not only ill-becoming of political leaders but it is also hurting the democracy systematically, inch by inch, in our country today. Perhaps political personnel will do well to tune in to the arguments raised and conclusions arrived at by our most eminent Judges of the Supreme Court, and the eminent Advocates who represent the parties involved in their defense of the cases, and how they are respectfully and delicately presented.

The vindictive stance taken as normal by political leaders at the helm of public affairs only reveals their bestial instinct which finds its external expression, not only in words but even in acts of hatred such as immediate disqualification of members from the legislative houses or from the legitimate membership in the public service domain. Debates held in the Parliament of Children in educational institutions speak of the dignity and reverence exhibited by the little ones, can serve as a good example for adult but immature politicians in our legislative assemblies. The children have no rancor or aggression in their discourses and arguments, instead an open mind taught by their teachers. The opposition which is manifested in their debates

does not spill over into their common forum where they interact with each other amicably. They retain a sense of decency and good manner without hypocrisy which our political masters exhibit on the street corners and on television channels. The journalists just wait for such vindictive politics played out by politicians to attract their viewers and benefit publicity from such events, even supporting political parties.

Vindictive politics has swept across our nation today which is obviously aimed at the elimination of the voice of truth and the right of justice. Sadly enough masses are made to believe that India is shining. Those who oppose are treated as enemies of the nation or betrayers of the Constitution. Statements hurled at without right foundation or truthful evidence are brandished in public, making a mockery of their freedom of speech. It almost looks like the freedom of speech is reserved only for those who support the majority government. Is it not unbecoming of the Speaker of the Rajya Sabha or the central Law Minister to air whatever their head prompts? Even at their level of public position, these do not show to citizens worthy conducting of discussions in legislative houses. Vindictiveness is clearly their stance in whatever they stand for. However, when it is an expression of genuine freedom of speech, most often it is judged sedition or defamation or anti-national. Reading too much into what is being said, these days, is being done with rapidity, just in order to hammer down and shut up legitimate speech, as in the case of Rahul Gandhi whose statement on Modis which was made in 2019 in a public appearance, even though it was not meant to denigrate any person or community. This only indicates how one can be so narrow in one's perception. Quick vindictive position is taken against the opponent as if politics is only a war against the enemy who must be eliminated because he or she is a threat to one's secure position. Mercilessly and miserably have failed our leaders in not withholding vengeance against those who dare to voice out dissent and propose truth.

A WhatsApp message sent to me by a thoughtful person reads: Strong people don't put others down... They lift them up. This wisely stated as it may be, one can hardly see it any-

where being practiced. Politics is not a vindictive exercise of destructive speech as witnessed in our country; it is rather a public act which deals with human concerns and works together with the opposition, respecting differing opinions and yet holding them all in confidence for a government, which serves its citizens without fear or favour. By setting aside contra-distinctive stand and yet moving forward for an expansive development of the citizens, a political leader burns himself into the project of 'lifting up' the human person rather than putting them down. Today, on the contrary, what one witnesses every day is the manner in which the political power is used. All are aware of its use as retaliation against individuals who are seen as opponents or even as enemies. Bringing into the public domain family issues of opponents is becoming an ugly performance of our political masters. Perhaps the politicians have run out of substance and have closed their minds to wider horizons which are leading them to cheap and perverse speech. How easily individuals are targeted and convicted conveniently through legal action only in order to disqualify them from the Parliament. In this way the iconoclasts are expelled for their unmasking of falsehood. Since truth exposes the ugly side of persons, spreading false information about the opponents, such as in the case of Rahul Gandhi, and disqualifying them from their place in the Parliament is viewed as a victorious deed. A move such as this has definitely dented the democratic image of India and has undermined the ability of individuals in the political circle, but not only there, even in the social domain where unethical form of elimination by fascists is observed today. Hence politics today has become intolerant governance and a persecution of the prophets of truth.

Vindictive politics in our country today is perhaps a passage towards a totalitarian regime whose aim is to silence democratic free speech so that one's personal agenda of establishing one religion, one voice and one language could be brought to reality. This is also for the benefit of a few elite, the strong ones, who would become the supreme authority over the masses. Political participation and sharing of common concerns is discouraged in this remote project and a

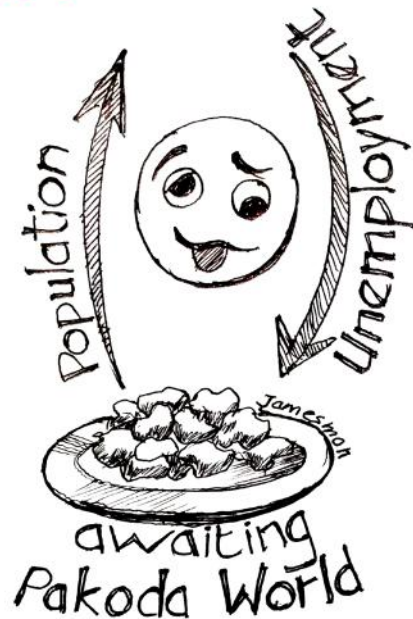


climate of fear is injected into the consciences of people today. As a result the citizens are bent low by the ruling demagogues in order to create one thinking as it is happening in Russia, Myanmar, China or North Korea. Alluring the voters with sweet-meats of promises on the economic level has created a kind of phobia in the citizens driving them to choose between 'the devil and the deep sea.' This agenda of a dominant political regime which uses vindictive politics at the crucial times such as today when elections are being announced is only aimed at terrorizing the commoners for self gain and majority victory. Unfortunately the Indian masses do not seem to be seeing through the vicious and cunning plans of avaricious politicians.

Ever since the incumbent majoritarian government took over the reins of legislature and the executive wing of governance in our country, the populace stands in an uncertain, insecure and fearful environment, awaiting freedom, equality and liberty at all levels of the society.

Vindictive politics has been rapidly spreading through the country like a wild fire just in these last few years. No more disciplined and worthy speech is emerging from leaders representing their people. Even the media is quick to blow things out of proportion at times, creating an impression that it is unbiased, only to serve the masters of authority. Politics of hate has entered into the Parliament, desecrating the 'Temple of Democracy' and destroying the fundamentals principles of a sacred Constitution. The citizens, who still hold their allegiance to a nation of great integrity, are gradually scandalized by the vindictive behavior which is witnessed in public discourses and in personal interaction. The time is now, after almost ten years of living in fear under the authority of an undemocratic democracy, when the citizens of this nation must rise above its self-interests and raise truth-doing voices to destroy vindictive attitudes and elect a 'Government of the people, by the people, with the people and for the people.' ■

## HAVE A HUNCH



# Toxic Masculinity Ruins the Party Again

Vindictive politics has been rapidly spreading through the country like a wild fire in these years.

NIKITHA ANTO

According to the Cambridge dictionary an alpha male is 'the most successful and powerful male in any group. A strong and successful man who likes to be in charge of others.' I mean there is nothing wrong in wanting to be successful and powerful. But it does not stop with that. The recent 'alpha male movement' was started by this man named Andrew Tate. This man started making videos on how to be an alpha male and how becoming one would make the men successful and rich. He did not end it there, rather he added that in order to become the so called 'superior quality man' they should start controlling their woman.

I quote 'Females are designed to meet a man, get pregnant, fall in love with the said man. If you sleep with enough of them, you remove the stigma and that cheapens you. It doesn't matter if a man slept with 20 girls or 200 girls, he's still a man'. It does not stop with this; he has passed many more vicious and disgusting comments about women. The matter

blew up to an extent that he was banned from social media sites like YouTube and Instagram because of his hate speech. But his videos are still being shared. Still being seen by millions of men, especially the growing youth.

Young people are being swayed by him. Andrew Tate has portrayed himself as a rich dude with a lot many cars and who is absolutely successful. That is more than enough for young minds to jump on the 'alpha male' bandwagon. They think that if they obey his words like; 'cheat on women', 'treat them bad', 'a real man does cry', blah blah blah, they would become successful and people would adore them. When women are trying their best to come up in the society, striving to be treated as equals, trying to speak up against discrimination, a person like Andrew Tate and his bulls\*\*\* ideologies on being a 'man' is a menace. ■

*PS: He is currently detained in Romania over a rape and human trafficking investigation.*



IN PICTURES

## Kaziranga and Its One-horned Rhinos

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

I love Kaziranga because here they are not caged or fenced as an exhibition item for the *homo sapiens*. The rhinoceros, elephants, wild buffalos, deer, the occasional tigers, and many other smaller animals roam free in this 430 square-kilometre expanse across the flood plains of Brahmaputra. Kaziranga lies between the Brahmaputra and the Karbi Hills. Much of the park is marshland interspersed with large pools fringed with reeds, patches of elephant grass, scattered trees, and thickets; inhabited popularly by the great Indian one-horned rhinoceroses.

I took an early morning walk around the park with my lens, and the woods there is bustling with birds, both resident and migratory. Sighting rare large birds, like, woolly-necked stork, grey-headed fish eagle, the lesser and great adjutant, which are declared vulnerable and threatened by International Union for Conservation of Nature, is very satisfying.

We took a safari in a private Gypsy into the central range of the park. We began seeing elephants, buffalos, deer, otter, and more; our eyes searched for the one we came travelling 3,000 km from the south of the country – the great one-horned rhinos. We could see large animals in flocks gracing far in the valleys; they all looked grey and one can't figure out whether they are elephants, buffalos, or rhinos. We were losing hope, and suddenly, there was a loud rustling of tall grass around us; we knew something large is approaching. The guide knew what was happening, and told us to look out. And there came two solid rhinos charging towards our vehicle. They came to a screeching halt as it came face to face with our vehicle. They looked magnificent and stood majestic. Now I know why they are called the pride, not only of Kaziranga, but also of our country.





# Determinism

Are we truly puppets on a string moved by forces beyond our control?

MONICA FERNANDES

The theory of Determinism states that we have no control of our lives. A determinist may say that we are predisposed to certain harmful actions because we have inherited our nature from our great grandfathers. The drunkard fools himself into believing that being a drunk is a trait that is genetic and that he can do precious little to throw off this bad habit.

According to the theory of psychic determinism, we owe all those hang ups we have today to our parents who were either too strict with us or too lenient. Perhaps they did not have the means to give us the education that could help us to make a success in our lives. The environmental determinists state that something or someone in our environment is responsible for our sorry state of affairs. Perhaps it is the government. Or it may be the weather. Or may be global warming and pollution.

Theological determinism is a form of determinism where people believe that all events that happen are pre-ordained by God. 'God took away my son,' moaned a lady whom I know. The reality was that her son got into wrong company, became a drug addict and died of an overdose. 'Why am I losing jobs? It's God's

will,' said a lazy part timer who once used to 'work' for me. How convenient! She had a ready excuse for not being able to retain jobs.

Determinists are fatalists and react negatively to what is happening to them. Is this viewpoint logical? Are we truly puppets on a string moved by forces beyond our control? If this is so, what about the free will God has endowed us with – the enormous power to choose between good and evil, between one course of action or another? It is an insult to God to believe in determinism, for God has created each individual lovingly to have his/her personality and traits.

The drunkard and drug addict referred to above could chosen to be steady, good citizens. The neta who lines his pockets with cash and does nothing for the people has chosen greed over duty. Some jailed convicts improve themselves by studying further whereas others choose to remain hardened criminals.

How do we react when we are afflicted with a serious illness? If we wallow in self-pity, we are merely seeking attention. We have a thing or two to learn from some of the saints who bore their illnesses stoically. They praised and thanked God in the midst of their pain.

Helen Keller lived a full life and was a

champion of the blind despite being blind and deaf herself. Stephen Hawkins, the great physicist, has never let his disability come in the way of his work. They chose to react to their challenges in a positive, proactive way.

Rita is a senior nurse working in the dialysis unit of Hinduja Hospital, Mumbai. Tragedy struck when her husband had a sudden stroke and was declared brain dead. Rita thought of suffering humanity and magnanimously decided to donate her husband's kidneys, liver and corneas so that five others could live a better life.

The so-called 'migrants' trudging wearily to their villages from the cities were victims of circumstances. The pandemic had rendered them jobless and there was no support system for them such as free rations or a shelter over their heads. They didn't return home out of their own free will. Was this Determinism at work or was it the failure of a callous system

where the financially weak are used when there is a need and forgotten during difficult times when the strong do not lend a helping hand to the weak? Let us not forget that these hapless people worked as masons, carpenters, workers in factories and their wives worked as part time maids in homes. They were enablers who enabled us to lead a better life.

Weather changes have been attributed to the increasing pollution levels. It is a facile excuse to blame circumstances beyond our control. Actually we are to blame for this sorry state of affairs. We have a collective responsibility to use Gods resources frugally and wisely. Instead we let greed take the upper hand. The Amazon, that treasure trove of clean air, is fast losing its green cover. The holy Ganges is filthy. It's undoubtedly stupid but true that we time and again choose to destroy the Good Earth and indirectly, ourselves. ■



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# Religions: Stuck in a Rut?

In the monument state, religion is merely an excuse to remain unconscious, holding on to a memory of something that must once have been a great adventure. Religions must become movements again.

RICHARD ROHR OFM

In the Wisdom Pattern, there are five stages of change that have taken place historically in religious and cultural institutions: human, movement, machine, monument, and memory.

It seems that many great things in history start with a single human being. If a person says something full of life that names reality well, the message often moves to the second stage of becoming a movement. That's the period of greatest energy. Taking the church as an example, the church is at its greatest vitality as the 'Jesus Movement,'

and the institution is merely the vehicle for that movement. The movement stage is always very exciting, creative, and also risky. We feel out of control in this stage, and yet why would anybody want it to be anything less? Would we respect and love a God that we could control? I don't think so! Yet we move rather quickly out and beyond the risky movement stage to the machine stage. This is predictable and understandable.

The institutional or machine stage of a movement will necessarily be a less-alive manifestation. This is not bad, although it is always surprising for those who see church as an end in itself, instead of merely a vehicle for the original vision. There is no other way; but when we don't realize a machine's limited capacities, we try to make it into something more than it is. We make it a monument, a closed system operating inside of its own, often self-serving, logic. By then, it's very hard to take risks for God or for gospel values.

Eventually this monument and its maintenance and self-preservation become ends in themselves. It is easy just to step on board and worship at a monument without ever-knowing why or longing for God ourselves. At this point, we have jumped over the human and movement stages and have become what authors Mark Gibbs and T Ralph Morton called 'God's frozen people.' In this state, religion is merely an excuse to remain unconscious, holding on to a memory of something that must once have been a great adventure. Now religion is no longer life itself, but actually a substitute for life or, worse, an avoidance of life. The secret is to know how to keep in touch with the human and movement stages without being naïve about the necessity of some machines and the inevitability of those who love monuments. We must also be honest: all of us love monuments when they are monuments to our human, our movement, or our machine.

## It's Hard and Rare to Call Your Own Job into Question

Sometimes machine and monument people can be recaptured by the vision of the human and the movement. Frank worked for the nuclear test site outside of Las Vegas, Nevada. In fact, Frank headed the operation for a number of years—and then dared, by the grace of the gospel, to call it into question. He even joined me once as we practiced civil disobedience at the test site. I will never forget seeing him walk toward me with a half-worried half-smile on his face. 'I have trusted your teaching all these years. Now I have to trust where it has led me,' he said. We stood together as his former employees drove by and gave less-than-flattering gestures to their old boss. I was humbled and awed by such courage and humility. He had let go of his secure monument through an encounter with the man Jesus and the vision of the peace movement. It's hard and very rare to call your own job into question. When Jesus called his disciples, he also called them away from their jobs, and their families too. Of course, jobs and families are not bad things. But Jesus called them to leave their nets, because as long as anyone is tied to job security, there are a lot of things they cannot see and cannot say. This is one of the great recurring disadvantages of clergy earning their salary from the church, and perhaps why Saint Francis did not want his brothers to be ordained priests. We tend to think and say whatever won't undermine the company or brand.

Francis of Assisi offers us a model of transformation because he did not attack the monuments or machines directly but went out to the edge and did it better. For his inspiration, Francis went back to the original dynamism and nonviolent style of Jesus the man.

Assisi is surrounded by city walls; inside those walls are the cathedral and the established churches, all of which are good. That's where Francis first heard the gospel and fell in



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A religion that cuts itself off from the example of its founder while still bearing the founder's name often becomes little more than a chaplaincy for other ideologies.

love with Jesus. But then he quietly went outside the walls and rebuilt some old ruins called San Damiano and the Portiuncula. He wasn't telling the others they were doing it wrong. He just gently and lovingly tried to do it better. I think that's true reconstruction. Remember, the best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better. That might be a perfect motto for all reconstructive work. It does not destroy machines or monuments but reinvigorates them with new energy and form.

#### Opening Up the Machine

*For centuries the Church has operated like a well-oiled machine, but the oil is running low and the machine is running down—Ilia Delio*

Writer Ilia Delio asks whether the Church is stuck in a 'machine' stage of change. With the rise of modern science, the word machine became the dominant metaphor of the modern era, and the Church adapted its medieval cosmology to the new mechanistic paradigm. Has the Church become mechanistic like so many other world systems? Is it 'stuck in a rut,' and if so, can it find its way out of the rut into a new future? Jesus lived with imagination, and he preached with imagination: 'Imagine a small mustard seed,' he said. 'If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.' He aimed to instill imagination in his disciples so they could think the unthinkable and do the incredible. Similarly, it is helpful to imagine the Church in a new way that enkindles us to think the unthinkable and do the incredible.

An open-systems way of life works best on shared vision and dialogue and least on control and lack of communication. Trust is an essential factor, but trust requires kenosis, emptying

oneself of control and power, and making space for the other to enter in. An open-systems community, like the physical world itself, is based on relationships, not roles or duties but bonds of friendship, sisterhood (or brotherhood), respect, charity, forgiveness, and justice. Where these values are active and alive, life evolves toward richer, more creative forms, never losing sight that wholeness is at the heart of it.

#### An Opportunity for Transformation

Author Brian McLaren has spent decades thinking about change in the church and why so many resist it. Here he summarizes what often happens to our religious institutions once they lose their original purpose: The pattern is predictable. Founders are typically generous, visionary, bold, and creative, but the religions that ostensibly carry on their work often become the opposite: constricted, change-averse, nostalgic, fearful, obsessed with boundary maintenance, turf battles, and money. Instead of greeting the world with open arms as their founders did, their successors stand guard with clenched fists. Instead of empowering others as their founders did, they hoard power. Instead of defying tradition and unleashing moral imagination as their founders did, they impose tradition and refuse to think outside the lines. A religion that cuts itself off from the example of its founder while still bearing the founder's name often becomes little more than a chaplaincy for other ideologies, offering its services to the highest bidder. No wonder so many religious folks today wear down, burn out, and opt out.

Minister, entrepreneur, and author Cameron Trimble sees the decline of church structures as an opportunity to ask questions that matter, to rediscover and renew our faith: What is church really about? I've always understood the church

as being a community with a shared story in our scriptures, which binds us together. Church is about weaving relationships together so that life for all of us is more deeply rooted in Love. Today, I would offer that the church also offers a platform to work together to build a world that acts and advocates for the common good of all of us. We are warriors, lovers, peacemakers, protectors, prophets, thinkers, and dreamers who gather together to celebrate our heritage as children of God. At the same time, we are fearlessly willing to stand up and stand in for those our culture might oppress. When we live consciously aware of our power to shape our world for good, we live lives of meaning. We are our own most fully human and fully sacred expressions. We are whole.

#### Change Is Never Comfortable

The role of the prophet is to direct and legitimate necessary deconstruction. The prophet's path is of descent, and is never popular, nor easy. It is about letting go of illusion and toppling false gods. The prophets are often killed.

True priests talk of union, communion, love, transcendence, religion, connecting this world and the next world, and giving back a coherent world of meaning. Everybody usually likes the priests and they quickly become established and comfortable in almost all cultures.

But we've had too much priesthood and not nearly enough prophecy, in my humble opinion. The result has often been religion for religion's sake. How can we envision a new world when we have never fallen away from the old?

Religious scholar Diana Butler Bass writes of Christianity's tension between the pastoral and the prophetic: Religious faiths struggle between the pastoral and the prophetic, comfort and agitation. In a very real way, institutions are inherently pastoral—they seek to maintain those things that give comfort by baptizing shared values and virtues of a community. They reinforce the way things are (or were) through appeals to divine or supernatural order. They are always slow to change. Institutions resist prophets. Prophets question. They push for things to be different. They push people to behave better

toward one another. They want change.

The history of Christianity can be told as a story of the tension between order and prophecy. Jesus came as a prophet, one who challenged and transformed Judaism. A charismatic community grew up around his teachings and eventually formed into the church. The church organized, and then became an institution. The institution provided guidance and meaning for many millions. And then it became guarded, protective of the power and wealth it garnered, the influence it wielded, and [the] salvation it alone provided.

Many of the people in the church did not seem to notice, but some did. What the church taught seemed at odds with their experience of life or God. They questioned the way things were done. They experimented with new ideas and spiritual practices. They bent the rules and often broke them. The established church typically ignored them, sometimes tolerated them, often branded them heretics, tried to control them, and occasionally killed them. When enough people joined the ranks of the discontented, the institutional church had to pay attention. In the process, and sometimes unintentionally, the church opened itself up for genuine change and renewal.

#### Nothing Is Excluded Except Excluding

We are always hopeful that the Church will see its Copernican Moment, when it decides that its center is not located in Europe, in white males, in mandatory celibacy. We all hope against hope that it will become the 'wonderful adventure' that Pope Francis envisions -Church as movement and not decorative institution.

The gospel always wants to dislodge itself from the places where it gets stuck and embedded in the narrow, cultural structure. So, we all take steps to free it, find our way, again and again, to an expansive tolerance and a high reverence for paradox. We need to allow the Church to become a movement again. Jesus says it beautifully, 'if you're not gathering, you're scattering.' We either pull people in or push people out. ■



# Settling an Estate Can Make or Break a Family

The easiest way is to take your kids into confidence and always keep your finances an open book with your spouse.

Dr MARIANNE de NAZARETH

When a loved one dies, someone will have to take care of debts and distribute assets. If the deceased had property — a house or a car, for example — or monetary savings, someone will have to do the paperwork to pass it all on to the inheritors. The word ‘estate’ may be misleading for some, but an ‘estate’ means whatever a person leaves behind on their passing which needs to be shared with the inheritors in a will.

‘When you hear the word ‘estate,’ you think of someone that lives in a big mansion that has a yacht and vacations in the south of France all the time,’ said a friend I was discussing the topic with. ‘But that’s not the case; literally every single person has an estate.’

I have just finished experiencing what an Executor of a will and estate has to face. No parents prepare you for it, but the next generation learns from whoever is the executor. When Dad called me to sign as an executor of his will I was still fairly young and felt immensely proud of being trusted by my tough, no-nonsense, Air Force officer Dad. Being naïve, I figured okay, I’ll surely be able to handle it. It turned out to be a much bigger job than I expected and torturous to say the least as one sibling had died and his aggressive son had come to demand his ‘share’ even before he was buried!

Dad made the will almost 20 years before his death in which it was pretty simple, everything went to my Mum except for the house that had to be divided between us five kids. Luckily the house was divided in Mum’s time, but everything else was left to me to wade through and divide equitably — shares, liquid cash and jewelry.

## Being Recognised as Executor

The first step is getting recognised as an executor by the family. Your parent must inform the other siblings that you are the chosen one. If you are a parent, choose a child whom you feel is trustworthy to share equally and not grab all for themselves. ‘It was not a simple process; it’s a detailed process,’ said the friend, and it was made even slower by court shutdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic.’ Experts say a simple estate with only a few assets that are easy to find may be settled in six months. However, a more complicated financial situation may take several years to resolve.

Executors, often family members, should understand that fulfilling their loved one’s wishes can be like taking on a second-job, some experts say. In addition to dealing with grief, ‘a lot of clients jump in without talking with someone and understanding the roles, the responsibilities,’ said a lawyer friend I was consulting. ‘Just take a deep breath, call someone when you have been able to digest it a little bit.’

## Finding Financial Advisors

Take the time to understand and contact advisors the parent may have worked with, who could offer additional information or insight into the deceased’s assets. Most often parents will not go into details of their investments with their kids and just nominate one of their children in any investment made. It’s when the parents pass on that the true difficulty in releasing those monies falls on the executor.

‘Typically, a financial advisor or an attorney or an accountant, or even an insurance spe-



cialist will have some of that information,’ said my parents’ share advisor. ‘If a parent has been proactive with their proposed executor, hopefully the executor does not have to jump through too many hoops to settle the funds. If they don’t, those individuals can provide a lot of helpful insight.’

## Learning an Executor’s Responsibilities

Each parent’s will is either easy or complicated in helping to settle an estate. While the process can be relatively straightforward with a plan in place, it’s still not easy. To settle an estate, experts advise, to get multiple copies of the death certificate from authorised government agency. Then get many of them notarised to be distributed to the children if you are a helpful executor.

Next, locate the will if not already with the lawyer and gather account documents. Note that life insurance and financial accounts with named beneficiaries supersede a will. And this is where the difficult part happens. The executor’s job is to notify and stay in touch with benefi-

The easiest way I have come to believe is to take your kids into confidence and always keep your finances an open book with your spouse.

ciaries and the other siblings. Executors are also responsible for paying funeral bills, closing accounts and taking inventory of assets. The task is time-consuming and emotionally draining. Having a checklist and keeping detailed records is a must to be on top of all transactions.

‘I think the biggest mistake that they make is thinking that’s going to take a short amount of time and not understanding the full lengthy process of it,’ says my bank manager. The executor should not distribute assets to beneficiaries until outstanding debts and taxes have been paid.’

Being prepared ahead of time can provide some relief, both financially and emotionally. A parent can involve the executor ahead of time and make a note in a detailed list of all nominees of any investments or bank accounts. ‘A tremendous gift that you can give to your family and friends is that you properly plan now, because it will save them money and save them time,’ my bank manager said, seeing my stressed face checking on FD receipts in the bank.

It’s been three years since my Mum died with Covid taking most of the three years useless, with inheritors unable to travel. From my experience which this article sets out to do is remember — patience is key. Since I have been through the mill, I have learned that you need to collect all the details of all inheritances first. Set it out on a spreadsheet on your computer or just the old fashioned way in a book. Then go through it all systematically and there is light at the end of the tunnel.

The easiest way I have come to believe of course is to take your kids into confidence and always keep your finances an open book with your spouse. Then a lot of heartburn can be avoided. ‘Honestly, if you’re not sure what to do, it’s probably better not to do anything until you do know,’ is my key take away from a banker friend. ■

# A Long Voyage Home

DIVYANK JAIN

A beam of a flashlight moved in the darkness and stopped right away at their faces. Omar and Jamal were opposed by a short, but stout man in khaki with a mask and he saw them coming from behind the barricades that stood across the road, blocking their way ahead. Omar, gripping Jamal's hand, came closer, the policeman looked into his deep, sunken eyes, inspected their travel exhausted faces and asked, 'where are you coming from?' Omar hesitated before he answered, 'Delhi'.

Meanwhile, he began to scabble about his pockets for any ID proof he could find. The policeman, still flashing in their faces, said, 'where are you going?' Omar looked around, in the nervousness of not getting anything in his pockets, and then behind the policeman. There was a light coming from there, that sharpened the edges of the khaki and it looked scary. He back-stepped as he failed to find the ID proof. The policeman asked him again, louder this time, 'Where will you go?' Omar said, 'Badeu!'

'No, you cannot,' another policeman spoke in a dry voice. He was sitting in the chair against the ambulance that stood parallel to the barricades with its side-lights twinkling. He had a big, upturned moustache and the way he was seated in the chair - one leg manly placed on the knee of another - projected him as some sort of senior. Omar dared not to respond to him, instead, he stared down at his boy, Jamal, who stood beside him helplessly, while the first one came closer. After considering them from head to toe, the seated policeman knocked hard behind at the ambulance door. A fat doctor stepped out of the ambulance, pulling himself together.

'Cover up your damn mouths,' the senior policeman commanded while the doctor, now completely covered in a white nylon suit except for his fat eyes, came over and put a weird pistol-looking white machine against Omar's eyes and then Jamal's. The tiny, dark, fluffy eyes above the blue, N-95 mask examined Jamal suspiciously. Then the doctor squeezed Jamal's wrist in his gloved hand. 'He's got a fever,' he said to the policemen. 'Does he have a cough or a cold?' 'No!' Omar answered. 'Any trouble breathing, child?' the doctor asked softly and directly to the boy, not to his father. 'No, not at all,' Omar answered instead, pressing his boy against his left thigh. 'He's perfectly alright.'

However, last weekend Jamal had a fever and even vomited multiple times before they departed. But after that, all the way he proved himself really a good boy. He didn't even talk about his mother. Every time Jamal had been afflicted with fever or something, he behaved gawky and blurted nonstop about his mother. But, not this time. He walked along, passed cities and towns under the April sun, however, onto Omar's shoulders half the time, but Jamal certainly was not sick now. At least he doesn't look sick. 'Here you'll spend the night,' the first policeman said calmly.

'We can't... Sir,' Omar protested, not so politely, then peering down in the eyes of the senior one, he realised he shouldn't have. A drop of cold sweat rolled down from his forehead and fell onto his collar bone. 'Please, let us go, sir. Please.' Both the men in khaki said nothing. 'I



request you, sir. Please. We have to go far away,' urged Omar, holding both his hands together.

The father and the son had already completed half of their journey. How could they stop here in the middle? Even when all this chaos was just a nightmare, Omar knew how to go on a long, long journey on foot. JUST KEEP WALKING! If you have stayed in one place for more than necessary time, you are finished. How could they now misspend the whole night here in the shelter?

'We are arranging buses in the morning.' The first policeman leaning over the barricades pointed at a big yellow bulb behind, illuminating a portion of sidewalk and the leaves of a ficus tree on the left. There was a huge tent behind. Omar shifted his gaze to the policeman who now looked a little concerned with their condition. 'And still if you don't care about your sick son,' the policeman said. 'Then, you can go, yes, go on!' He gestured with his hands.

The other one stood up, perfecting his moustache, came forward, and rebuked Omar, 'Are they all idiots? They five hundred people there are waiting for the buses. Are they idiots?' His reddened eyes seemed disturbingly upset at something. Both the men in khaki exchanged glances and the first one looked down and went away behind the ambulance with the doctor. 'Go to the shelter now!' the tall one commanded and shut the barricades with a jerk. Before turning left, Omar, dejected, stared at the barricades that stood between him and his hometown.

They spent the night in the shelter, but

not in the hope for an easy morning and the bus that could relax their tensed muscles and reduce the unbearable distance by far, but because Omar thought a little rest would have been good for his son. If he is sick... if the doctor was right... If... No! No, he can't be. My boy's alright. Omar kept muttering to himself as he lay down beside Jamal in the tent and put his hand on his chest to feel. He looked out there beyond the flapping, loose triangle of the tent. The stars above were being stirred by the faint breeze. And everything began to seem normal again for the moment. 'He's alright,' Omar said to himself.

The shelter was already crowded yet people kept coming to stay there with their children the whole night long. It filled the entire tent with the scent of sweat and vomit. For Omar, it was not strange that almost all the children were screaming out of hunger, stomach cramps and seasonal ailments, except for his boy who remained silent throughout the night. Jamal, only a nine-year-old boy, was brave and strong and he had proved it in the journey by walking at the same pace as his tall, lean father. Omar knew they would get through, and it was only a matter of a night.

By the morning, there were many gathered outside the tent, waiting for the bus to take them away, somewhere, perhaps their homes. They waited for two hours and together, they saw the sun rising as the only normal occurrence of the forthcoming day. And many of them as hopeless as Omar was, began to walk down the road. 'Once you reach home, everything will be alright. Jamal will be alright,' Omar contented himself before picking up the bag. 'Can you walk?' he asked his son. 'Yes Abbu, I can,' Jamal answered with a smile.

As they were to surpass the cool shadow of the trees beside the shelter, a white van came from the opposite direction. It sure was not a passenger vehicle which was promised and they were all hoping for, but a small one with a red rose as an emblem against the white of the flag waving on its top beside a loudspeaker. 'Food Packets!' The voice through the loudspeaker resounded in the morning air. 'Food Packets! Come over here y'all. Stand in the queue.'

The policemen weren't there. People rushed pushing down the barricades. At the entreaties of the two young gentlemen white kurta, they stood in two queues even though the hunger was agitating them to break all the moral rules. Omar was happy to get two packets because he stood in the first row and his son, Jamal, in the second. The rest of the families were given only one. And unfortunately, many were left behind empty-handed, watching the van rushing back on a bare road with their hollow eyes. Omar instructed his son to put the packets inside the bag as noticeably as he could since four of the men were staring at their hands. They were hungry too, Omar knew it. If it was another day, he would have given one of them the extra pack-

et, but it wasn't another day... it wasn't going to be any normal day and he had to go far far away.

Five hours straight, they plodded along the national highway 2, where he had always seen overloaded trucks and the buses with happy children peeping out of their windows; Jeeps coming and going very fast; dusty cars speeding up, overtaking each other, sometimes honking horns continuously and sometimes as swiftly and silently as you could not even spot them passing by.. Even a mile-long traffic jam, but today, as far as his eyes could reach, it was strangely and terrifyingly empty. The wrecks after the fatal accidents had not scared Omar as much as this emptiness was, now. But they walked on.

After crossing the serpent-like road of the valley, they made a half-circle of a large lake and with it, comfortably left five more towns behind; all just looked the same: grey and dusty under the sun as if deserted. Many people kept coming across and walked together as if they were the companions for each other and they moved like a herd of animals; no-one knew who was from where, but walking shoulder to shoulder, they looked the same; as though they all momentar-

ily became a part of the singularity of human fate which no one could escape. With bags on their shoulders, panting but striding, sweating like hell but hopeful to go back home.

They stopped twice, rested their legs in the ponds and backs against tree trunks. Jamal was filled with vitality every time he got up after taking a short rest. 'I can walk, Abbu. We have to go home. Just keep walking, remember?' he'd say. Omar had been repeatedly touching his forehead; Jamal no longer had a fever, but to avoid the direct sunlight, he poured the water from the bottle to wet his handkerchief so that he could cover his son's head with it. Jamal also liked it.

They walked down from the main road for a shorter route. 'Look, Abbu trees are just like they are at our farm.' There were blue gum trees that shadowed the narrow, cracked road from both sides, and it was windy. Omar looked back at his son, sweat drops were shining on his forehead and he was walking with his shoulders bent. 'Let's eat something. It's a good place,' Omar suggested.

Under the rustling leaves of gum trees, they gobbled down the food which they had been carrying since morning, which now finally began to trigger their hunger, and shortly after, Jamal vomited all over his rugged trouser and dusty shoes. His face turned red and terrible as he stood upright.

He washed his son's clothes and shoes in a stream and laid him down on the meadow under a tree, and let him close his eyes for a while. Omar, too, lay down there, and he glared at the sun through leaves, and the tree branches above were dancing swiftly with the wind, making more noise than ever. Such trees were at all the sides of his farm when... when he actually had the farm. Omar watered them and had seen them getting taller and taller like he had seen Jamal growing up, and one-day trees were gone and the farm was gone and they both, the father and the son, had to leave the town. The darker thoughts invaded his mind as the faces of the

two policemen and the fat doctor floated in front of his eyes. He couldn't see trees anymore and not even the sun. Did I make the right choice? Should I have stayed in the city? It was difficult figuring out which one was the right choice. Choosing had always been difficult for him. But, it was much easier to lay down here in the cool shadow than staying in the middle of the madness of the city. I made the right choice, yes I know it's right. Once we reach home, everything will be alright. Jamal will be alright. He smiled at his boy when he woke up and his eyes were looking for his father.

'Are you okay?' Omar asked. 'Yes, Abbu.' Although a dull answer, Jamal looked better, all he needed was a little sleep. 'I like this road so much, why don't you make such roads?' Jamal asked. Jamal knew what kind of work his father used to do in the city. Omar didn't keep it a secret and was not ashamed of providing his cheap labour for the road and gutter construction agencies.

'All roads are alike, there are only trees on both sides.' 'But there are many trees in my school too, and I don't like it.' Omar said, 'I thought you liked it.' 'Never.' 'So what do you like then?' 'Our farm ... will we go there once we reach the village?' 'Yes, we are going there,' Omar lied. 'And then, we'll go back to the city, won't we?' Jamal asked him with wrinkles on his forehead. 'Don't know!' Omar looked away.

He trudged, and Jamal followed. They crossed three bridges that connected four towns, and saw the water, flowing down there uninterrupted, and after they passed the towns, Omar picked Jamal up and seated him over his shoulders. Jamal's dirty shoes were slapping on Omar's chest as he walked with the bag heavy in his right hand.

'I know you'll go back to the city when it's all over,' said Jamal dismally when both of them sat down on the side of a drain to cool down their legs. The sun had descended a little but it was still hot. By now, Omar acquired many cuts on his feet throughout the journey and his



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stiff thigh muscles were aching too. He poured the drain water onto them continuously, which relaxed his whole body.

'Will you take me back with you, Abbu?' Jamal asked. He looked worried. 'You don't want to come to the city again after all this ends?' 'No, I never wanted to,' he said bitterly. 'You took me there.' 'You don't like the city?' asked Omar. 'Wasn't it a wonderful place?' 'No, it was very bad, bad, bad. And, I don't have a friend there.' 'You'll have many if you know how to make friends,' said Omar remembering his lone past. 'I know one thing, I hate them... all of them. Why did you take me to the city, Abbu? it was all good when I was in the village and I was with my Ammi.' 'Okay, we won't go back if you stop talking about your Ammi, okay now?' 'You're ly-

ing, I know.' Jamal stood up. 'I have to go home... and to my Ammi.'

Omar, grabbing his skinny wrist, pulled his son closer and touched his forehead, it was hot again. 'Listen, Jamal, Ammi no longer lives with us, I've told you,' Omar said, brushing Jamal's dry hair away from his tiny, black eyes. 'You are lying,' Jamal released his hand from the grip of his father and started walking by himself, and didn't stop at his father's call even though he started panting. 'We must be walking, I have to go back to Ammi.' Omar stood up, lifted the bag, and followed. 'I am not lying Jamal, if you stop talking about your Ammi, we won't go back to the city, Promise.'

'I wanted to live with her. You didn't care,' cried Jamal and kicked hard a pebble away. 'I don't understand. Why did we go to the city at all? we were so happy at our home, in our village.' Jamal stopped angrily, turned to his perplexed father, gasping for air, as if sobbing. 'We sit here for a while, Son,' Omar suggested. 'No, I don't want to.' 'See! You like such beautiful places, don't you?' He pointed towards the trees and there was a half-dried river flowing beyond, with boulders green with mosses. 'You like this?' 'No. I got a headache.'

Omar made him sit on a well rounded grey rock. 'You sleep here in my lap.' 'I just want to go home.' 'Don't think about it my boy,' Omar put his arm around his bony shoulders. 'We'll soon be at our home.' He kissed his sweaty forehead. 'Then why are we sitting here?' 'Across that hill, look there, is our home. We're already home. You can sleep in my lap for a while.'

When Jamal fell asleep and was in deep sleep, Omar took him over onto his left shoulder and commenced to push himself as hard as he could towards his destination, but without disturbing his son's hard-gained peace. And in the wild silence, as he heard the dead leaves being crushed under his worn out shoes, some old but malicious thoughts began to churn in his mind. Never could he gain control over them. He thought about the village; he thought about the

city and then he thought about the catastrophe that kicked them out of the city. Omar had lost everything he had left behind there in the city. Yes, he knew it from the moment he started his journey. No further questions about it. The only question was he was going back to his village where he might not be welcomed anymore.

Gone were those days when Jamal and his Ammi used to greet him with shy kisses and warm hugs. And his son's smile had lost the magic of healing as soon as he had also with his father, shifted to the city. Sometimes Omar wondered if he himself had snatched everything away from the little one; his childhood, his friends, his Ammi... Who else is responsible for this destructive state of Jamal? Who else is here to blame? His Ammi? She cannot be. It's me! It is only and only me. Omar shook his head ruefully.

When it was almost dark Omar climbed up the hill, stopping twice to catch back the gone breath. Then he smiled to himself as though rewarding himself for what he had achieved. Their journey was going to be over soon. Before reaching the crest, he heard some faded but rattling noise coming up from the other side, and it was getting louder and louder with his every step farther. Curious to know what was going on down there, he climbed his last steps harder and in the moments of astonishment, he had completely forgotten about what was on his shoulder.

Omar stood at the hill-top and gazed down at his village, even in the dark he could see some of the roofs as there were many light- beams, waving all around; shaken up to and fro by the ecstatic hands with their victorious shouting to accompany their joy, and also there were deafening clanging of the steel plates and bells that resonated the entire village and came up to the hill, to him, and beyond. What's going on here? As soon as he felt the weight on his shoulder again, Omar patted his son's cheek to wake him up to have a look at the exceptional view that was ahead of his eyes. 'Jamal!' he said, 'This is

magnificent! Look how beautiful our home has become.' Jamal didn't move, his head still resting on his shoulder. Omar looked down at his face and half-open eyes, saliva had come out of his mouth on his shirt. 'Jamal?' He shook him, but this time only Jamal's head rolled down from his shoulder. 'Jamal?' Omar shouted.

With his trembling hand, Omar touched his son's forehead; all the hotness had gone, and it was now shockingly cold. Besides, there was no breathing. Completely perplexed by the thoughts again, he laid his son down on the uneven ground. His frantic hands rushed to search his son's skinny body; and wherever his frightened fingers touched his boy, it was the same: cold and numb! He patted on Jamal's right cheek again. 'Wake up Jamal,' and then he gently slapped both the cheeks together. 'Jamal, we are home...Look! Look there.. don't you want to see your Ammi? She is coming up the hill with many flashlights in her hands. Yes, there she is.' He said while his eyes looked for the slightest hint of movement but there was none. 'Please, wake up my boy.' But, the cold body of a nine-year-old, lying in front of him, didn't respond.

Omar lay himself down on the ground beside his son, gasping for air. Even though his heart was pounding so loud in his ears, he could still hear the thunderous music of bells and steel plates, and the shouting of the people. He saw the flashing above in the sky as though it was all over. Yes, the chaos was over. The journey was over. Over his head, light beams crossed each other as if they were searching for something in the sky, something that had just gone up there, beyond the stars. 'This can't be true...he was brave, my boy was strong...this isn't true.' He shook his head helplessly and fisted on the ground. The hotness rolled down his cheeks. Under the stars and flashing of the lights, he, too, lay down lifelessly on the hill next to his town, beside his son until he began to feel the immense pressure in the centre of his chest. And he choked. ■

# Dwelling on in the Labyrinth

Reflections on the Art Exhibition by Jamesmon PC OFM

SUSANNA VAS



When a Franciscan priest tells you he's an artist, you'd probably expect him to paint some run-of-the-mill pictures of Jesus, Mary, *Il Poverello*, and all the saints you'd find at your diocesan religious goods store: soft features, heads encircled with haloes, a relaxing scenery in the background. You wouldn't expect a wan angel-winged, bird-beaked humanoid loosely covered in a sheet in a bedroom with the sky for a wall; a glaring crow on a stubby tree against a menacing green sky that would feel right at home on Edgar Allan Poe's pages; or a solitary pink lotus bobbing on a murky pond.

Although exhibited for viewing and sale in February 2023, the *Labyrinth* collection by Jamesmon OFM has been in the works since 2014. All 31 works use surrealism to explore the inner workings and realities of life, memory, spirituality, and society.

Far from being a shallow re-representation of people and inanimate elements, the paintings convey the deep communion between the artist and the subject. He has not just perceived them through his visual cortex; he has meditated on their haecceity.

One of the pictures features the artist approaching Fort Kochi with a cheery marmoset looking over his shoulder. He mentioned to me that he felt a kinship with the creature due to their mutual shyness. While the artist blends into the scenery, the marmoset stands out in stark relief. The painting featuring a crow against a grim colour palette has an intriguing backstory. Jamesmon was painting a crow that entranced him only to find it dead the next day. (Till present, one of the deceased bird's feathers

adorns the door to his room.) His powerful animal paintings stem from his Franciscanism. At this point, it would help to ponder that Francis of Assisi might be far from popular domesticated depictions.

If you made a circuit of the makeshift gallery, you would have noticed a recurrent figure I choose to call the birdman. This curious creature was inspired by a gentleman Jamesmon encountered on one of his travels. This social reject, like St. Francis' leper, left a lasting impression on him. Personal experience expanded into social consciousness. Society is based on a framework. And here's the thing about frames: you only care about what's inside them. They show you some things and leave out other things. Whereas in society the man existed on the margins, in the paintings he is front and centre. You see him, you look at him, you empathise with him.

In a handful of paintings, the artist laid out his mind for us to explore. The geometric abstraction was one way of presenting the cohabiting binaries of certainty/uncertainty, known/unknown, and predictability/unpredictability. Concentric circles resemble a step drill poised at the entrance of the mind.

You have earthen bowls in midair amidst a pipeline network that might be a kissing cousin of an old Microsoft screensaver. Laterite stones and a sky populated with wispy clouds complete the picture. Thoughts travel in various directions, sometimes overlapping. Some sail gently like the clouds, others are set in stone. Like the softness of clouds and the hardness of stones, the mind, too, is richly textured.

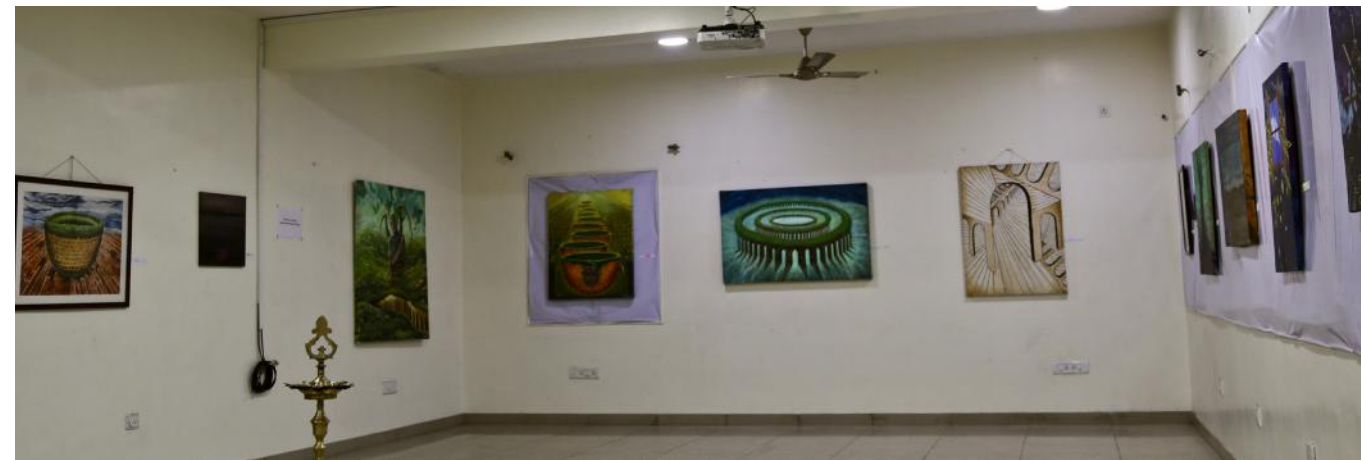
Few paintings were titled to give the viewers a chance to interpret pieces in isolation or

collective context without imposing his artistic intent. Titles are like frames in that they strait-jacket creative interpretation. With untitled paintings, you hardly feel bashful or disappointed for thinking along different lines. You can give the painting a new meaning that sticks, one that coexists and interacts with others.

While he isn't confined to religious themes just because he's a priest, he hasn't succumbed to the pressures of an agent or commercialism either. Jamesmon mastered and married authenticity and impeccable technique instead of dwelling inordinately on mass appeal or even niche appeal.

Among the visitors were schoolchildren. I can't tell who was luckier: the young ones to behold sublime, surreal art or the artist whose works were blessed by the gaze of children. Children have a greater appreciation for art, but it wanes as they grow older. They assume an anyone-can-do-it attitude because disciplines like art, writing, craft, music, and photography are treated as hobbies and pastimes rather than serious subjects. Most schools scrap art altogether after a certain grade. Doodling or writing become punishable offences because you're supposed to be spending your time productively—factorising polynomials, memorising the periodic table, learning Newton's laws, and labelling shoddy diagrams of the brain and the eye.

Before leaving Bangalore, I asked Jamesmon what the next theme would be. Shrugging, he told me he had been dwelling on and in the labyrinth for years. There's no escaping it now. Nietzsche might agree with me that if you stare into the labyrinth long enough, the labyrinth stares back at you. ■



# Fathers & Sons

BOBBY JOSE KATTIKAD OFM CAP

Father may not always be a fond memory for everyone. While watching the movie *Joji*, I remembered the letter Kafka wrote to his father. That long letter of one hundred and three pages was the way he found to cross the distance between them. He handed it over to his mother as he did not have the courage to give it directly. Max Broad, who brought his unpublished writings to the readers, speculated that the mother gave it back to her son after reading it.

He begins the letter by saying that he has reason to be afraid. 'You asked me recently why I maintain that I am afraid of you. As usual, I was unable to think of any answer to your question, partly for the very reason that I am afraid of you, and partly because an explanation of the grounds for this fear would mean going into far more detail than I could even approximately keep in mind while talking. And if I now try to give you an answer in writing, it will still be very incomplete, because, even in writing, this fear and its consequences hamper me in relation to you and because the magnitude of the subject goes far beyond the scope of my memory and power of reasoning.'

Too many fathers and sons have gone through this process, passing on more fear than love and consuming its byproduct of hatred. It was the same, with variations, in every masculine culture. Jesus was no stranger to such people and surroundings. An expression of evil fathers is echoed somewhere among his sermons. He deliberately created the concept of a father



who is far away from the stereotypical fathers of that time and therefore is close to a mother. That is how the metaphorical picture of Lazarus sleeping on Abraham's bosom is painted. A father like a mother was imprinted into the consciousness of the listeners by depositing immeasurable estrogen in the genes of hard-working and demanding fathers. He rewrote the powerful myth of fatherhood by presenting us with a man bathing his son who wandered off and finally came back with bruised feet, put shoes on, dressed him in a robe, put on a ring and took him to the banquet table.

As Vivekananda understood, Jesus uses the word 'Abba' which is Aramaic language. It comes as a rural relative of the classical language of Hebrew. The distance created by the translation of the word into 'Father', which should be translated as 'Daddy' or 'Apa', is not small. ■



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



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



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