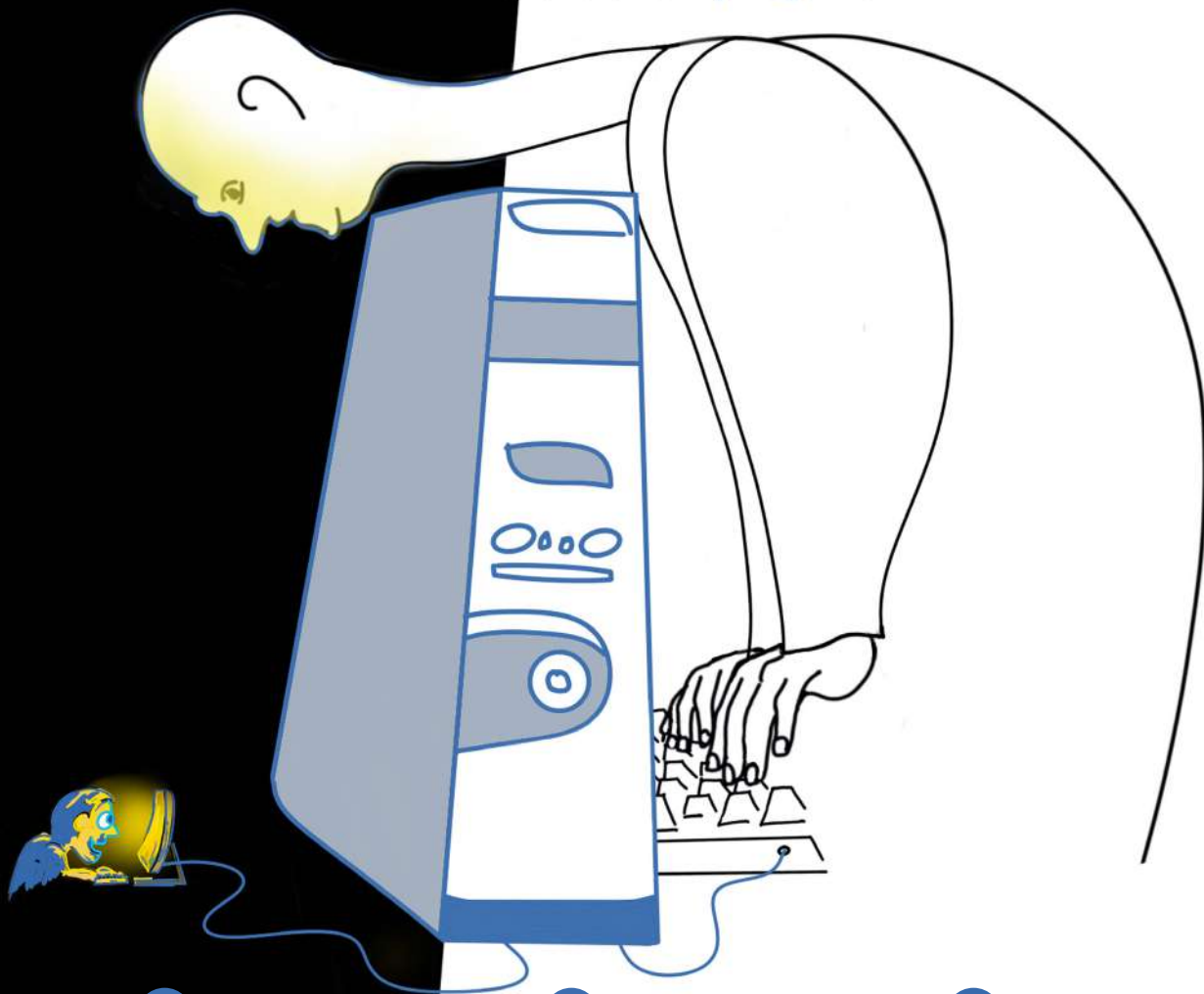


together

a national family magazine



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**The Strange, Not So
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Y SRESHTA PRAVEEN

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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COVER STORY

Social media's popularity and reach are expanding along with the global digital population.

DATA MINE

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Gaza has a population of about 2.3 million people living in one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Located between Israel and Egypt on the Mediterranean coast, the strip is about 365sq km (141sq miles). Since 2007, Israel has maintained strict control over Gaza's airspace and territorial waters and restricted the movement of goods and people in and out of Gaza.

HRW SLAMS ISRAEL FOR COMMITTING WAR CRIMES AGAINST PALESTINIANS

The Human Rights Watch has slammed Israel for "deliberately deepening the suffering of civilians in Gaza" by refusing to allow fuel shipment into the besieged enclave and to restore the flow of water. "The fact that Palestinian fighters committed unspeakable war crimes against Israeli civilians does not justify Israeli authorities committing war crimes against Palestinian civilians," read a report by the group which added that Israel was punishing "all of Gaza's civilians for Hamas's attack".

UN CALLS FOR 'UNIMPEDED FLOW' OF AID

The UN's agency for Palestinian refugees says the limited number of aid delivery trucks permitted into Gaza so far is "a trickle in the face of the immense needs of people on the street".

'WE ARE ON OUR KNEES': WHO PLEADS FOR MEDICAL DELIVERIES

The WHO says medicine and health supplies have been delivered to three key hospitals in southern Gaza but are still needed to reach the north. Dr Rick Brennan, WHO Regional Emergencies Director stated, "We are on our knees asking for that sustained, scaled-up, protected humanitarian operation. We appeal to all of those in a situation to make a decision or to influence decision-makers to give us the humanitarian space to address this human catastrophe." ■



Infrastructure destroyed in besieged Gaza



Media Images Aren't Always Real; But Their Effects Are

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

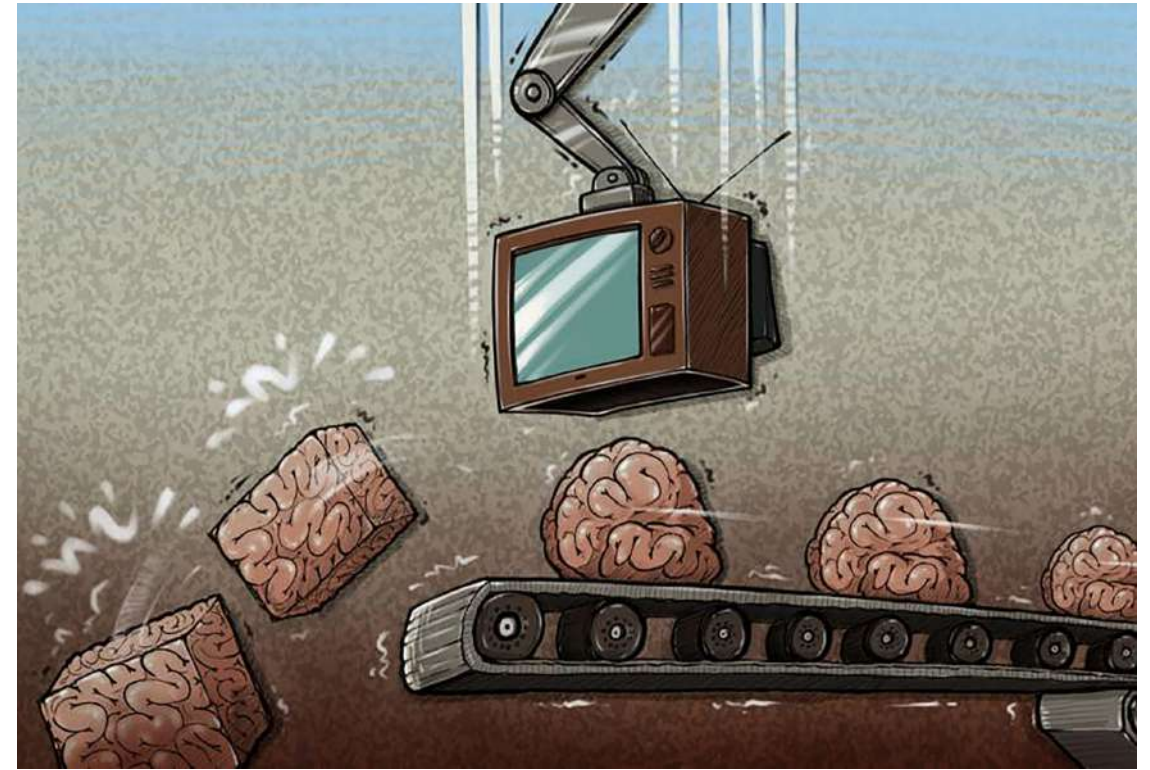
We in unison agree that media control people. But we seldom approve that media control us; because we are not able to give up media. Giving up media appears to be giving up our freedoms; but in truth it is media and their masters that hold us sway. We, for better or for worse, are products of media to a great extent. The images that we have of the world, the other, and even of ourselves are a lot from the media.

We sit, in buses and trains, on transits, in office, even on our thrones, scrolling down on our screens. We get influenced, immersed, and lost in the content and form of the mass media. Plato's 24-century-old allegory of the cave is so very true in the case of the social media today. The allegory portrays people as slavish, naïve receivers like sponges; knowing only as much as they are told, whether it is true or not. Plato underlines that people consider reality to be just the visible world, when reality in truth is more than what meets the eye. His allegory assumes that if a group of prisoners had their necks and hands chained down in a cave; they would be unable to see behind themselves. With a fire behind them, they would be only capable of seeing shadows of images reflected on the cave wall in front of them as they passed by the fire behind them. As time passes, even if the prisoners begin to identify that these are

only shadows they are helpless to do anything. And if somehow one of the prisoners could climb out of the mouth of the cave, he would not be able to see anything at first because the light would be so blinding. If the freed prisoner begins to see, and returns back to the cave one day; and tell the other prisoners about the fire behind them and that the shadows they see are not real images, they would not believe him and would accuse him of trying to disrupt their way of life.

The movie *The Truman Show* (1998), which in many ways, is a modern day adaptation of the Plato's cave. It too has light/fire, the shadows, the breaking of the chains, the prisoners, the free prisoner, the cave, etc. Truman was a prisoner in the cave, he only knew what he was being fed to believe, and when he tried to look for the truth, or rather look past what they were telling him, they keep him from knowing the truth. Truman ultimately decides to leave Seahaven Island, where he was trapped in the sets, characters and constructed stories and images of a reality show.

Mass media content, in more ways than one, has become like the shadows of reality appearing on the walls of Plato's cave, or the constructed realities set up for Truman to live in and live with. Every media content is a constructed reality often for profit, propaganda, and to manufacture consent. Noam Chomsky and Edward S Herman would explore further the people, factors, and filters behind and are at play in what becomes news or media content today. Ownership by large corporations or conglomerates to maximise profit sacrifices objectivity and truth. Advertisers are kept happy by not putting out anything that would conflict with the 'buying mood' of the population. Media firms sell readers and viewers as products to advertisers. There is an Indian lore that says, the mouse dies in the mousetrap because it does not understand why the cheese is free. If it is free, you are the product. Media firms spend far less to obtain credible



Ownership by large corporations or conglomerates to maximise profit sacrifices objectivity and truth.

content from trustworthy sources; and play safe so as not to gather negative press and public opinion. News firms find it easy when they have a powerful-political or otherwise-friendly to work for. Friends' enemy becomes media firm's enemy too.

On the other hand, when we consumers use media to gratify our specific wants and needs, often very privately, media algorithms, for profit and other gains, show us content based on what they think would gratify us. This process can lead to the creation of a filter bubble. They don't show us things that are uncomfortable or challenging or important. These filter bubbles are one-sided; they show us the side, we want to see; they tunnel down our point of view and isolate us from each other.

The documentary *The Social Dilemma* by Netflix features interviews with former employees from today's largest social media platforms. The film tells us that many social media companies succeed by capturing as much of our attention as they can, then they sell that attention to the highest bidders. According to Tim Wu, the author of the book *The Attention Merchants*, says that it is

a business model that sells access to people's minds. The attention industry needs people who are in a distracted state, or who are perpetually distractible, and thus open to advertising and other less important things. We end up spending hours of the day clicking on random nothingness.

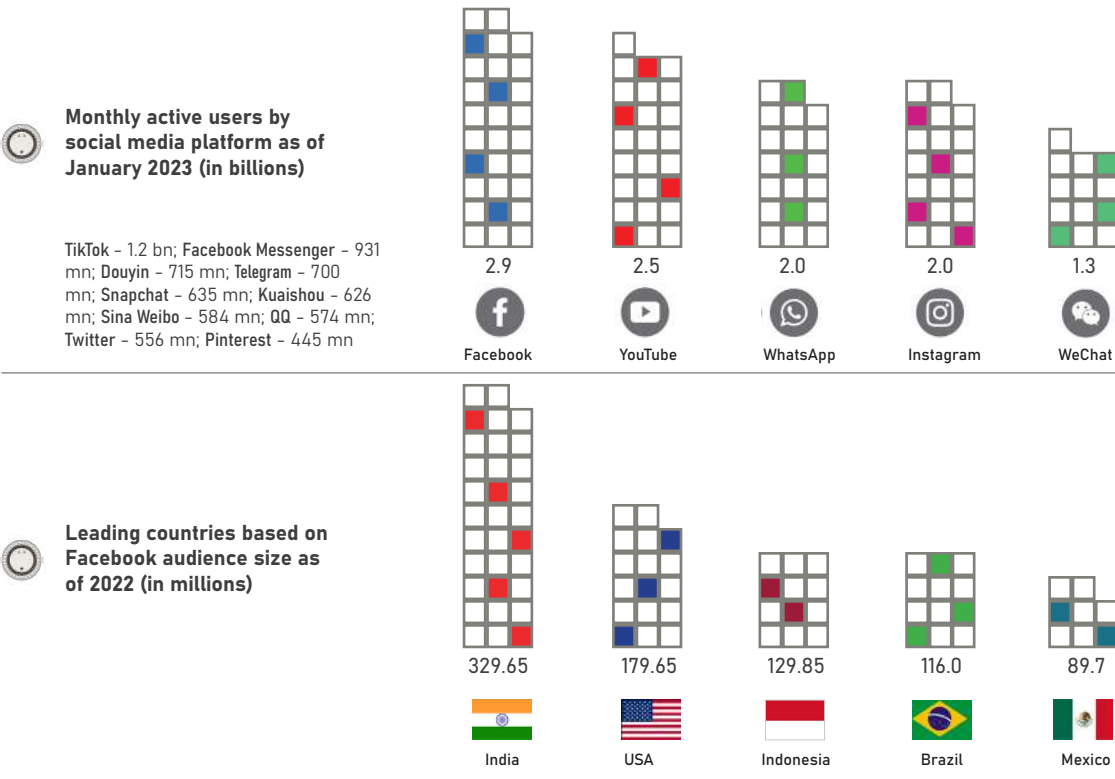
The Social Dilemma suggests that it is important in this age of fake news and misinformation to question everything that we read online. Be critical of situations in which beliefs and narratives are amplified or reinforced by communication and repetition inside a closed system, namely, an echo chamber, and insulated from rebuttal and dissent. Beware of priming: media's way of positioning certain content as more important than others, and framing: packaging of a media content with rhetoric and narrative that would encourage certain interpretations. ■

SOCIAL MEDIA IN NUMBERS

KAPIL ARAMBAM

Social media's popularity and reach are expanding along with the global digital population. Online platforms, which allow users to access a wide range of information, are a part of everyday life and are continuously changing how people engage with one another globally.

In 2023, an estimated 4.9 billion people use social media across the world. The number of social media users worldwide has swelled to a record 4.9 billion people globally. What's more, this number—according to DemandSage—is expected to jump to approximately 5.85 billion users by 2027.



An average person spends about 145 minutes on social media every day. Time is a precious commodity. So it's significant that the average person globally spends a significant portion of their day—about 145 minutes—on social media.

The most engaging type of content on social media is short-form videos. Both brevity and

authenticity are winning the day on social media, with short-form videos—typically less than a minute in length—capturing the attention of 66% of consumers.

The most common way people access social media is a mobile device: 99% use a tablet or smartphone to connect to social media, while 78% do so exclusively from their phones.

6.648 billion: The number of smartphone users across the world; almost 83.07% of the world's population

\$350 million: The amount TikTok generated in revenue in Q4 of 2022

84% people aged 18 to 29 use at least one social media site

77% of businesses use social media to reach clients and customers

90% of users follow at least one brand on social media

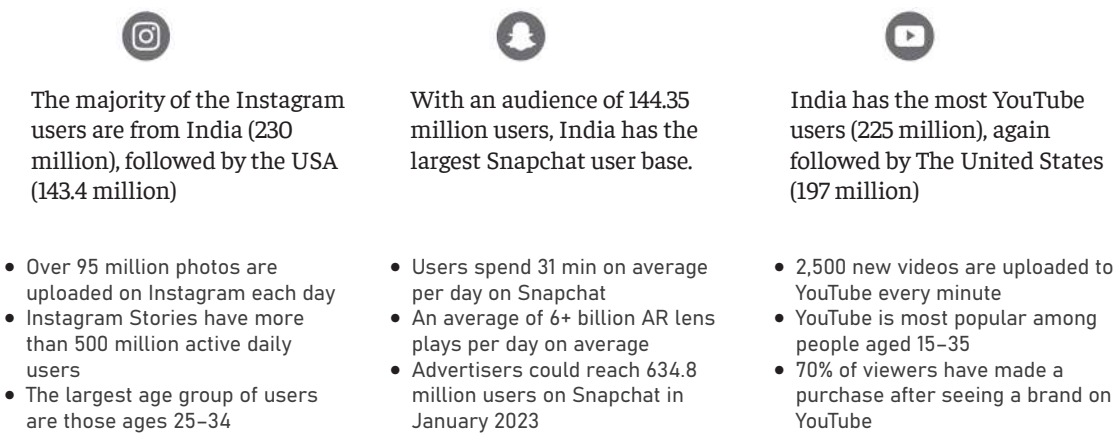
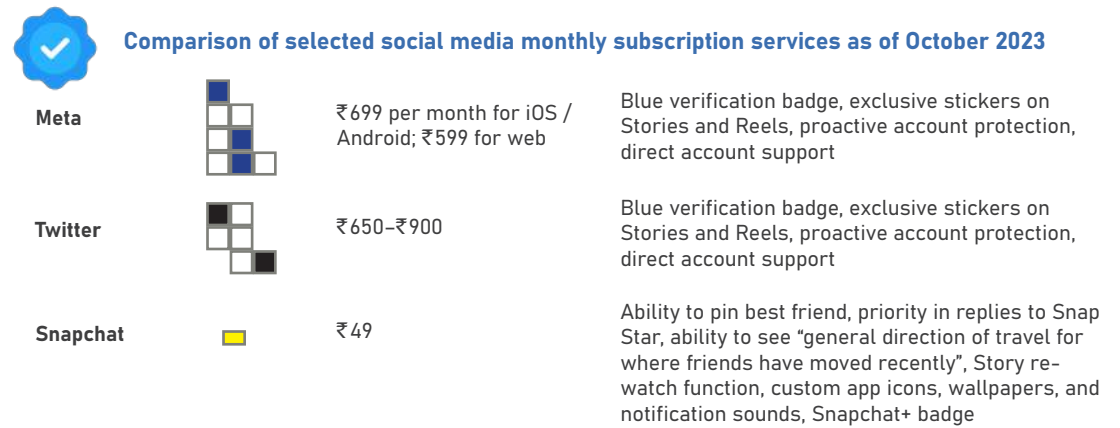
76% of social media users have purchased something they saw on social media

\$4.14 billion: The amount of spending on influencers last year

\$2,500 The minimum average cost of a sponsored YouTube video with 1 million views

\$1,200 The minimum average cost of an Insta post with 1 mn followers

\$1,034 The minimum average cost of a TikTok post with 1 mn followers



DATA SOURCES	Grand View Research	Statista	BrandWatch	Forbes	Score.org	Retail	Healio
DemandSage	Research	Backlinko	SproutSocial	Pew Research	Instagram	TouchPoints	Hubspot

Connected by Clicks

Welcome to a world where social media is the connective tissue that binds us together. Social media is redefining human bonds.

MITREYI VENUGOPAL

Step into the realm where screens become bridges, where the click of a button can span continents and rekindle long-lost friendships. In a world where we share our lives, passions, and moments with a tap and a swipe, there's a remarkable thread that binds us all together—the magic of social media and connectedness. Let's embark on a digital journey filled with heartwarming stories, surprising connections, and the extraordinary ways in which our virtual lives intertwine.

Connecting in Crisis and Chaos

In the face of a devastating catastrophe, a digital lifeline emerged when Nepal experienced its most powerful earthquake in over 80 years, claiming the lives of over 4,800 people. The world watched in awe as social media, led by Facebook, became a beacon of hope and connectedness. Facebook's ingenious "Safety Check" feature played a pivotal role in helping friends and families locate their loved ones amidst the chaos. In times of crisis, this remarkable tool allowed users near the disaster area to mark themselves safe, providing instant relief to their concerned friends and family. It didn't stop there; the feature encouraged others to actively participate by confirming the safety of their loved ones. This life-saving innovation had its roots in the shared desire to connect and support, with Facebook's engineers in Japan initially creating the Disaster Message Board following the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

► In an increasingly interconnected world, the role of social media in global networking cannot be overstated.

Social media transcends boundaries and sparks social change with remarkable efficiency. A standout example is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. In the wake of the tragic death of George Floyd, social media platforms became the epicenter for organising, mobilising, and amplifying the message of justice and equality. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter spread like wildfire, drawing attention to systemic racism and police brutality. It wasn't just about sharing information; it was about galvanising a worldwide community. Activists used platforms like Twitter and Instagram to coordinate protests, share resources, and, most importantly, ensure that voices were heard.

These platforms have transformed into digital hubs where people come together to seek and provide assistance. Consider the recent Israel and Palestinian conflict as a poignant example. Social media was ablaze with crowdfunding campaigns to provide humanitarian aid, share information about safe locations, and even reunite families torn apart by the turmoil. It's not just about raising funds; it's about raising hope. The same platforms have been instrumental in solving cold cases, bringing answers to families long searching for closure. In the world of hashtags and retweets, the collective strength of social media is not just about connecting, but about taking real-world action in times of need.



Digital Bridges to Success

In an increasingly interconnected world, the role of social media in global networking cannot be overstated. It has become a virtual agora, where professionals, entrepreneurs, and aspiring talents can transcend geographical boundaries to collaborate, learn, and grow. Platforms like LinkedIn have emerged as a launchpad for career advancements and business collaborations. Here, connections transcend oceans, mentors know no borders, and expertise travels across time zones. The digital age has ushered in a global era of professional growth and innovation, with social media as the bridge to these endless opportunities, connecting like-minded individuals worldwide. It's an evidence of the power of virtual handshakes and the global friendships forged in the world of bits and bytes.

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed an educational revolution, and social media played a leading

Social media, in all its digital glory, has evolved into much more than a platform for posts and memes.

role. It evolved from a space for memes and posts to a thriving virtual classroom. Teachers and students around the world, grappling with the challenges of lockdowns and closures, turned to platforms like Zoom and Google Classroom for a semblance of continuity. Beyond official classrooms, social media also became the hub for students to form study groups and share resources, with Facebook and WhatsApp fostering global study communities. The pandemic underscored the remarkable flexibility of social media, not only as a mode of communication but as an indispensable tool in ensuring education remains accessible in times of crisis.

Social media, in all its digital glory, has evolved into much more than a platform for posts and memes. It's the thread that binds our global village together, the bridge that spans continents, and the lifeline that rekindles human connections. From the heart of disaster zones to the epicenter of social movements, from heartwarming family reunions to collective acts of compassion, and from global networking opportunities to the virtual classrooms that educated us in a pandemic—social media has been our constant companion, connecting us when we needed it most.

As the digital age continues to unfold, one thing remains clear: the potential for social media to forge connections and enact change is boundless. In a world marked by screens and swipes, let's not forget that behind every click, there's a beating heart, a voice longing to be heard, and a story waiting to be told. In the realm of social media and connectedness, the human spirit remains at the forefront, proving that even in the most challenging of times, we can find unity, compassion, and a profound sense of belonging. ■



The Strange, Not So Strange, Social Media

YARLAGADDA SRESHTA PRAVEEN

Doomscrolling

Doomscrolling is frequently characterised as a user's responsibility, but it can also be a product of the monetary paradigm that underpins social media.

Although the phrase is rather new, the concept of doomscrolling itself, is not. It is the practice of regularly spending a lot of time going through social media and reading unfavourable posts. People have developed the compulsive urge to scroll through their news and social media feeds. You may have caught yourself in this pattern.

The phenomenon became so popular that the Macquarie Dictionary chose *doomscrolling* as the Committee's Choice Word of the Year for 2020. It goes without saying that doomscrolling is bad for your mental health. It can lead to anxiety, tension, despair and panic, and could make existing symptoms of stress worse. So then, one must wonder, if this behaviour causes us distress, why do we continue to do it?

Research suggests that doomscrolling may be positively correlated with negativity bias, which is the tendency to pay attention to,

► Research suggests that doomscrolling may be positively correlated with negativity bias, which is the tendency to pay attention to, learn from or apply bad information.

learn from or apply bad information. This implies that while on social media, we may be more likely, and perhaps even predisposed, to dwell on negativity. Some also believe that doomscrolling may be related to the fear of missing out (FOMO).

While we may assume that everyone is equally susceptible to doomscroll, one study contended that men and adults under the age of forty are more prone to it. They also found that doomscrollers were more likely to follow politics and engage in activism. They have the habit of checking news repeatedly and often, reading news with a negative tone, reading multiple articles about the same story, putting off commitments and losing sleep over disturbing news.

Effective Ways to Kick the Habit

WATCH YOUR SCROLLING PACE: Try slowing down the pace at which you skim past stories. Pay heed to the quality of the content you consume rather than the quantity.

BE TRUTHFUL TO YOURSELF: Recognise the root of your habit; whether it is an

attempt to deal with boredom, acquire assurance, receive direction or have your concerns confirmed. After this, try to tackle the issue constructively.

EMPLOY MINDFULNESS: Be aware of the emotions the content makes you feel. If something is making you feel alarmed and on-edge, take a step back. Talk to a mental health expert if you think you can benefit from it.

TAKE SCREEN-FREE SELF-CARE BREAKS: You could take a warm shower, read a book, engage yourself in arts and crafts, take a nap, go on a walk or catch up with a loved one.

TRY OUT WELLNESS APPS: Wellness applications present viable solutions through guided meditation, mood trackers and increased access to uplifting content that can assist you in building healthier habits.

STOP THE PUSH NOTIFICATIONS: Push notifications from news applications present themselves as important. Disable them to feel less anxious.

STEER CLEAR OF CATASTROPHISING: Instead of jumping to the worst-case scenarios, if you take the ground reality into consideration, you will start seeing beyond the clickbait and fear mongering in the media.

TRY THOUGHT-STOPPING: Blocking and substituting upsetting thoughts is used to curb negative thoughts.

EMPLOY MINDFULNESS: Be aware of the emotions the content makes you feel. If something is making you feel alarmed and on-edge, take a step back. Talk to a mental health expert if you think you can benefit from it.

According to cultural theorist Mark Fisher, doomscrolling is frequently characterised as a user's responsibility, but it can also be a product of the monetary paradigm that underpins social media. The algorithms that power social media platforms are frequently designed to grab attention and boost participation. Statutory regulations may improve platform accountability, help consumers become more aware, enable them to restrict profiling and customisation, and take better measures.

Sharenting

How much information about your child's life do you post on social media? Sharing images of children online is becoming more and more common, and some people have even managed to make a profit from doing so. Some children's digital footprints are created before they are even born when parents post a picture of their ultrasound to share the good news. The true danger, though, comes from parents who do not care about the rights or best interests of their child.

Sharenting is a combination of the words share and parenting. Collins Dictionary defines it as the habitual use of social media to share news, images, etc. of one's children. In the age of social media, it has become extremely common for parents to share details of their child's life. But just because something is common, doesn't mean it isn't questionable, especially given some of the extremely concerning effects of overexposing children on the internet.

Documenting your child's life online could include their first steps, zoo visits and action-packed beach days. Doesn't sound like a big deal, right? That is certainly true most of the time, but there are times when sharing too much information or particularly intimate details can put your children in trouble.

Parents could be posting their children's milestones to maintain a digital diary of significant events and accomplishments, and even meltdowns and embarrassing moments. Some influencers who become parents notice that posts with their children get clicks, so they may put their children at the forefront of their content.

They may also do so to share their own parenting journey or to connect with other parents in their community. After all, this brings with it the comfort and assurance of shared experiences, affirmation of beliefs and ideals, displays of pride and social feedback.

Although sharing is controversial, some experts and parents believe it is not entirely catastrophic. Sharing child-centric content on social media can be an excellent approach to promote healthy family relationships, to reserve memories, to ring together a community of parents who support each other and learn how to navigate parenthood together, and to create child-friendly content and support one's family.

So, if sharing comes with all these great benefits, why is it frowned upon? The boatload of cyber security issues that come with sharing your child's personal information online are at the top of the list of reasons you should avoid sharenting.

Sharing child-centric photographs and videos expands your child's digital footprint. These children would be more susceptible to identity theft. According to an estimate by Barclays, by 2030, sharenting will account for two-thirds of identity fraud involving individuals aged over 18.

There are also many concerns surrounding how exposing every aspect of a child's life of the internet can lead to child sex offenders misusing this information. Not only could paedophiles use images and videos of the child for sexual gratification, but if your child continues to have an online presence of their own, they could be at risk of grooming.

Put yourself in the shoes of the child of an

influencer. If everything from your potty training to your tantrums, your first period to your first date are being documented online, how would you feel? You may feel like you have no privacy at all, and as you grow old enough to understand, you may feel betrayed by your own caregivers. Moreover, teens may also get bullied in schools by peers.

The ethics of family vloggers come into question when we look at how certain influencers will go to any lengths to make content that will make them money. YouTuber Jordan Cheyenne received backlash when she accidentally posted a video where she was instructing her child to cry harder over their dying dog for the camera. Looking at this example, it becomes clear how it is very easy for parents to take things too far.

Finally, the lack of legislation governing online photo sharing of children can be alarming. Not only can a website's privacy policy be convoluted, there are also no regulations about parents setting aside a percentage of the money they make with the help of their children toward the future of those very children. While we like to believe that parents have their child's best interests at heart, that is not always the case, and this has been proven time and again by the financial exploitation of child stars. So, why should we believe circumstances on social media would be any different?

The Parental Responsibility

Parents need to become more tech-savvy as their children become adults in a highly digital environment with murky internet repercussions. The internet's innocent era has ended. It is a public forum and everything you post there can be used against you and your kids. You have a responsibility to lead by example for your kids.

Ask yourself, how will they learn to protect their reputation and internet safety as adults if they don't care about it now? Talk to your kids about online safety and good digital citizenship; encourage them to consider before they share. And, most importantly, do the same yourself.

As with all forms of social sharing, it is crucial to establish personal limits, develop healthy routines and limit the amount of time spent on apps.

Why would you want to make something as private and intimate as your family life privy to the

public, especially when content can be misused and abused? You will never regret speaking too little, but you will frequently regret speaking too much, according to a proverb from the 15th century that seems to still be true when it comes to sharing information online. And after all, parenting is more important than sharenting, right?

Cyberchondria

In this day and age, the use of internet as a resource for health information has grown significantly. This is because it is quick, simple to use, anonymous and relatively inexpensive. Before visiting a doctor, people usually check online for basic information about diseases and treatments. Sometimes, relying solely on internet medical knowledge can be detrimental instead of helpful.

The term *cyberchondria* was coined in the 2000s. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as the excessive worry or anxiety about one's health, especially when accompanied by imaginary or exaggerated physical symptoms. It is a form of health anxiety as a result of using the internet to self-diagnose conditions.

The causes of cyberchondria are complex and can involve a combination of psychological, social and environmental factors. Anxiety and stress can heighten health concerns and lead to an obsession with physical symptoms. Past health problems can also make one vulnerable to excessive fear of further illness. The widespread availability and access to the internet makes people more prone to looking up their symptoms. Personality traits such as neuroticism and perfectionism, and sensationalised media coverage of health issues also causes the onset of health anxiety.

The symptoms can vary from person to person, but some signs include: spending a lot of time checking symptoms and self-diagnosing, worrying about having a serious illness, even when there is no evidence to support it, seeking reassurance from others about health concerns, experiencing physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches, due to anxiety, feeling distressed or impaired by health-related fears.

Tackling Cyberchondria

LIMIT YOUR ONLINE SEARCHES: Avoid looking up symptoms or medical conditions excessively.

PRACTICE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES: Engage in deep breathing or mindfulness to help reduce anxiety and stress.

STAY GROUNDED: Try grounding activities that keep you calm and in touch with reality.

INCULCATE HEALTHY HABITS: Eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly and sleep well.

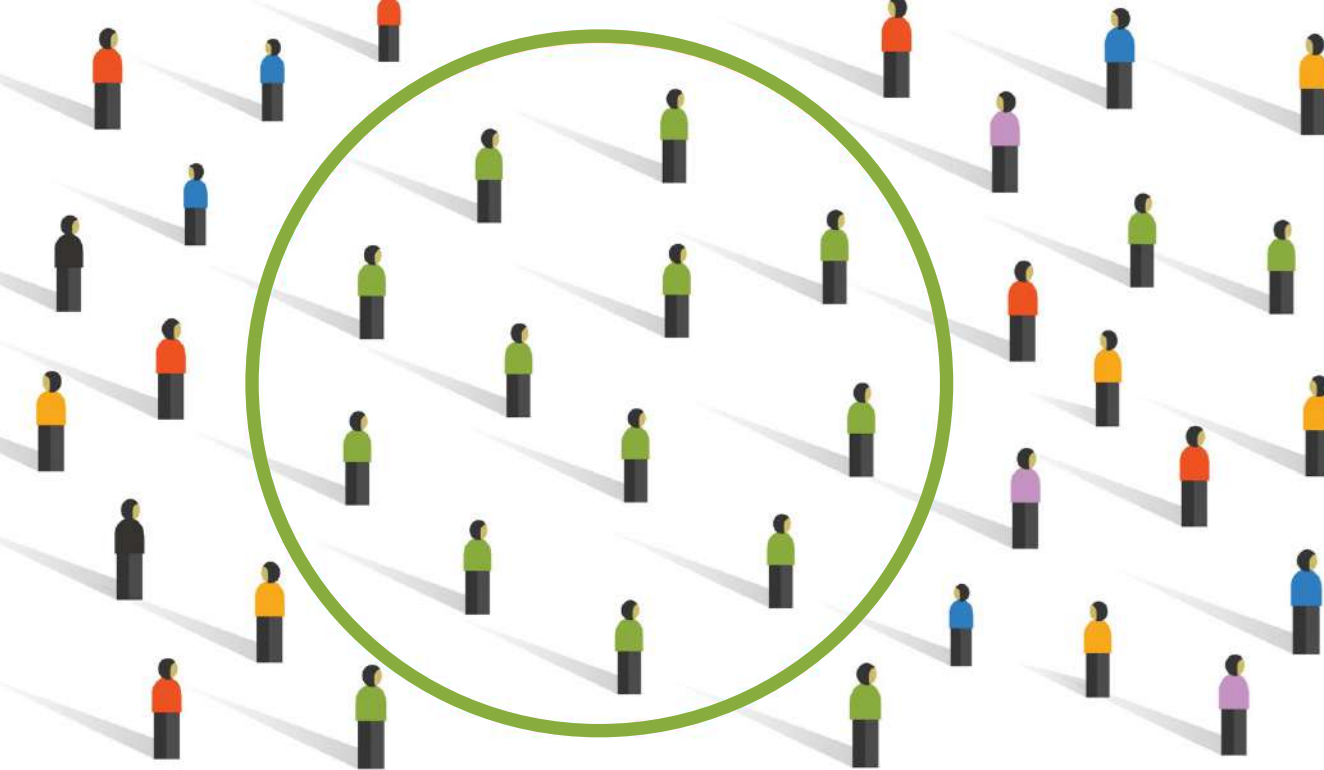
SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP: Cognitive behavioural therapy and rational emotive behaviour therapy can effectively treat cyberchondria and reduce anxiety.

The rise of people searching for health information online has led to a proliferation of misinformation and unverified sources of information. Here are some suggestions to help you identify trustworthy sources of health information: look for information from reputable organisations such as government agencies, academic institutions and professional associations, such as the World Health Organisation. Keep an eye out for references. Reliable health information sources will provide references to research studies or other sources that support the claims made. Evaluate the website. You can do this by checking their domain, design and structure.

Cyberchondria in the Indian Context

There are several factors that suggest cyberchondria is a growing concern in India. India has one of the largest populations of internet users in the world. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has also led to a concerning reliance on online sources. A study published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics* found that many Indian patients are likely to use the internet to self-diagnose, medicate and treat conditions, often incorrectly.

To address these concerns, there is a need for education and awareness campaigns on identifying reliable sources of information. Healthcare providers and organisations play a key role in promoting accurate and trustworthy health information and encouraging patients to seek professional help when required. ■



ESCAPE THE ECHO CHAMBER

DRISHYA TV, VANDANA G

echo chamber
/ˈekəʊ tʃeɪmbə(r)/
noun

an environment in which somebody encounters only opinions and beliefs similar to their own, and does not have to consider alternatives

In the world of media, people resonate their own opinions or perspectives and related content, over and over again, creating echo chambers. Echo chambers reduce exposure to alternative views, reinforcing existing beliefs and ideas more firmly. They result in confirmation bias, a tendency to favour information that confirms existing beliefs.

Social media platforms have intentionally created algorithms that collect user interaction data and show them content and advertisements related to their interests, thereby encouraging the formation of echo chambers and creating filter bubbles. Some people believe the Internet and social media are great ways to explore the world and learn different aspects and perspectives. This makes people unaware of the other side of their views and makes it difficult for them to accept opposing views when confronted with them, and can also create a mindset where people refuse to respect others' opinions.

Echo chambers can be deceiving. They give us a false sense of being informed and up-to-date. It is challenging to recognise when we are in one because we enjoy it and are not aware of other perspectives. In reality, echo chambers only show us news and information that align with our existing views and interactions, while other viewpoints remain unexplored.

To escape the echo chamber, it is important to avoid interacting with the same kind of content repeatedly and seek out alternative views. It is also crucial to be aware of our online interactions and analyse situations from different angles. Additionally, making friends with people who have different perspectives will allow us to interpret things from their side and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the world. ■

Dark Web

JENNIFER R

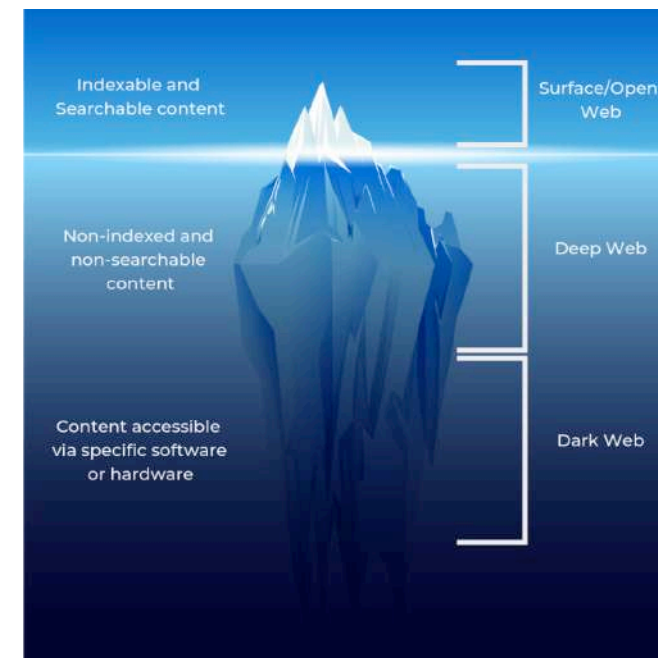
The internet has transformed how we live, work, and communicate. Life revolves entirely around the Internet, which has become a driving force in economic and business growth like never before. As much as the internet has benefited us, there is a dark side that many of us are unaware of. There is an increase in the number of crimes committed on the internet. We will navigate the dangers of the dark side of the digital world here. Millions of people worldwide are impacted by cybercrime every year. It might lead to property damage, identity theft, or even bodily harm. However, we can all contribute to making the internet a safer place for everyone by being aware of the risks and taking precautions to protect ourselves.

The dark web is a haven for a variety of criminal activities, including the sale of illegal drugs, weapons, and stolen goods, as well as human trafficking, child pornography, and other illegal activities.

A portion of the internet known as the 'dark web' is untraceable, inaccessible to the general public, and frequently used for illegal purposes. The dark web is accessed using Tor (The Onion Router), which provides users with anonymity and makes tracking their online activities difficult. It is frequently used by activists, journalists, and whistleblowers who wish to remain anonymous or avoid censorship. The dark web, on the other hand, is a haven for a variety of criminal activities, including the sale of illegal drugs, weapons, and stolen goods, as well as human trafficking, child pornography, and other illegal activities. Because of the anonymity provided by the dark web, law enforcement agencies may find it difficult to track down and prosecute those who engage in criminal activities on the platform. Dozens of illegal activities take place on the dark web every now and then. Nearly 70% of the child sexual abuse material that the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received in 2019 came from the dark web.

Torture is another frequent crime committed on the dark web, where users pay thousands to watch streaming live murders and abuses, and other types of torture. The dark web is where hitmen are hired. The most common types of crimes are proxying fraud and bitcoin scams. Criminals frequently use proxy servers to conceal their identity and location while establishing bogus websites and Bitcoin exchanges to steal personal and financial information. The dark web is regarded by criminals as their most reliable source of drug trafficking.

In conclusion, it is critical for all of us to be aware of the dangers of the dark web and to report any suspicious activity to the appropriate authorities. It is important to be cautious of the websites you visit, to avoid clicking on suspicious links or opening suspicious emails, and to use reputable security software to protect your devices. We can better protect ourselves and prevent cybercrime from claiming more victims if we are vigilant and informed. ■



Cybercrimes Against Women in India

LIYA THOMAS

Cybercrime is a criminal activity executed through the use of computers, Internet, and digital technologies, like, identity theft, privacy invasion, financial frauds, trafficking in child pornography, intellectual property theft, spreading malware and viruses, and online harassment or stalking. Put together, there are two categories of crimes that come under cybercrimes, two types of crimes exist: those that target computer networks or devices, and those that make use of computer networks to further criminal activities.

Cybercrimes are equally or more damaging than other crimes; they cause financial losses, weaken national security, trigger psychological and other mental health problems on victims of cyber bullying and harassment, and erode trust and confidence between individuals and groups.

With the spread of computers, and the reach of the Internet even to the remotest villages, nobody is spared from the dangers of cybercrime. Rightly so, criminology today is focusing and engaging with incidents of cybercrimes, cybercriminal behaviours, and the psychological and social causes of cybercrime. It is a huge task to achieve cybercrime prevention and effective intervention strategies; this task often becomes even more challenging because of the vast distances between the victims of cybercrime and perpetrators of it. Law enforcement is thwarted by lack of international cooperation.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, there has been a noticeable increase in cyber-

crimes in India. Cases of cybercrime against women have increased significantly by 28%, and there have been more instances of cyberblackmail, threats, cyberpornography, posting/publishing of obscene sexual materials, cyberstalking, bullying, defamation, and creation of fake profiles. India is one of the only nations in South Asia to have passed the IT Act 2000, which broadly addresses economic and commercial offences. Despite the fact that this Act still doesn't address issues relating to women.

The incident at Chandigarh University, in September 2022, of recording images and videos of a girl by a hostel mate of hers using a smartphone and sending it to others who demanded for it once again opened public discussions and academic conversations on the safety of women in cyberspace. Loss of privacy, unrestrained communication, online harassment, and stalking are among the concerns. The rules controlling the internet have not kept up with the growth of the internet.

Phishing, pornography, cyberstalking, cyber-squatting, posting obscene comments and remarks,

harassing with offensive messages, and uploading false information are among the cybercrimes against women in India. Such behaviours can have devastating effects on a lot of people, especially young adults. On social media, women are more likely to suffer abuse directed at their safety and right to free speech than males are. Social, economic, and psychological effects of cybercrimes on social media can vary for female victims. Women and girls may feel ashamed and afraid due to the environment of male dominance established by cybercrimes. Social internet has given women more power and a platform to express their ideas, unite in protest, and engage in similar causes with like-minded people. Social media is crucial for women's empowerment, but it has also increased the vulnerability of women's lives.

The two cybercrimes against women in India that have the greatest societal and psychological impact are sextortion and cybersex trafficking. One of the most common cybercrimes involving women is sextortion. By using their victims' private photos or altered images to blackmail, these criminals start demanding money or sexual favours from them.

The Case of Chandigarh University Girl's Video Leak

The story surfaced of a girl who had made private videos of her hostel mate and circulated online in September 2022 in Chandigarh University, Punjab, India. After the arrest of the accused, because of the widespread and prolonged protest by the students of the university, classes were suspended; there were serious investigations, even by a Special Investigation Team. They uncover more videos circulated online; which led to the arrest of more than three people from different and far off cities in India. The investigation revealed that the girl who took the video and sent it to the other accused was blackmailed by others who were accused in the case, and had demanded nude images of girl students; and the prime accused, Sanjeev Singh, had blackmailed multiple women through the same modus operandi.

Critically studying the case of Chandigarh University girl's video leak in the light of the major proposals of Space Transmission Theory would make us understand how sociologically and, to some extent psychologically, become cyber criminals.

Due to their status and position, people with repressed criminal behaviour (in the physical world) have a propensity to commit crimes in cyberspace that they otherwise would not do in the physical environment. The friend of the girl, whose objectionable pictures and videos were taken and circulated, was not a habitual offender in the

physical space, but she was easily wooed into it. She as a student of a prestigious institution would have been careful about her status and position, but she got the needed cover in cyberspace, and she commits a cybercrime.

The first accused Sanjeev Singh has an honourable job in the Indian defense force. Behind the safety and privacy of cyberspace he demands and even blackmails the girl to provide him with objectionable videos and images. Jaishankar made it clear that the term "repressed behaviour" in his argument does not refer to any criminal behaviour that is suppressed from childhood; rather, it refers to the hidden motivations of people who, because of their status and position in society, are unable to express them in the physical world.

Identity flexibility, dissociative anonymity and lack of deterrence factor in the cyberspace offers the offenders the variety of choice to commit cybercrime. The three accused had positioned their identity as friends. The first accused had grown in acquaintance with the accused girl on a friendship app. Cyber space gives predators a chance to create their own fake and misguided identities and get what they want without the fear of being doubted by the rest. The most intriguing aspect of all is that people are always capable of persuading themselves that certain behaviours "aren't me at all."

It's likely that strangers will band together online to conduct crimes offline. Criminal activity in cyberspace is likely to be coordinated by friends from the actual world. Compared to those from open societies, people from closed societies are more likely to commit crimes online. Jaishankar's argument is predicated on the idea that while those living in open societies have many outlets available to them for expressing pent-up emotions like rage through rallies and demonstrations, those living in closed societies do not. According to others, these individuals find comfort online. ■





Illustration: NewAge

Trial by Media

Responsible journalism adhering to ethical standards can contribute to transparency, accountability, and public discourse.

PRISCILLA P

Media outlets, through their coverage and portrayal of a legal case, play a significant role in influencing public opinion, potentially impacting the fairness and outcome of the trial. In trial by media scenarios, media coverage often goes beyond reporting the facts of the case and delves into sensationalism, speculation, and biased narratives. This can lead to a rush to judgment, character assassination, and a presumption of guilt or innocence even before the legal proceedings are completed.

The Amanda Knox Case (2007–2015)

The trial of Amanda Knox, an American student accused of the murder of her British roommate, Meredith Kercher, in Italy, was widely covered by the media. Knox's case received extensive attention in both American and international news outlets. The media coverage portrayed Knox in various ways, with some outlets labeling her as a cold-blooded killer and others presenting her as a victim of a flawed justice system. The sensationalised reporting and public scrutiny influenced public opinion and created a highly polarised atmosphere surrounding the case. Knox was initially convicted but later acquitted on appeal, further highlighting the potential influence of media coverage on legal proceedings.

Jessica Lal Murder Case (1999)

The Jessica Lal murder case received significant media attention and became a symbol of public outrage against the influence of the elite and the power of political connections. Jessica Lal, a model and a bartender, was shot dead at a party in a high-profile restaurant in New Delhi. The initial trial witnessed influential people allegedly tampering with evidence and

intimidating witnesses. However, media coverage shed light on the case, resulting in widespread public protests and demands for justice. The extensive reporting and public pressure ultimately led to a retrial and the conviction of the accused.

Trial by media poses several concerns. First, it can compromise the presumption of innocence, which is a fundamental principle of justice. Media narratives, even if unverified or speculative, can shape public opinion and prejudice potential jurors. Second, sensationalised coverage can distort the perception of the case, overshadowing the objective assessment of evidence and legal arguments. Third, it can put pressure on the justice system, influencing the course of investigations and trial proceedings.

However, media coverage can also play a constructive role in highlighting important issues, raising awareness, and bringing attention to potential injustices. Responsible journalism adhering to ethical standards can contribute to transparency, accountability, and public discourse. Striking a balance between the right to a fair trial and the freedom of the press remains a complex challenge in the era of instant information and widespread media influence. ■



Catching Wild Pigs

MONICA FERNANDES

Karl Marx once said, "Remove one freedom per generation. Soon you will have no freedom left and no one would have even noticed."

One day while the class was in the laboratory, a professor noticed a young man kept rubbing his back and stretching, as if his back hurt.

The professor asked the young man what was the matter. The student told him that he had a bullet lodged in his back. He had been shot while fighting communists in his native country, who were trying to overthrow his country's government and install a new communist regime.

Then, the student looked at the professor and asked a strange question: "Do you know how to catch wild pigs?"

The professor thought it was a joke and asked for the punchline. The young man said that it was no joke at all.

"You catch wild pigs by finding a suitable place in the woods and putting corn on the ground. They find the corn and begin to come every day to eat the free food. When they are used to coming every day, you put a fence on one side of the place where they are used to coming regularly.

"At first, the pigs are scared, but when they get used to the fence, they begin to eat the corn again and you put up another side of the fence. They get used to that and start to eat again. You continue until you have all four sides of the fence up with a gate on the last side. The pigs start to come through the gate to eat that free corn again. Then you slam the gate on them and catch the whole herd. Suddenly, the wild pigs have lost their freedom and they are slaughtered thereafter."

The young man then told the professor:

"That is exactly what is happening in many countries today.

"The governments keep pushing the people towards socialism and keep spreading the Free Corn out in the form of programmes such as free rations, free electricity, tax credits, farm subsidies, welfare schemes, free entitlements, free medicines, caste reservations for college and jobs, while the people continually lose their freedom, just a little bit at a time."

One should always remember the simple truth: **There Is No Such Thing as a Free Lunch.** If you think that the free ride is essential to your way of life, then God help you when the gates slam shut!

Most of the problems we are facing today, are because the people who work for a living are now outnumbered by those who vote for a living! ■

The Floating Palace of Jaipur

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

The awe-inspiring Jal Mahal Palace (water palace), built and rebuilt with sandstone between 1650 and 1800, is an architectural showcase of the Rajput and Mughal style architecture of Rajasthan. It,

standing majestically in the picturesque

Man Sagar Lake, is a beauty to behold. The

Man Sagar Lake, in the backdrop of the

surrounding Nahargarh (tiger-abode)

hills, holds the Jal Mahal like a lotus in

full bloom. Of the five stories, only the top

floor with a roof garden is visible above the

water. The Jal Mahal was built in the lake by Maharaja Jai Singh II of Amber (there are other claims) for bathing with his queens and pundits. Then or later it was used as a duck-hunting lodge. The dam, which was built later to combat severe droughts in the area, submerged the lower portions of the palace.

As you reach the lakefront, the sunlit sand coloured stonewalls of the palace standing in stark contrast with the deep blue of the waters and the lush green surrounding mountains take your breath away, you fall in love, you walk along the shore lost in fantasy and romanticism. Soon you are surprised by the sightings of not so common birds like, black-winged stilts, pelicans, red-wattled lapwing, moorhens, and more.

Jaipur, bathed in the colour of hospitality—pink, is an adventure in the land of palaces, forts, and kings. The Jal Mahal, with its waterfronts and backdrops, has everything a tourist looks for in the Pink City: palace, lake, landscape, birds, and of course, the travel vibe. ■

Jaipur, bathed in the colour of hospitality—pink, is an adventure in the land of palaces, forts, and kings.





Contemplation Is Shedding of Habitual Thoughts

RICHARD ROHR OFM

Contemplation is a panoramic, receptive awareness whereby we take in all that the situation, moment, or person offers without judging, eliminating, or labeling anything. It is pure and positive gazing that abandons all negative pushback so it can recognise inherent dignity. That takes much practice and a lot of unlearning of habitual responses.

We have to work at it and develop practices whereby we recognise our compulsive and repetitive patterns. In doing so, we allow ourselves to be freed from the need to “take control of the situation”—as if we ever really could anyway!

It seems we are addicted to our need to make distinctions and judgments, which we mistake for thinking. Most of us think we are our thinking, yet almost all thinking is compulsive, repetitive, and habitual. We are forever writing our inner commentaries on everything, commentaries that always reach the same practiced conclusions. That is why all forms of meditation and contemplation teach a way of quieting this compulsively driven and unconsciously programmed mind.

The Desert Fathers and Mothers wisely called this process “the shedding of thoughts.” We don’t fight, repress, deny, identify with, or even judge them, but merely shed them. We are so much more than our thoughts about things, and we will feel this more as an unlearning than a learning of any new content.

When we meditate consistently, a sense of our autonomy and private self-importance—what we think of as our “self”—falls away, little by little, as unnecessary, unimportant, and even unhelpful. The imperial “I,” the self that we likely think of as our only self, reveals itself as largely a creation of our mind.

Through a regular practice of contemplation, we become less and less interested in protecting this self-created, relative identity. We don’t have to attack it; it calmly falls away of its own accord and we experience a kind of natural humility.

If our prayer goes deep, “invading” our unconscious, as it were, our whole view of the world will change from fear to connection. We don’t live inside our fragile and encapsulated self anymore, nor do we feel any need to protect it. In meditation, we move from ego consciousness to soul awareness, from being fear-driven to being love-drawn. That’s it in a few words!

Surrendering to the Present Moment

If we watch our minds, we will see that we live most of our life in the past or in the future. The present always seems boring and not enough. To get ourselves engaged, we will often “create a problem” to resolve, and then another, and another. The only way many of us know how to motivate ourselves is to create problems or to need to “fix” something, someone else, or ourselves.

If we can’t be positively present right now without creating a problem, nothing new is ever going to happen. We will only experience what we already agree with and what does not threaten us and our preferred mode of being. We will never experience the unexpected depth and contentment that is always being offered to us.

Notice that the Scriptures present God as a thief, or a master who returns before

being expected (see Matthew 24:42–46), who even “puts on an apron, sits them at table and waits on them” (see Luke 12:35–38)! Do we even realise what an extraordinary notion of God Jesus must have had to talk that way? God waiting on us! No problem to solve—just an immediate intimacy to enjoy.

The spiritual journey is a constant interplay between moments of awe followed by a process of surrender to that moment. We must first allow ourselves to be captured by the goodness, truth, or beauty of something beyond and outside ourselves. Then we universalise from that moment to the goodness, truth, and beauty of the rest of reality, until our realisation eventually ricochets back to include ourselves! This is the great inner dialogue we call prayer. Yet we humans resist both the awe and, even more, the surrender. Both together are vital, and so we must practice.

The way to any universal idea is to proceed through a concrete encounter. The one is the way to the many; the specific is the way to the spacious; the now is the way to the always; the here is the way to the everywhere; the material is the way to the spiritual; the visible is the way to the invisible.

What We Resist Persists

When I entered the Franciscan novitiate in 1961, part of our training was learning to avoid, resist, and oppose all distractions. It was such poor teaching, but it was the only way they thought back then. It was all about willpower: celibacy through willpower, poverty through willpower, community through willpower. But what we need isn’t willpower; we need the power to surrender the will and to trust what is. That’s heroic! It was a fruitless and futile effort because if we start with negative energy, a “don’t,” we won’t get very far. That was the extent of the teaching, and it’s really no teaching at all—it’s just “Don’t! Don’t do anything!” When we hear that, the ego immediately pushes back. Some days we have strong willpower and we succeed, but most days we barely succeed.

We know the old shibboleth, “Don’t think of an elephant.” If we try not to, that dang elephant invariably sneaks back into our minds! Just wait. To actively oppose something actually engages with it and gives it energy. That’s why good spiritual teachers say, “What you resist persists.”

Our first energy has to be “yes” energy. From there we can move, build, and proceed. We must choose the

positive, which is to choose love, and rest there for a minimum of fifteen conscious seconds—it takes that long for positivity to imprint in the neurons, I’m told.

If I had told my novice master that I wasn’t going to fight my distractions, he would have said, “So you’re going to entertain lustful or hateful thoughts?” But that would have largely missed the point. The real learning curve happens when we can admit we’re having a thought or feeling and see that it’s empty, passing, and part of a fantasy that has no final reality except as a lesson.

We must listen honestly to ourselves. Listen to whatever thought or feeling arises. Listen long enough to ask, “Why am I thinking this? What is this saying about me that I need to entertain this negative, accusatory, or lustful thought?”

We don’t have to hate or condemn ourselves for a thought or feeling, but we do have to let it yield its wisdom. Then we will see it is the wounded or needy part of us that wants these unhealthy thoughts. Our True Self, our Whole Self, does not need them, and will not identify with them.

If we can allow our thoughts and feelings to pass through us, neither clinging to them nor opposing them—and without ever expecting perfect success—I promise that we will come to a deeper, wider, and wiser place. Even our inability to fully succeed is, in itself, another wonderful lesson.

Recognising and Appreciating

Contemplation is a kind of seeing that is much more than mere looking because it also includes recognising and thus appreciating. The contemplative mind does not tell us what to see but teaches us how to see what we behold.

To begin to see with new eyes, we must observe, and usually be humiliated by, the habitual way we encounter each and every moment. It is humiliating because we will see that we are well-practiced in just a few predictable responses. Few of our responses are original, fresh, or naturally respectful of what is right in front of us. The most common human responses to a new moment are mistrust, cynicism, fear, knee-jerk reactions, a spirit of dismissal, and overriding judgmentalism. It is so discouraging when we have the courage to

finally see that these are the common ways the ego tries to be in control of the data—instead of allowing the moment to get some control over us and teach us something new!

To let the moment teach us, we must allow ourselves to be at least slightly stunned by it until it draws us inward and upward toward a subtle experience of wonder. We normally need a single moment of gratuitous awe to get us started.

The twentieth-century rabbi and theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel [1907–1972] wrote a lot about “radical amazement,” that sense of “wow” about the world, which he claimed is the root of spirituality. It’s the kind of thing that people often experience in nature—at the proverbial mountaintop, when walking in the woods, seeing a gorgeous view of the ocean. But it’s also, I think, about bringing that sense of awe into the little things we often take for granted, or consider part of the background of our lives.

The real gift of contemplative practice is to be happy and content, even while we are just sitting on the porch, looking at a rock; or when we are doing the “nothingness” of prayer or benevolently gazing at anything in its ordinariness; or when we can see, accept, and say that every single act of creation is “just this” and thus allow it to work its wonder on us.

I look at the river. If I were to cling to it, I’d have to pick it up in a bucket and take some of it with me. I’d separate it from itself. If I were to cling to a tree, I’d have to break a part of it off, or uproot it. If I were to cling to a rock, I’d have to remove it from its home. This is worse: if I were to cling to the red bird, I’d have to cage him.

Maybe when I cling to people, I dim them, too. I separate them from their own inner roots. I help them to believe that they are dependent on me, or that the hunger in their bellies is a cry for me. I convince us both. And then we never hear the cry of hunger which is for God. Until this moment I have not understood that. I am hungry for God.... Now as I am eating and drinking (taking in) God’s creation, I feel satisfied. I am letting myself live in its beauty without needing to own it or control it or secure it for tomorrow. I am seeing it as it is ... really seeing it. And that is enough, to really see. I am present to this moment. That brings joy. ■

BODY SHAMMING

A HARROWING REALITY

ARJUMAND KHANEM

Body shaming is a pervasive issue that affects individuals worldwide, transcending borders, cultures, and societies. In the Indian context, body shaming particularly targets women and has become a distressing reality. The patriarchal mindset, rigid beauty standards, and societal pressures place an enormous burden on Indian women, leading to self-esteem issues, mental health concerns, and a perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. This article aims to shed light on the detrimental effects of body shaming on women in India and advocate for a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Indian society has long upheld narrow beauty ideals that prioritise fair skin, thin bodies, and specific facial features. This unrealistic benchmark creates an environment where women are constantly judged and compared based on their physical appearance. From the film industry to advertisements and social media, these

Indian culture, with its emphasis on conformity and traditions, plays a significant role in body shaming. Body shaming comments often stem from age-old beliefs about the ideal body shape, reinforcing the notion that women must adhere certain standards.

Additionally, cultural celebrations and rituals often highlight physical appearances, further exacerbating the pressure on women to meet certain standards. Constant scrutiny and negative comments about one’s body can significantly impact a woman’s self-esteem. Body shaming instills a sense of shame, leading to feelings of worthlessness and a distorted self-image. The internalisation of these negative perceptions can manifest in anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and other mental health issues.

Media’s Role

The media, including television, movies, and advertising, wields significant influence over society’s perception of beauty. In India, the media frequently perpetuates body shaming by portraying women with unrealistic and photoshopped images. This constant bombardment of unattainable beauty standards perpetuates a cycle of comparison, dissatisfaction, and self-criticism.

Social media platforms have opened new avenues for body shaming and cyberbullying. Women, particularly young girls, are vulnerable to online harassment and trolling based on their physical appearance. The anonymity of the internet often emboldens individuals to make hurtful comments, leading to severe emotional distress.

Building a Supportive Society

To combat body shaming, it is crucial to foster a supportive and inclusive society. This involves challenging the prevailing beauty standards, promoting body positivity, and educating individuals about the harmful effects of body shaming. Encouraging media representation that embraces diverse body types and backgrounds can help reshape societal perceptions and promote self-acceptance. People, including celebrities like Sara Ali Khan, should be respected for their talent, skills and contribution rather than being judged solely based on their appearance.

Body shaming can have serious consequences on an individual’s mental and emotional well-being so its essential to promote body positivity and acceptance instead. Recognising the mental health toll of body shaming, it is vital to provide accessible mental health resources for women who experience body image-related distress. Counseling services, helplines, and support groups can offer a safe space for individuals to share their struggles and seek guidance. Educating healthcare professionals about body shaming’s psychological impact is also crucial to provide appropriate support and intervention. ■

FROM RATIONAL CHOICES TO BINGE-WATCHING

ANAMIKA S

Why is it always Netflix and chill but never let's watch something and chill? At this point in time, it almost becomes synonymous with each other. Netflix subscriptions Amazon subscriptions hot sales and every other thing that companies do to market themselves has an element of behavioural economics which itself is a strong base. By convincing all of their potential customers that losing would be a huge setback for them, these services use the loss aversion strategy to draw people into clients. Netflix, like Blockbuster, began as a DVD rental service. However, unlike the latter, was able to guide its operations towards a long-term strategy. Its participation in major film award ceremonies such as the Oscars and Golden Globes has elevated the company's prominence to more than merely a streaming service, despite its rejection of the traditional industrial norm of movie release in theatres.

From a very long time ago, economists adhered to the assumption that consumers make rational decisions, which has been a foundation for all the theories they have formulated over the years. Rationality has always been a topic under discussion and it is true that humans who have unlimited needs and wants with limited income and scarce resources will not always make a rational decision. This possibility is completely ignored during the early stages of economics and it was during the 1970s that behavioural economics came into being. Behavioural economic studies about how and why humans

behave the way they do when they are to make choices. By understanding how consumer decisions could possibly be impacted, behavioural economics contributes to businesses with marketing efforts.

Netflix has been a global sensation and young adults began taking up the subscriptions one after the other. From a rational point of view one should take up the subscription only and only if they find it cost-effective but here people are more likely to make impulsive decisions because of the 'follow the herd' mentality. Because of this relevant herd mentality, people tend to go with what is popular with others or what people perceive as being popular. It is evident from the example above how marketing strategies have been successful in attracting customers to purchase their goods by bringing them the best deals that they can afford. Netflix also doesn't face the problem of having to choose the approximate price a subscriber will pay for a particular movie or show rather with a bundle subscription, there is no need to guess how much customers value films. The bundles themselves make it easier for the firm to use behavioural profiling, which means it



can divide customers into groups based on their behaviour patterns when engaging with Netflix using a specific algorithm. If Netflix can properly forecast the average price a user is prepared to pay for all films in a bundle, it may easily charge a price just below that level and maximise the customer's willingness to pay. Companies like Netflix have adapted dynamic pricing strategies, which are based on behavioural economics principles, in order to maximise their profits. In order to maximise revenue and customer satisfaction, prices may be adjusted depending on a range of factors, such as consumer demand, user behaviour, and preferences.

Furthermore, the policy of offering a one-month free subscription under the guise of a 'free trial' is deceptive because it requires credit card information in order to lure the forgetful user into a potential paying customer. In this situation, a completely rational

mind would analyse and actually look up the cost-benefit factors that they will have from getting the subscription. The human mind is very complicated and may take purchasing decisions as an abrupt leap. That is where we understand how well institutions like Netflix have made use of behavioural economic principles in order to lure their customers into actually being their regular potential customers. People fail to cancel a free trial before it requires a fee for auto-renewal. These are behavioural methods used to boost the company's revenue at the expense of the client. This retreat that in reality, the human mind can often be forgetful and not always well reasoned and logical.

Netflix also provides personalised suggestions; if you liked that, you'll like this: a simple 'choice satisficing' solution. Based on the normative model, in this case, people should determine if they enjoy what is being suggested to them and watch it only if they have the time. Contrary to traditional belief, researchers have found that three out of four times that simple nudge, such as automatically starting the next episode, keeps people watching. This initiates a binge-watching habit. This effect is reinforced by the practice of posting about Netflix binge-watching experiences on social media. Traditional economists believe that rational individuals would choose a product if its price was lower than it was previously. However, despite the fact that the OTT giant Netflix has consistently reduced the cost of its membership plan in trying to fit into the Indian puzzle, it just couldn't. For similar plans, Netflix is more expensive than Prime Video or Disney+ Hotstar. While you receive several advantages from an Amazon subscription, such as the ad-free OTT platform, free shipping, access to Amazon music services, etc. However, Netflix does not offer any additional advantages even the most basic ad-free services. This is one of the primary reasons why people choose other OTT platforms over Netflix and is the only place where the rational mind actually performs as the classical theory states.

The findings from this study have significantly improved my understanding of behavioural economics and how to market giants strategically employ these ideas to persuade customers to become subscribers. This study shows that humans actually follow bounded rationality rather than absolute rationality. The relevance of a branch of study like behavioural economics can clearly be understood as the study highlights how actual human behaviour is different from what we have learned in traditional economics. ■

Nature: The Unwritten Scripture

TOMY PALAKKAL OFM

In a world filled with sacred teachings and divine revelations, there exists a profound and often overlooked scripture, a scripture penned not by human hands but by the very essence of creation itself. It is a scripture that speaks to the heart of our existence and to the interconnectedness of all living beings. It is the nature.

In the rustling leaves of a forest, along the babbling brooks, on the towering mountains, and in the boundless oceans, I find the first scripture by God. Nature, in all its splendid diversity, is a living testament to the Creator's artistry and wisdom. It is a scripture that requires no translation or interpretation, for its message is universally understood and appreciated. In the words of Elizabeth Barret Browning, "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God, but only he who sees takes off his shoes; the rest sit round and pluck blackberries."

The Earth, the Early Prophetess

The Earth, our home, is the sacred vessel that cradles this first scripture. Just as a woman nurtures and cherishes her child, the earth, a mother and a prophetess, holds this very mystery of God's presence in her womb. Its landscapes and ecosystems are like chapters in a holy book, each revealing a unique aspect of the divine plan. The Earth, with its bountiful provisions, serves as a prophetess of God, teaching us the importance of stewardship and responsible care. Just as the prophets of old conveyed messages of moral and ethical guidance, the Earth implores us to be responsible custodians, reminding us that we are entrusted with its well-being and the well-being of all its inhabitants. She does not project an anthropocentric attitude but shouts aloud a message of coexistence and respect.

Every Prophet is also a message as much as they are messengers. As a result, the earth, the early prophetess can also be considered as the womb of God. Perceiving the Earth as the womb of God is a powerful and evocative way to explore our relationship with the natural world and the divine love. It calls us to be mindful of the sacredness of our planet, our interconnectedness with all life and our responsibility to cherish and protect this nurturing cradle of existence. It serves as a reminder that, just as a child is formed and nourished in the womb, the Earth is the sacred space where life is created, sustained, and celebrated.

The Trees, the Later Prophets

Among the Earth's prophets, the trees stand as majestic sages, their branches reaching for the heavens while their roots firmly anchor them to the soil. Trees, like prophets of old, offer lessons of patience, resilience, and steadfastness. They provide shelter, sustenance, and oxygen, symbolising the nurturing and life-giving qualities that are inherent in the divine.

The trees exemplify the very attitude and values that every follower of Christ should imbibe. First, they are oriented to the heavens the abode of God. Second, they speak rarely and only when needed. They are witnesses of everything but disturbed by none. Third, they possess nothing, not even their hurts or fruits. They are open to changes from season to season and resist nothing that promotes growth and fulfilment. Fourth, they teach us to give every good they possess and when they die, they die empty. Finally, they are grounded to the extent they show up. If only we understood our later prophets!

The Self, a Divine Principle

But beyond the Earth and its living prophets, there is another realm of spirituality to consider—the self. The human self is a sacred and mysterious entity, a prophet of God, carrying the potential for spiritual awakening. Within each of us resides the divine spark (the Christ

principle), a connection to the sacred source of all existence. As we turn our gaze inward, we can find the answers to life's profound questions and the guidance to lead a life of purpose, compassion, and integrity.

The self as psychology tells us is the organising, integrating and meaning making reality within us. It flourishes on connections and interactions with the world, others, and one's own being. While the concept of the self as divine principle is deeply spiritual, its important to note that it takes various forms and interpretations in different belief systems. For example, in Hinduism, it might be referred to as "Atman," the eternal self, while in Christian mysticism, it could be seen as the "Christ within." However, its conceptualised, this idea encourages us to seek a deeper connection with the sacred, embrace our higher potential, and contribute positively

to the world, ultimately realising that the divine is not external but a part of our very essence.

When we reflect on the theme of nature as the first scripture by God and view the Earth, the trees, and the self as prophets and divine principle of God, we come to understand that the divine message is not confined to ancient texts or distant heavens. It is present all around us, in every rustle of leaves, in the soil beneath our feet, and in the depths of our own souls. It is a message of unity, responsibility, and spiritual awakening. By heeding the lessons of this first scripture and embracing the teachings of the prophets in nature and within ourselves, we can find a path to a more harmonious and spiritually enriched existence. ■





DEMOCRACY OF DIVERSIONS!

ANMOL BARA OFM

The General Election in our country being around the corner, the political parties are sparing no time for any other affairs but politicking by employing outlandish and out of the blue strategies with the sole intent of defeating the 'enemy' opponents! The voters and their existential aspirations are not their primary concern, instead, their votes which by hook or by crook that will be elicited at all costs bereft of any dignified and moral conscience. With the frenetic activities of the political stronghold, the incumbent majority ruling government at the centre is in no mood to attend to human needs and respond appropriately to the real aspirations and hopes of the voters. Soothing sops are announced by various parties which only touch the surface to keep the masses voiceless and subdued. This favours the benefactors because it assures them the position they hanker after on high level space of the civic territory. The voters, on the other hand, benefiting the dole-drums of their political heads, prefer to be uncritical towards the manipulative approach of their benefactors, thus floating on smooth waters of non-lasting material comforts. It is not the ignorance of the voters as such; rather it is their deep seated desire or greed for the plenty that prevents their critical voice against the strong men and women who appropriate the country as their kingdom. Life goes on in our country and the strong ones perpetually thrive!

Many so called democracies in the world who profess Abraham Lincoln's philosophy, 'government of the people, by the people and with the people,' are now a government "without people", one dare say. Without doubt it applies to our democracy as it appears today. Autocratic, dictatorial regimes do not require human people; they require only the sweat and pain, misery and distress of the sufferer, to rule with iron fist by disregarding human rights. They enforce laws to suit their egoist desires and call it 'democracy.' India is no better. Our honorable Prime Minister has all the Hindi vocabulary in order to swallow the widows and orphans and silence their existential cry. Majestic oratorical proclamations are declaimed before the massive crowds, but absolutely hollow in content other than the dramatic poetry and mesmerising gestures used to attract spectators at a magic show. But, that's what politics has come to be and that's how democracy is easily thwarted or twisted towards one's own benefits at the cost of bare human lives, in our country or elsewhere.

On the outset, the impression one gets is that our prime leader of the country is so passionately dedicated and is in love with the 'Bharat Matha.' Perhaps, he is! On the other hand, the other side of the coin clearly indicates his deeper commitment to an ideology which promotes one's own Party. This dedication has one goal, namely, gaining control over the nation, by making it one nation, one civil code, one language, one election, with the strategy of dividing people through hate speeches and hurting the sentiments of the ordinary human lot. Well, ours is truly a "democracy of diversions," and not a democracy of focused intent and conscientious praxis. More and more democratic principles enshrined in the Constitutions are torn apart and dispersion of minds with the distortion of facts is surfacing on the face of our nation's life. Fear and uncertainty are expressed in civic conversation everywhere. People share their anxieties in private space and yet remain suspicious of each other of divulging the conversation to political watch-dogs. There might be inquisitors who patiently and enthusiastically pay attention to voices as interested ones, but one is not sure if that would lead to prison arrest.

Democracy of diversions is meant here as a negative process. These are diversions that hinder rightly meant democratic process which takes place by shifting attention from action. Personal attacks and promoting non-essential issues through inflammatory speeches are a strategy here for which the instrument of social media is utilised. In this way unrelated and insignificant issues are put forth. It can also be a subtle way of avoiding accountability. The Manipur crisis is a good example of avoiding accountability. It implies deflecting attention from that which urgently needs a solution. Manipulating public opinion by highlighting emotionally charged issues is another way which sways people and distracts them from the reality of their life which needs attention. Bringing to the public highly divisive issues in order to create a sense of being right all the time in the face of the opposition is a kind of diversion used by political stunts. Media, because it requires more coverage, unfortunately falls into the hands of politicians which further generate controversy on issues of no importance. In the democracy of diversions systemic problems are avoided by politicians for securing immediate benefits.

The lost-ness of direction towards which our country must move forward among the nations of the world is obvious in the aimless diversions of the Indian democracy today. Ground level realities of people, in particular, the Manipur saga which is still fresh on the face of our country, is conspicuously set aside; instead platitudes about scientific and technological developments in the country are exalted to the skies from the roof tops. Human issues are buried under the carpet by uttering derogative and sarcastic statements about the dominant opposition in the parliament, calling it "dynastic politics" by our Prime Minister, which is not of good taste. Most of all this was done on an honourable day such as the Independence Day of our nation. What's wrong with dynastic politics if it serves the nation? Emperor Ashoka mightily ruled his kingdom. But recall his example of humility and kindness when he decided never to war again, having witnessed before his very eyes the bodies of thousands of soldiers lying all around after a war he waged against his enemy! Were there no benevolent dynasts in human history? Are we sure that the incumbent government of our country at the centre is not "dynastic" in its attitude and action? Perhaps it was not proper for our Prime Minister to hit out against his opponents standing under the national flag on August 15 this year. That dignified place is not meant for blaring out on corruption, dynasty politics and appeasement politics of those who challenge the government. It could have been during a debate in the Parliament, not under the flag.

"India is not a territory, history and culture. It is the voice of every person living in India. My Mother India is not just a piece of land; it is not even a bunch of impressions. It is the voice of every Indian," stated Rahul Gandhi in his Independent speech this August. What does that voice mean? It is not pageantry or slogans. It is the cry of every human person in need. It is very true that India is not mere territory with a boundary but the human voice, human distress, human poverty, human anxiety, also human joy and human hope.

Democracy requires diverse opinions and strategies to generate humanity. However, diversions projected and executed only serve the dishonest politician, marring democracy as a harmonious music created by numerous notes! ■



A Zen Mindset Builds Relational Connections

A FRANCIS OFM

Have you ever thought substantially about a failed relationship, a connection, or a conversation you've had with someone - a significant other, a friend, a colleague, your boss or even a stranger? With the overwhelming rise of the attention deficit disorder (ADD) among children and men, I am certain, that we have had many such experiences of going into bouts of rumination as to what went wrong, and why we couldn't strike a friendly relational cord with those folks.

If you are given a second chance to make up for those failed relationships, what do you consider that would help you the most to reconnect, re-establish or sustain an enduring conversation?

A Zen Mindset

Scholars suggest that cultivating a 'Zen mindset' can assist us with the skills required to genuinely connect, understand, appreciate, and accept others and their points of view. The 'Zen mind' also known as the

'beginner's mind' can be described as a mindset that teaches us to practice seeing everything with wonder and curiosity. Just like a child, having the disposition of a beginner we see everything with an open mind and a fresh set of eyes. Eschewing all preconceived ideas, assumptions, and expectations, we approach everything with a mind that is empty, and not constrained by any distraction.

With a Zen mindset, we stay present to the moment, dropping our desire to control. As James Clear, the author of the book, *Atomic Habits* points out, that we give up our desire to add value to other people around us. In adding value to others, we could view others as less capable of taking care themselves. So, we bombard them with many "You should try this" suggestions, which they really don't need.

A Zen mind enables us to completely shut up and listen to the other, with calm and clear

A Zen mind transforms us from our intellectual hubris to intellectual humility.

self-awareness. In the process of listening, our subjective emotions, thoughts, and perspectives do visit us from time to time. We don't try to suppress them, but we acknowledge and accept them as part of human life, 'I know you are there. You deserve my attention.' The suppression could only give way to the regeneration of these emotionally charged materials at an undesired time in the later phase of development, letting them find new expressions through heightened negativity toward the self, and pushing the self to engage in compulsive addictive behaviours.

A Zen mind transforms us from our intellectual hubris to intellectual humility. It is my sense of the intellectual hubris that makes me feel that I should have the last word in every conversation. A Zen mind with intellectual humility, as Clear suggests, would be open to explore and appreciate the opinions of others. And my stance remains, metaphorically as an empty cup, willing to receive, "Tell me more about it."

With the Zen mindset we become more compassionate, and kind to others. The empty and open mind allows us to enter into another's story. Walking with them in tandem, we 'feel for' them (sympathy), and more of it in time will make us to "feel with" (empathy) them in their joys and sorrows.

Experiencing gratitude, and feeling grateful for everything is the precious gift a Zen mindset provides to the person. Nothing is taken for granted. Everything is considered to be a gift, deeply respected and appreciated.

In the early 1970s, Shenyryu Suzuki popularised the Japanese concept of, 'shoshin' which meant the beginner's mind or the Zen mind. The late Zen master wrote in his book titled, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, "In beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's, there are few."

The Expert Mindset

The 'expert mind,' that is like a cup that is full, is antithetical to the beginner's mind. The pitfall for the expert mind is, that it could be tainted with overconfidence and self-centeredness, leading a person to believe that only he/she has the right understanding of a given situation, and the right answer to the situation. Anything different from their position could be wrong! With this narrow point of view, the expert mind could block the person from seeking new and better solution to the given problem, says Maggie Woll, author and researcher.

Expert mind tends to cherry-pick, says Clear, pointing to their effort to stay put in their preconceived knowledge. He adds that the expert mind merely steamrolls through new information and learning, and instead of accepting all of it, they just accept the parts that validates what they already holds.

Cultivating a Zen mind requires constant practice and effort. No one achieves a Zen mind overnight. It takes a lot of personal discipline of patience and the let go of one's ego. We let go of your preferred ways of thinking; the rational and emotional go-to comfort zones, the intellectual securities of preconceived ideas, and our upheld values, and belief systems. In any given situation, or circumstance, a Zen mindset never feels, "I have been here, and I have got it all." No, you haven't been here, it is a new day and it is a new occurrence, a new experience and a new reality. We simply allow ourselves to stay in the present moment and approach everything from a place of wonder and curiosity.

Mindfulness meditation is the gateway to achieving a Zen mindset. In mindfulness mediation we clear our mind, space things out. We stay attuned to our inner being in the here and now. We observe our monkey mind that keeps moving from one thought to the other, one idea to the other. In our non-judgmental and non-reactive observation, neither getting into ignoring nor rejecting the moves of the mind, we calm it, clear the distractions, and empty it to accept new perspectives for life. We respond mindfully, rather than engage in impulsive reaction, or helpless cognitive reflexes. ■

Our Earthly Nest

KM GEORGE

The old coconut tree is dying. It might collapse in a few months time. Every morning as I pass by the tree on my solitary walk, I see two parrots sitting or hovering over it. Soon it was clear that the birds had made a nest in the hollow inside the decaying tree. Obviously the she-bird was laying eggs in their tree-home's dark cavity.

The birds probably sensed the end of the tree from the rotting stuff within which they had meticulously prepared a soft bed out of twigs, leaves and feathers for their future chicks. It takes only 3 to 4 week for the eggs to hatch and for the fledglings to fly away depending on the species.

Unlike us humans the birds have no long term investment in the tree, as they probably know by instinct that their support system, namely the degenerating tree would soon collapse. The biosphere is the immediate support system on our little planet earth, our home. We know very well it is dying due to relentless human activity, mistreatment and exploitation. Yet unlike the birds that make their nests just for birthing and upbringing of their young ones, we build cities and skyscrapers, roads and vehicles, fighter jets and cruise missiles. Ecologists point out that the "anthropogenic mass" or the sum total of all human civilisational construction now begins to outweigh the biomass, the weight of all living organisms including the human race, trees and animals. This is alarming as it disrupts the ecological balance of mother earth. Yet we continue to haul cement, plastic and asphalt over our mother's body that groans

in mortal pain. Even otherwise, they say it is not unlikely that some passing asteroids strike the earth with a fatal blow to life. The birds know the fragility of their tree- homes by instinct while we know for sure the death of our planet home through our own scientific means. Still we raze down forests and fill up wetlands to build resorts and concrete jungles. In the final count it turns out to be absolutely counter productive to life and happiness that we want to promote. Do we need all these civilisational constructs to breed and bring up the new generation of the human race in an environment of human dignity, freedom, joy, compassion, solidarity and mutual love? ■

29 November

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

TOM JOHN

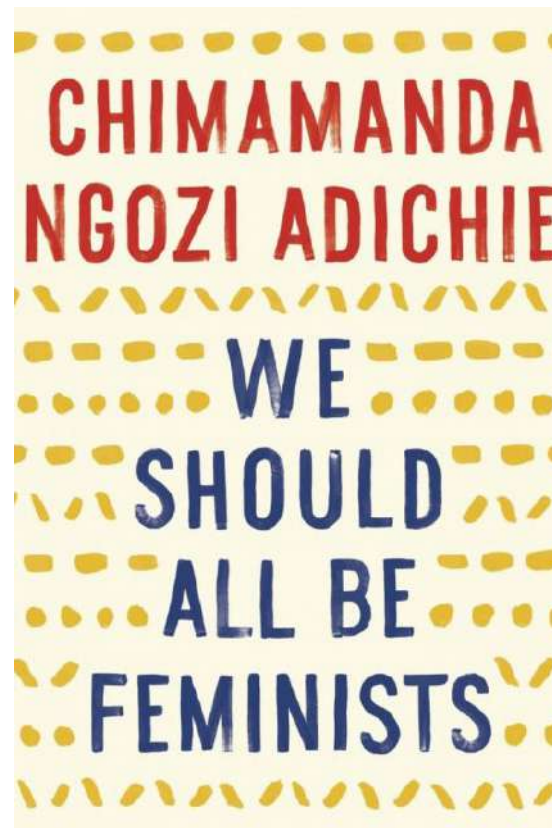
The International Day of Solidarity traditionally provides an opportunity for the international community to focus its attention on the fact that the question of Palestine remains unresolved and that the Palestinian people have yet to attain their inalienable rights as defined by the General Assembly, namely, the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right to return to their homes and property.

In 1947, the General Assembly's resolution was to establish in Palestine a "Jewish State" and an "Arab State", with Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime. Of the two States to be created under this resolution, only one, Israel, has so far come into being. The Palestinian people, who now number more than eight million, live primarily in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967. ■



Why Adichie Thinks We Should All Be Feminists

A PRAVALLIKA MANJU



Written by Nigerian author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists* is a crisp yet engaging adaptation of her TEDx Talks with the same title. As the name suggests, the book makes a compelling argument for why feminism can benefit everybody.

It is sprinkled with stories of growing up in Nigeria and her encounters with sexism. She recalls the first time she was ever called a feminist as a young girl and notes that though this remark came from a close friend, it was not a compliment. She describes how feminism is looked down upon and delves into the various etiquette society prescribes to women. Time and again she is told that feminism is un-African and that she shouldn't buy into the West's influence; that being feminist means you hate men; that it will destroy your marriage or somehow make you unfit for it. The word comes with baggage and Adichie does a great job outlining this.

When she was only nine, Adichie is told in class that the person who scores the highest on a test will be made class monitor. Filled with ambition, she works hard and tops her class. But to her dismay, her teacher tells her that only a boy can be the class monitor (duh!). From the very beginning, we are taught that only men get positions of power. This translates into the glass ceiling that prevents women from holding high-level management roles in corporations. It is also reinforced over the years that women cannot be too ambitious, as it will

threaten the men around them. Women are meant to be warm, motherly and homely.

The author speaks of a woman she knew who sold her house just so she doesn't intimidate the man she would marry. Though reading this may infuriate us, it doesn't take long to start thinking of similar instances from our own lives. And that shows us the finesse with which Adichie brings to the surface how so many normalised practices are rooted in patriarchy.

The story of how the valet at a restaurant thanked her male friend after she paid him because they assumed that any money she had came from a man in her life struck a chord with me. It took me back to all the times a waiter at the restaurant would only acknowledge my partner although I was the one communicating with them. It may not seem like a big deal until you begin to realise the implications of such conversations. Men make the decisions and the money; men are superior.

But Adichie doesn't stop at mentioning how feminism can improve the lives of women. She

draws attention to how if two teens go on a date, though both have the same amount of money, the boy is expected to pay. Men are constantly expected to prove their masculinity.

I could go on and on mentioning anecdotes from the book, but that would be redundant. The bottom line is that the author does a wonderful job making her point while being descriptive yet concise.

She takes you on a journey to understand what it is like to be a woman through her lens. Her arguments make a mark on readers as she not only discusses problems but also presents solutions. Very matter-of-factly she states that just as we are desensitised to misogynistic practices due to normalisation, we can overcome it by embracing and normalising feminism. She acknowledges that unlearning is not easy but also leaves the readers with food for thought.

After all, a feminist, as Adichie learnt at a young age, is a person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes. And in her own words, 'All of us, women and men, must do better.' ■



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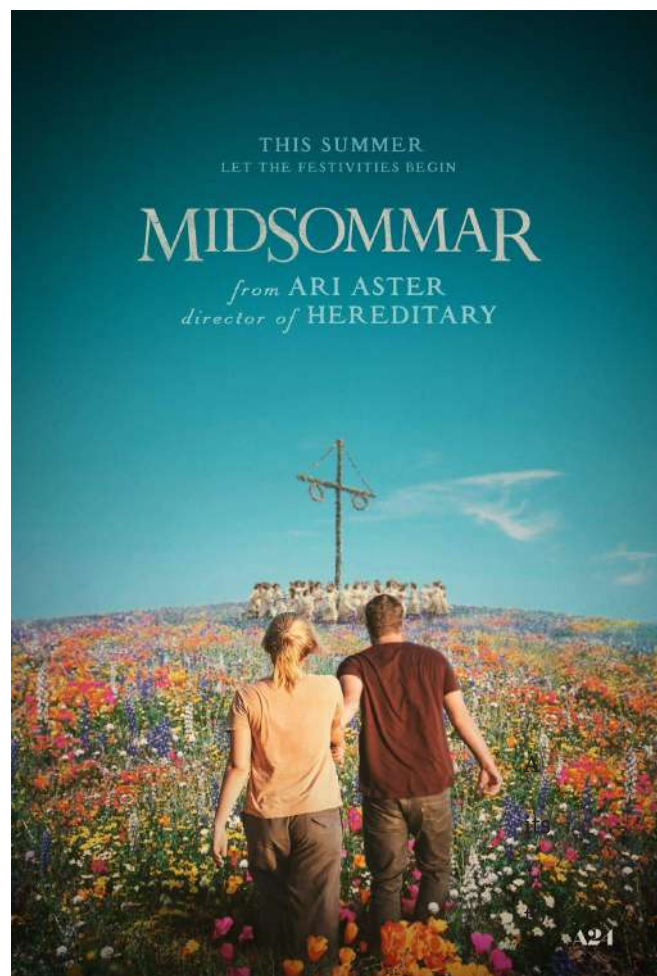
Midsommar Rewriting Horror

ROMIL UDAYAKUMAR TNV

Midsommar is one of those cinematic experiences that has managed to imprint its story in my mind forever, I presume. roller coaster of dark, shadowy emotions! The movie holds you down with narrative visual style, keeping you on the edge of your seat with its absolutely flawless writing. The characters have a lot offer, and each of them takes you through their own subjective realities that dwindle down on murder, sex, and occult practices, practices that leave you feeling gore, fear, and disgust.

In the horror-drama film *Midsommar*, directed by Ari Aster, the film sets the stage with a somber and emotionally charged atmosphere. The story begins with a deeply unsettling and tragic event. The audience is introduced to the main character, Dani, who is grappling with immense grief and trauma after her sister Terri kills their parents and herself. This dark and tragic backdrop creates a mood of sorrow and vulnerability, setting the emotional tone for what's to come. Dani's strained relationship with her boyfriend, Christian, further adds to the tension. It's revealed that Christian had been planning a trip to Sweden with his friends without discussing it with Dani. This revelation, combined with her emotional turmoil, adds to the sense of isolation and neglect she feels. As the group prepares for the trip, there's a palpable unease in the air. The audience senses the disconnect between Dani and Christian, and the pending journey to Sweden becomes a symbol of their strained relationship. The movie is long because it's not afraid to take its time explaining the background of the characters (the group of friends and particularly the young woman on whom it focuses). So, from the start, the audience will feel that this will be a different experience from most horror films. But the movie really takes off once they arrive in Sweden.

The emotional fragility of the characters is a prominent element in this part of the film, serving as a backdrop for the disturbing events that will unfold in Sweden. Upon arrival at the commune, the group is introduced to Simon and Connie, a British couple also invited to the



The cinematography for Midsommar is one of the best due to its use of lighting and the avoidance of shying away from gore to hide its imperfections; instead, the movie explores artistic gore in visible light, adding new meaning to horror.

festival. They are offered psychedelic mushrooms, leading to a traumatic experience for Dani, who hallucinates about her family's death. The group witnesses disturbing rituals, including an ättestupa ceremony where elderly members commit suicide. The movie is filled with abnormal references and cultural practices that the cult partakes in, and as each of them goes by, a character moves closer to death.

These practices leave the visitors in complete disgust, with most of them screaming in disgust and fear. The story follows each of the characters impulsivity toward sin rather than the human urge to pursue pleasure. As the story progresses, it gets deeper into an absolute abstract void of gore ideas that seem never-ending towards the conclusion of the film. The first half would seem slow and tiring to get through, but there are nuances of uneasiness and awkwardness amongst the characters that have been brilliantly communicated through acting, camera angles, and the strong music that it uses. The predictability in the first half of the cinema completely switches to oblivious predispositions in the second half.

There are multiple notable nuances in this horror movie, one of which is the absence of jump scares. There were no over-the-top screen-filling moments with vague jump scares, which leaves the film's feelings entirely to its genius storytelling, and it does tickle your dread.

The art direction of the movie had this seraphic tinge to it, making everything on screen seem extremely peaceful, while all of the situation's unraveling is opposite to the visual trajectory of the film. All the characters in the film slowly blend into the physical attire of the cult that they've walked into.

Symbolising their general connectedness and the bizarre realities that the cult lives through The architectural showcase was also an integral part of

setting the tone of the movie. While every building and structure was artsy, they had some sort of eeriness connected to them, which eventually amalgamated into reflecting uneasiness and fear in the minds of the audience.

The music of the film abundantly added to the tone that it had set with the use of violins and the cacophony of violins that reflected on the grief, torment, and emotional misery that the characters experience. The music purely elevates the brilliance of the visuals and emotions that the characters reflect upon. The story might get a bit too weird because of the extreme idea that it stands upon, but as it explores a completely different angle to horror, it can be extremely enjoyable to patient cinema viewers. The cinematography of the film is one of the best due to its use of lighting and the avoidance of shying away from gore to hide its imperfections; instead, the movie explores artistic gore in visible light, adding new meaning to horror. All of its occult acts that leave the audience in disgust were shot in perfect lighting; the element of fear was not added through the absence of light but the genius use of brilliant actors, music, and visuals.

This movie does not set itself by the standards of mainstream horror movies; it explores areas of visual storytelling that have been left untouched. It takes time, with all of its characters unraveling slowly through time. This cinema is slow, but it grips your emotions in ways you haven't fathomed. ■



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Mist

Dr MN PARASURAMAN

Mr Laitphang Kshoo, my neighbour in Tura (Garo Hills, western Meghalaya), who was Assistant Professor of Botany at the government college there, once shared a childhood and adolescent memory with me.

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the eastern part of Meghalaya are among the most humid places on earth. The two rainiest places on earth, Mawsynram and Cherrapunji, are located in the Khasi Hills.

Laitphang went to the Ramakrishna Mission boarding school at Cherrapunji. He told me that in winters, a mist would sometimes enter the classroom through the open door and windows and within seconds, it would envelop everything and everyone so thickly that the back of his classmate sitting on the bench in front of him, less than a foot away, would become invisible! The teacher would become a voice coming through the mist from the end of the classroom that the students would be facing!

When you spend three enjoyable days with your undergraduate sons and then they go back to their respective staying places because their classes resume tomorrow, the reality of loneliness is initially a foreboding. You try determinedly to stave it off. You get into your shirt and pants, take a walk, have a coffee at a roadside restaurant, buy a kebab for dinner from a takeaway, get into a convenience store and pick up a bottle of sugar free Coke and a box of *besan laddoos* for a dear friend who is visiting you (and Thiruvananthapuram) on leave after several months. Then you walk back to the hotel and settle your bill. Once you open your room and the lights come on as you insert the smart key card into its slot, the Cherrapunji experience suddenly hits you. By the time you are done with your quick visit to the washroom the mist is everywhere. It is the pain of loneliness and separation from the ones you love most. The blessings and distractions around you become totally obscured and invisible, like Laitphang's classmate's back. The irreverent voices of your sons, their boisterous bickering, the giveaways of the love they have for you; these constitute the voice of the teacher. The love is there but your craving for the plain sight of it must wait.

It will take a few days for the mist to clear... ■



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