

together

national family magazine



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Preparation for 2024

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Sexual Violence and Criminal Justice

LIYA THOMAS

together

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

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

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

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

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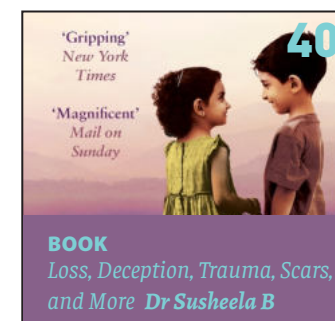
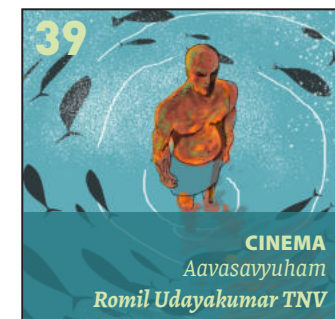
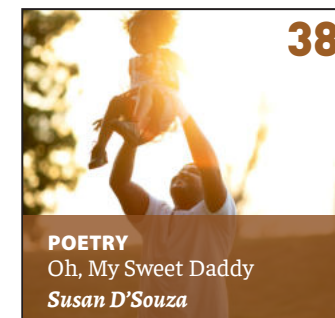
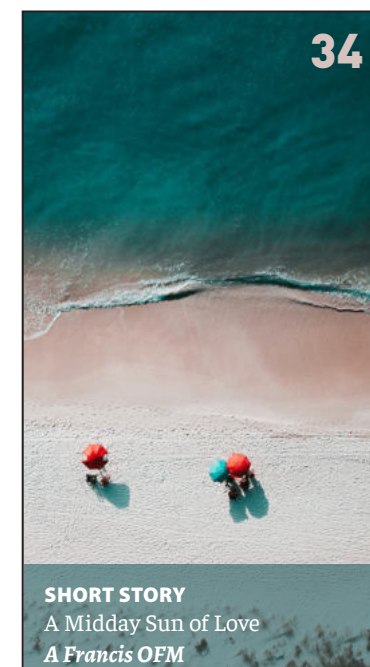
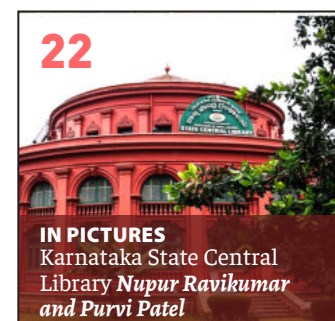
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Elections Make Democracy Distinct

Nothing kills a democracy like apoliticism of its people.

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

We are entering the election year. We are entering the most vulnerable phase of our democracy. The most exposed and susceptible point of a democracy is during its elections. It is the time where money and power do their dirtiest jobs. It is the time when people, even MLAs and MPs are not spared, are bought and sold like slaves; and people allow themselves to be sold and bought like pigeons in the market. A country or an organisation becomes vulnerable during elections because it could become an exercise of demonstration of mindless tyranny of the majority.

In Democracy Power Is a Fundamental Right

There are many forms of governments, but only in modern democracy people hold power as a fundamental right. In every other form of government the ruled are at the mercy of the rulers. Monarchies are absolute; a republic is authoritarian with power in the hands of a few; in oligarchy power is held by a small group of powerful and

wealthy people, often they are hidden from the people; a dictator has no limits to his power; he rules through force and fraud; in theocracy force and fraud are disguised and veiled in the holy name of god.

People devoid of ordinary powers make up a system that is bound to fail. Power gives people voice; and it is essential for a free and just society. Masses with power hold leaders accountable; if the leaders do not perform well, they can be voted out of office. When people have a say in who governs them, they are less likely to resort to violence to express their dissatisfaction. They encourage civic engagement and participation in the political process. Democratic elections help to promote diversity and tolerance in a country. People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people, says, Alan Moore.

Free and Fair Elections

Elections are the quintessential possibility of a democracy. Elections are opportunities to clean up. Every five years we have an opportunity to clean up the filth. That is why the ruling party or leaders fear elections. Erdogan of Turkey has changed the constitution to expand his powers, and has cracked down on dissent. Xi Jinping of China has abolished term limits for the president. This has led to concerns that Xi may be planning to rule China for life. Vladimir Putin of Russia has changed the constitution twice to allow him to stay in power longer. Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus has been accused of rigging elections and suppressing dissent. He has refused to step down. The list could go on.

Thank God India still has leaders who respect the verdict of the elections. Though most institutions of the country that ensure free and fair elections, like the election commission, judiciary, media, etc. are already tampered with. In a democracy with elections in place people still have the power to clean up the filth. For India, General Elections 2024 is Swachh Bharat 2024.

Developing Political Consciousness

Democracies decay when its people become apolitical and naively get attracted to strong leaders than democratic leaders. Voting is to make sure that everyone is included and has equal rights. Democracy is not rule by strength, and not even by mere numbers, but by a system where everyone is included; and everyone has the possibility to be heard and has the capacity to live their lives.

Apoliticism is apathy or antipathy towards all political affairs and affiliations. They have no interest and remain uninvolved at the face of even the severest matters of concern. Some even have an aversion to politics or political affairs; and parade it as a spiritual value. Both Political leaders as well as the voters can go apolitical. Political party leaders become apolitical when they move along with large corporations, to achieve their profit goals; that reduces a democracy to commerce or business model in which groups, parties and even companies invest to make profit. General public becomes apolitical when their voting is based on non-critical factors that do not support the wellbeing of all peoples: such as the distribution of resources or status. Perhaps the success of Indian erred democracy is that it managed to make a large majority of Indians apolitical. When people become apolitical, democracy gets reduced to just majoritarianism. What does not concern the majority will not concern the nation and the government.

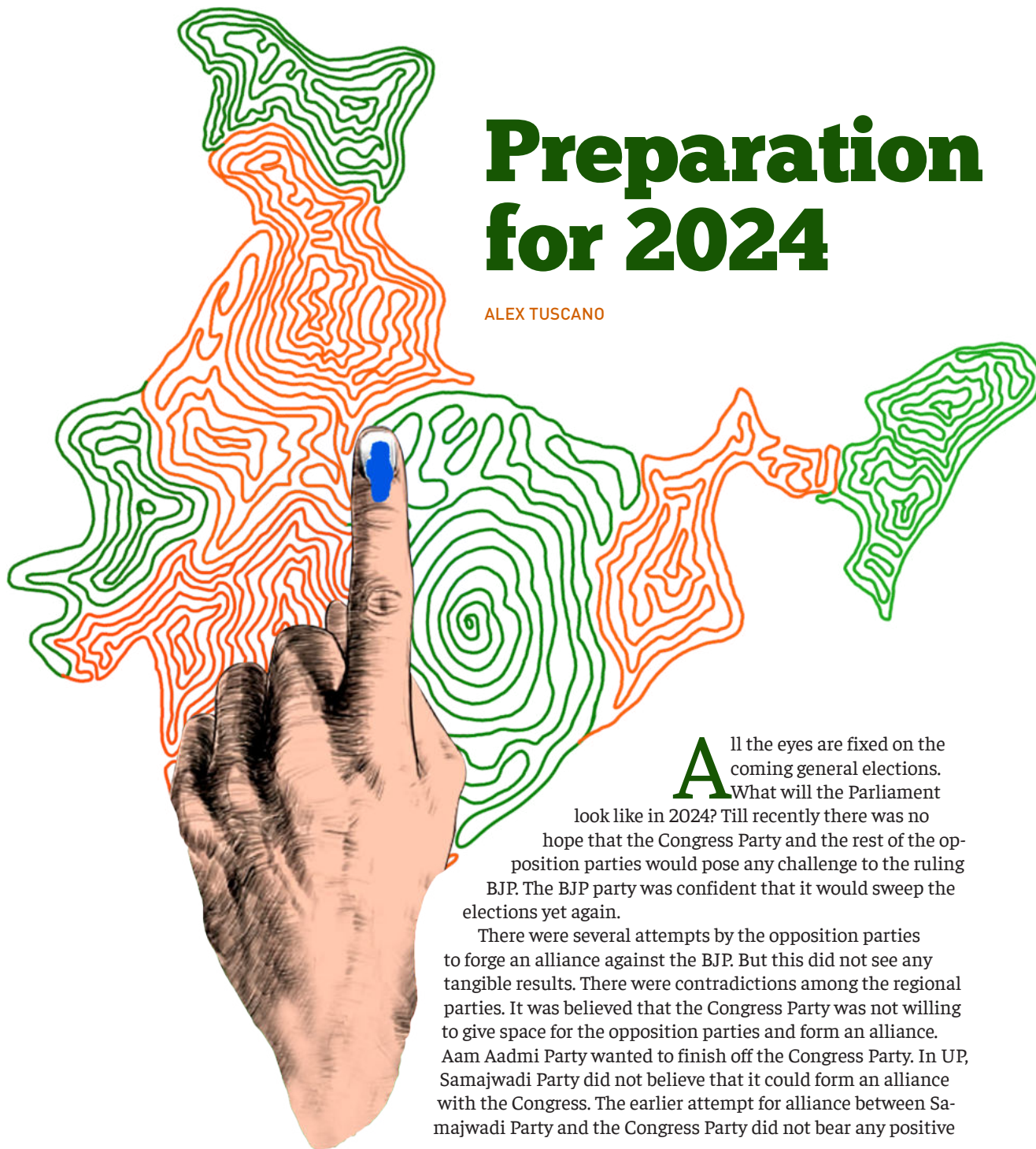
People Will Reject Violence

Party politics has become an unethical battlefield, thriving on intolerance, corruption, and violence. None of them will stand the test of time in an advanced, civilised society.

Politicians must give up intolerance and violence; embrace understanding, empathy, and kindness. People must reject those politicians who refuse to promote peace and tolerance. When someone's path to the top is marked with cruelty, they have failed the first test of an advanced society, said J B Pritzker, an American philanthropist and 43rd governor of Illinois. When we see someone who does not look like us, sound like us, act like us, love like us, or live like us, the first thought that crosses our mind is rooted in fear or judgement, or both. That is part of evolution. We survived as a species by being suspicious of things that we are not familiar with. In order to be kind we have to shut down that animal instinct and force our brain to travel a different path. Empathy and compassion are evolved states of being. They require the mental capacity to step past our most primal forces. Empathy and kindness too are political.

Preparation for 2024

ALEX TUSCANO



All the eyes are fixed on the coming general elections. What will the Parliament look like in 2024? Till recently there was no hope that the Congress Party and the rest of the opposition parties would pose any challenge to the ruling BJP. The BJP party was confident that it would sweep the elections yet again.

There were several attempts by the opposition parties to forge an alliance against the BJP. But this did not see any tangible results. There were contradictions among the regional parties. It was believed that the Congress Party was not willing to give space for the opposition parties and form an alliance. Aam Aadmi Party wanted to finish off the Congress Party. In UP, Samajwadi Party did not believe that it could form an alliance with the Congress. The earlier attempt for alliance between Samajwadi Party and the Congress Party did not bear any positive

results. In West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress Party did not want to have any understanding with the Congress Party. Though the Trinamool Party was an offshoot of the Congress party; probably because it was an offshoot of the Congress party, they were at war with each other. This animosity had heightened when Congress Party formed an alliance with CPM to fight during the last Assembly Election in West Bengal.

During the last assembly elections in Bihar, JDU was in alliance with the BJP. They did not believe that they could do any business with the Congress party. Congress Party is also in alliance with RJD which had opposed JDU. But this alliance did not help the Congress party to improve its position in Bihar. The Congress Party had demanded a big share of seats, which they could not win in the end. According to some this alliance led to a kind of weakening of RJD Party. In Telangana, Telangana Rashtra Samity (TRS) was determined not to have any understanding with the Congress Party.

Since the Congress Party has a national Presence with the biggest vote share, no formidable alliance would be formed against the BJP by ignoring the Congress Party. Despite this, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party, and TRS were uncompromising in their opposition to the congress party.

The Emergence of INDIA

Today we have seen the emergence of the 'Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA).' The Chief Minister of Bihar had broken his alliance with the BJP because he realised that the BJP was planning to destroy JDU and become a single largest party in Bihar. Nitish Kumar once again came out of alliance with BJP and formed an alliance with RJD and remained the Chief Minister. It was a magnanimous gesture on the part of RJD to agree to this alliance with Nithish Kumar and give him the chief ministership and form the government. I say it was a magnanimous gesture on the part of RJD because RJD had experienced a betrayal from JDS; RJD had bigger number of MLAs and further it did not insist on leading the alliance.

Nithish Kumar slowly develops a conviction that opposition should come together and defeat the BJP in 2024. He went out of his way to meet Mamata Banerjee, Sharad Pawar, Chandrasekar Rao (TRS) and Arvind Kejriwal (Aam Aadmi Party) who

responded positively to the suggestion of Nithish Kumar. It is very likely that Nithish Kumar also saw a possibility of becoming a prime minister if the opposition alliance gains power at the centre.

The Revival of Congress

The Congress Party came to the lime light and showed itself to be a powerful force, probably more powerful than the rest of the opposition parties put together. Rahul Gandhi ventured into a Padayatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir. His objective was to bring unity and solidarity among the citizens of the country. He wanted to oppose the polarizing and divisive politics of BJP. He called this Yatra Bharat Jodo Yatra. There had been some apprehensions by other political parties about the ability of Rahul Gandhi to complete this ambitious yatra. But Rahul Gandhi proved everybody wrong. When he started his yatra from Kanyakumari, DMK and the civil society in Tamil Nadu came in big numbers and supported his yatra and walked with him. In Kerala too, he got a very warm welcome everywhere. Wherever he went people welcomed him and he was able to meet youth, women, and farmers and had conversation with them. All the people from different walks of life showed great appreciation for the Yatra. They spoke to him about their disillusion with the present BJP government, about the price rise, unemployment. Rahul Gandhi met women who not only shared their concerns with him but also assured their support. The people showed such a great interest in what Rahul had to say they stood in pouring rain and listened to him till the end of his speech. Again, in Kashmir he stood in the heavy snowfall and spoke to the people of Kashmir. Congress party does now have a strong following in Kashmir. Rahul Gandhi achieved a great success in his Bharat Jodo Yatra, reaching out to the people and learning from them.

Rahul Gandhi 2.0

The nation saw, a different Rahul Gandhi throughout his journey to Kashmir in Bharat Jodo Yatra. He stood out the tallest leader of the congress party. The BJP had spent huge amount of money to destroy his image and had succeeded in making the general public to believe that Rahul Gandhi was immature, impulsive, and eccentric person, not fit for any political role. They nicknamed him 'Pappu'.



Rahul Gandhi proved them wrong. He destroyed the image that BJP had created of him in the minds of the nation. In all his meetings with the people, in his press conferences, and in his speeches, he expressed a great concern for the Nafrat that BJP had spread in the country. He promise that he would like to build ‘*Nafrat Ki Bazar Me Mohabbat Ki Dukan*,’ meaning, a ‘shop of love in the market of hate’. This iconic slogan appealed to the large population of the country.

Another very important development that happened in the life of Rahul Gandhi was his disqualification from the Parliament and dismissal from his house. In the budget session of the Parliament, Rahul Gandhi gave a spirited speech and raised the number of issues and made the BJP Government, and Modi in particular, accountable. One of the most important issues was Modi’s relationship with Adani. Why did Modi take Adani with him to his foreign tours? He also questioned the source of ₹2,000 crores which Adani had

► In the 2019 election Rahul Gandhi had given a speech in Kolar where he expressed his surprise to several people who had looted the country seem to have common surname Modi: Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi and now Narendra Modi.

invested in his shell companies. These questions frightened Modi and wanted to find a way to shut the mouth of Rahul Gandhi.

In the 2019 election Rahul Gandhi had given a speech in Kolar where he expressed his surprise to several people who had looted the country seem to have common surname Modi: Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi and now Narendra Modi. An insignificant MLA in Gujarat Assembly, Purnesh Modi filed a defamation case in Surat court against Rahul. After getting frustrated with nothing coming from this case, he went to the high court in Gujarat and brought a stay on the case. But when Narendra Modi was cornered by Rahul Gandhi Purnesh Modi was asked to revive that case immediately. P Modi went to the High Court and opened up the case again. It was with lightning speed, the trial court in Surat gave two years (maximum) punishment for Rahul Gandhi, which would eventually make him lose his Parliament membership. As soon as the verdict reached Delhi (within a

matter of few hours), Rahul Gandhi’s membership to the Parliament was cancelled and he was asked to vacate the house he lived in. Rahul Gandhi fought for stay on the conviction and went right up to the Gujarat High Court. Gujarat judiciary refused to give him any relief. It was like Gujarat mafia trying to corner and teach a lesson to Rahul Gandhi whereby he would be jailed for two years. His membership to be parliament would be cancelled and he would not be able to contest elections for another six years. The case was very simple. Purnesh Modi wasn’t really a Modi. He had changed his name into Modi. Secondly Modi is not a generic name for a backward caste. Hence insulting the backward caste by Rahul Gandhi did not happen. Lalit Modi & Nirav Modi, the names he had mentioned in his speech were not the people belonging to backward class. However, Rahul Gandhi did not attend the parliament and he vacated the house graciously and with equal lightning speed. Rahul Gandhi showed tremendous amount of courage and statesmanship. He was not deterred by the consequences of the action of Gujarat mafia. He was getting ready to go to jail. The manner in which he responded to these developments gave Rahul Gandhi tremendous sympathy from the entire country. The Supreme Court finally gave him the relief and he was reinstated in the parliament. This proved that Rahul Gandhi is a politician with outstanding qualities.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra made the other regional opposition parties realise the extend of support Rahul personally and the Congress Party in general received from the citizens of the country. Those who were not willing to do any business with the Congress party realised that the Congress Party should lead the opposition alliance. Rahul Gandhi and the Congress Party did not claim Prime Minister Ship for the party. The newly elected Congress President, with his outstanding leadership, also assured the nation that congress Party was not in the race for the Prime Minister ship of the country.

Congress party is recognised as a leader of the alliance because the spectacular victory in Karnataka election. Karnataka victory was a game changer in Indian politics. It changed the entire scenario of politics in the country. It gave new hope for the

opposition that together they could defeat the BJP and they are willing to repose their faith in the leadership of the Congress party.

The INDIA alliance had shown its strength during the monsoon session. Even the Aam Aadmi Party had been very cooperative and showed faith in Rahul Gandhi. There will be another meeting in Mumbai where the INDIA alliance will meet and trash out seats sharing issues and there is a possibility that the INDIA alliance will put up a spectacular show and defeat the NDA alliance.

One should say that the puzzle of the united opposition has fallen in its place. There is no doubt in the minds of anybody that Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance will pose a serious challenge for the BJP. It is an alliance of 28 parties. In this respect we can safely conclude the preparation of the opposition parties for the 2024 parliament election in the right direction.

BJP and the General Election 2024

The BJP is not complacent about their winning possibility. There is a palpable fear in Narendra Modi and the BJP party. Modi did not lose any time in forming a new NDA with 36 parties. The new NDA consist of parties who had deserted NDA, or found no place in NDA. Most of them have no MLAs or MPs in the present state and central government.

The body language of the INDIA alliance is very different from the NDA alliance. Indian alliance shows far more respect for their partners and their comradeship. What is noteworthy is there was jostling for the prominent seats on the days when NDA leaders met in Delhi. The NDA alliance projected Modi to be the god who will guarantee a victory to NDA. While all the other people stood at a distance, Modi alone stood in the centre with a big garland for the photo.

The one very spectacular aspect of NDA preparation for 2024 election is seen in the attempt of the BJP Party to dilute the position of the election commission. BJP in general and Modi in particular is indeed very frightened of the defeat that they see in the air during the fag end of the monsoon session. BJP has introduced a new bill, which will alter the committee that will choose and appoint the election commission. The test of democracy

Opposition parties had to call no-confidence motion to force Modi to come to the Parliament. And in spite of his coming to the Parliament in his two-hour long reply speech, he did not come to the point of Manipur violence.

lies in the neutrality of the election commission. This means that if we want the neutral election commission, then the committee that appoints the election commission should be constituted by the Prime Minister, the leader of the Opposition, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The Chief justice of the Supreme Court has shown himself to be a fearless man with a strong backbone in his pronouncement of several judgements. He has come out without fear or favour. He being on the committee to appoint election commission would ring dangerous bells for the BJP.

Therefore, BJP has introduced a Bill in the Rajya Shabha to reconstitute the committee that would appoint the election commission. The bill aims at removing the Supreme Court Chief Justice from the committee and instead include a minister of the Parliament of Modi Government. If this bill is passed, then effectively, BJP will have a complete control on making an appointment of the CEC and election commission. This also means BJP will ensure that the opposition alliance will be handicapped and probably be defeated through the role of the Chief Election Commission. In other word, there will be no fair and free General Elections in 2024.

The Manipur Experiment

Manipur was one of the latest laboratory experiments for the BJP government to prepare for the 2024 election. The plot was very simple. It is one of the smallest states in India. The majority community living in this state is Meitei living in the valleys. Nagas and Kukis are in minority, but not so small in numbers. Majority of them are Christians. It has been proven beyond doubt that BJP use its chief Minister and its RSS army to spread fear among the minority community of the Kukis and Nagas. They declared them as people who have migrated from Myanmar. They created doubts in the minds of the Meitei group that these Kukis and Nagas have occupied the most advantageous

hilltops. They are declared as adivasis and they hold the best properties on the hilltop. Therefore, it was essential that these people should be driven out. This false propaganda starts the war between the Kukis and Meiteis. There seem to be no end to this conflict. If this state was ruled by any opposition party the BJP at the Centre would have lost no time in dismissing the chief minister of Manipur and imposing President's rule. In spite of large-scale killing and violence, burning down of properties the central government does not think that Manipur has totally failed in maintaining law and order. They have continued to keep him in the post of chief ministership because he is the best agent to carry out the plan of the Sangh Parivar.

We have seen in many other states where there had been absolutely no problems, no law and order situation, and still BJP had changed their chief ministers several times. Amit Shah, the home minister had visited once and spent two or three days and promised the world that he has managed to control the violence. But it was only a promise and the reality was that he could not stop the violence. They say the Prime Minister Narendra Modi had enough time to travel across the world to attend to the minor and small inauguration functions but he did not have time and inclination to visit Manipur. He did not come to the Parliament for the monsoon session because he did not want the issue of Manipur to be discussed in the Parliament.

Opposition parties had to call no-confidence motion to force Modi to come to the Parliament. And in spite of his coming to the Parliament in his two-hour long reply speech, he did not come to the point of Manipur violence. Opposition felt being insulted and they walked out of the Parliament. It is only after they had walked out that Modi spoke very briefly on the need to end violence in Manipur. But he did not come up with any concrete plan. It is evident now that he supported the violence in Manipur, in order to spread fear among the minorities and come to power.

OPPOSITION PARTIES MEET UNITED WE STAND!

17-18 JULY BENGALURU, KARNATAKA



Image: PTI

The Haryana Incident

Another example of this kind of plan was being implemented in the Muslim dominated place called Nuh In Haryana, where RSS and Bajrang Dal took out a religious procession through the areas which was thickly populated by the Muslims. We have not heard of any religious procession where people carry guns, swords and sticks; but these religious people in their religious procession, waved out guns, swords and sticks and challenged the Muslim majority of people living there. Any small throwing of a stone could easily spark violence and this is exactly what happened. It is not important who threw the first stone. What is important is, why did the right-wing people create the situation of intimidation?

So for the BJP, preparation for the Parliamentary election is to spread Nafrat, create fear in the minds of the minority. Propagate the notion of Hindu khatre Mein Hai (Hindu is in danger) and force people to vote for BJP.

This is how BJP is preparing for 2024

► There is no doubt in the minds of anybody that Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance will pose a serious challenge for the BJP.

election. There are serious doubts in the mind of some that Modi may indulge into a huge action to attract votes from the people, even the action of sending the army into Pakistan occupied Kashmir. Indulging in a small-scale warfare with the Chinese in Ladak is also not ruled out. We have listened to Satpal Malik, the former governor of Jammu and Kashmir.

BJP is looking out for more opportune time to change the Constitution of India. a third term in Delhi will that opportune time. Our constitution would be changed; perhaps Manu Smriti would be our constitution. The people belonging to the minorities, Dalits and Adivasis will not be full citizens of the country. They will not have rights that the normal citizens enjoy. Shree Golwalkar has already explicated the norms for an Indian who is not a Hindu. India will be a Hindu Rashtra.

Social discourses are important to explode the many myths the Hindutva forces are spreading in the country and make people understand the idea of India as secular, democratic and socialist India.

Sexual Violence and Criminal Justice

LIYA THOMAS

Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting' (World Health Organisation, 2019). Sexual violence can take many forms, including unwanted sexual advances, touching, and rape. It also highlights the importance of the victim's consent, or lack thereof, in defining sexual violence. The WHO's definition is widely used in research and practice related to sexual violence, and serves as an important guide for efforts to prevent and respond to this form of violence.

In understanding the nature, causes, and consequences of a crime criminologists study sexual violence from a variety of perspectives, including victimology, criminal law, criminal justice policy, and social psychology. They seek to identify risk factors for sexual violence perpetration and victimisation, as well as effective prevention and intervention strategies. Criminological research has identified a range of individual and societal factors that contribute to sexual violence, including gender inequality, social norms that condone sexual violence, substance use, and a history of childhood abuse. Scholars have also examined the impact of sexual violence on survivors, including its effects on mental health, physical health, and social functioning.

Sexual Violence Has Multiple Consequences, and Entail Serious Legal Attention

Sexual violence is a serious crime that can have profound and long-lasting effects on survivors. It is a violation of human rights. The process of reporting sexual violence and pursuing criminal charges can be traumatic and retraumatizing. Another major issue is the underreporting of sexual violence crimes, as many survivors are hesitant to come forward due to fear of retaliation, shame, or disbelief. Additionally, there can

be issues with the handling of sexual violence cases by law enforcement and the justice system, including inadequate investigation, victim-blaming, and low prosecution and conviction rates.

Unfortunately, many survivors of sexual violence do not receive the justice they deserve, and the criminal justice system often fails to hold perpetrators accountable. There are many reasons why survivors may not report sexual violence or pursue criminal charges. They may fear retaliation from the perpetrator, be ashamed or embarrassed, or have concerns about how they will be treated by the criminal justice system. Additionally, the criminal justice system may not be well-equipped to handle cases of sexual violence, and survivors may face further trauma during the investigation and trial process.

The question is, though sexual violence is a serious crime and must be dealt severely with, is the practice of criminal justice sufficient to provide justice to the victim? Does the use of criminal justice adequately punish the perpetrators in order to reform themselves? Does criminal justice improve the living conditions of the victims? Are there other alternatives?

Criminal Justice Is Adequate Enough to Fight Sexual Violence

It is a common belief, that it is because of a strong criminal justice mechanism that many communities are able to control sexual violence to some extent at least. Masson (2020) offers a critique of what she sees as a growing trend among some feminist scholars and activists to reject the use of carceral (i.e. related to imprisonment and the criminal justice system) responses to sexual violence. She argues that while there are certainly legitimate concerns about the harms and injustices associated with the criminal justice system, these concerns should not lead feminists to abandon the



fight for justice for survivors of sexual violence.

It addresses the issue with due seriousness: Carceral feminism is a feminist approach that relies heavily on the criminal justice system to address issues of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. This approach is characterised by a focus on punitive measures, such as increased incarceration and harsher sentencing for perpetrators, as a means of addressing violence against women.

Holds perpetrators accountable: Masson argues that the criminal justice system has an important

role to play in addressing sexual violence, as it is one of the few mechanisms available for holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. She notes that alternative approaches, such as restorative justice or community-based responses, may not always be appropriate or effective, particularly in cases where the harm done to the survivor is severe.

It acts as a deterrent: Social learning theory argues that individuals learn behaviors and attitudes through observation and interaction with others. In the case of sexual violence, exposure to violent media and/or peers who engage in such behavior can increase the likelihood of an individual committing sexual violence. In this context, criminal justice interventions such as increased penalties for sexual offenses and public awareness campaigns about the consequences of sexual violence can act as a deterrent.

Provides a sense of justice and closure: Proponents of using criminal justice in dealing with sexual violence argue that it is necessary to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions and to deter others from engaging in similar behaviour. They argue that the criminal justice system can provide a sense of justice and closure for survivors of sexual violence; this can include holding offenders accountable and obtaining compensation for damages. And it would help to prevent further harm by removing offenders from society.

Stops normalisation of sexual violence: Additionally, proponents argue that the criminal justice system has a responsibility to protect the rights and interests of individuals, including the right to bodily autonomy and freedom from violence. They suggest that the criminal justice system can play a critical role in upholding these values and promoting a culture of respect for human rights. Finally, proponents argue that the criminal justice system can help to shift social attitudes towards sexual violence by sending a message that these

crimes will not be tolerated and that perpetrators will be held accountable. They suggest that this can help to challenge the normalisation of sexual violence in society and promote a culture of consent and respect.

Overall, proponents of using criminal justice in dealing with sexual violence argue that it is necessary to hold perpetrators accountable, protect the rights and interests of individuals, and shift social attitudes towards sexual violence.

Criminal Justice Falls Short in Helping the Victims and Reforming the Perpetrators

The criminal justice system is not always effective in addressing the complex social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to gender-based violence. As a result, there is a need to advocate alternative approaches to addressing gender-based violence, such as restorative justice, community-based responses, and transformative justice, that prioritise the needs and experiences of survivors and work to challenge the root causes of violence. The reasons why criminal justice is not enough are many.

Criminal justice is not the preferred approach of victim-survivors. For some victim-survivors, the criminal justice process can be lengthy and re-traumatizing. This can be particularly true for marginalised communities, who may not feel that the criminal justice system is responsive to their needs.

One of the main arguments against using criminal justice in dealing with sexual violence is that the system relies heavily on the testimony of survivors, which can be difficult to obtain and is often discredited by defense attorneys. This can lead to low rates of conviction and can further traumatise survivors who may not receive the justice they seek.

A 'kaleidoscopic' approach to justice is necessary. This approach recognises the complexity and diversity of victim-survivors' experiences and emphasizes

can meet their diverse needs. This may include a range of interventions, such as counseling, support groups, and restorative justice practices. A more holistic approach to justice is necessary in cases of sexual violence. This approach should prioritise the needs and experiences of victim-survivors and should be designed to address the complex and nuanced nature of sexual violence.

It is biased against women and marginalised groups: Carceral feminism reinforces existing structures of power and oppression, as well as it has the potential to contribute to the over-incarceration of marginalised communities. Critics of carceral feminism argue that the criminal justice system has historically been biased against women and marginalised groups, and that this bias continues to influence the way that sexual violence cases are investigated and prosecuted.

Criminal justice system often reinforces existing power dynamics, particularly those related to race, gender, and class. For example, research has shown that Black and Indigenous women are more likely to experience sexual violence and less likely to receive justice than white women. Additionally, marginalised communities such as sex workers and transgender individuals may face increased violence and discrimination within the criminal justice system.

It fails to address the root causes: Feminist theory emphasizes the role of gender inequality and patriarchy, cultural norms and attitudes that promote rape culture and toxic masculinity in the perpetration of sexual violence. They suggest that a more comprehensive approach is necessary, including education and prevention programs, community-based responses, and restorative justice practices.

An alternative approach to addressing sexual violence is needed, one that prioritises the experiences and needs of survivors and challenges the societal structures that enable gender-based violence. She advocates for a more intersectional and transformative approach to feminist activism that works to address the root causes of sexual violence, rather than relying on punitive measures.

Sexual violence is complex and nuanced: The current system is often inadequate and can be harmful to victim-survivors. One of the main challenges is that the criminal justice system is designed to deal with a narrow set of criminal offenses, which often requires a binary understanding of guilt and innocence. Sexu-

al violence, on the other hand, is often a complex and nuanced experience that does not always fit within the confines of the legal system. This can lead to victim-survivors feeling as though their experiences are not taken seriously or that they are not believed.

Criminal justice system is adversarial: The victim-survivors are often pitted against their abusers in court. This can be a traumatizing experience for victim-survivors and can further harm their mental and emotional well-being. Furthermore, the authors argue that the criminal justice system often focuses on punishing the offender rather than supporting the victim-survivor. This can lead to victim-survivors feeling as though their experiences are being ignored, and can make it difficult for them to heal and move forward.

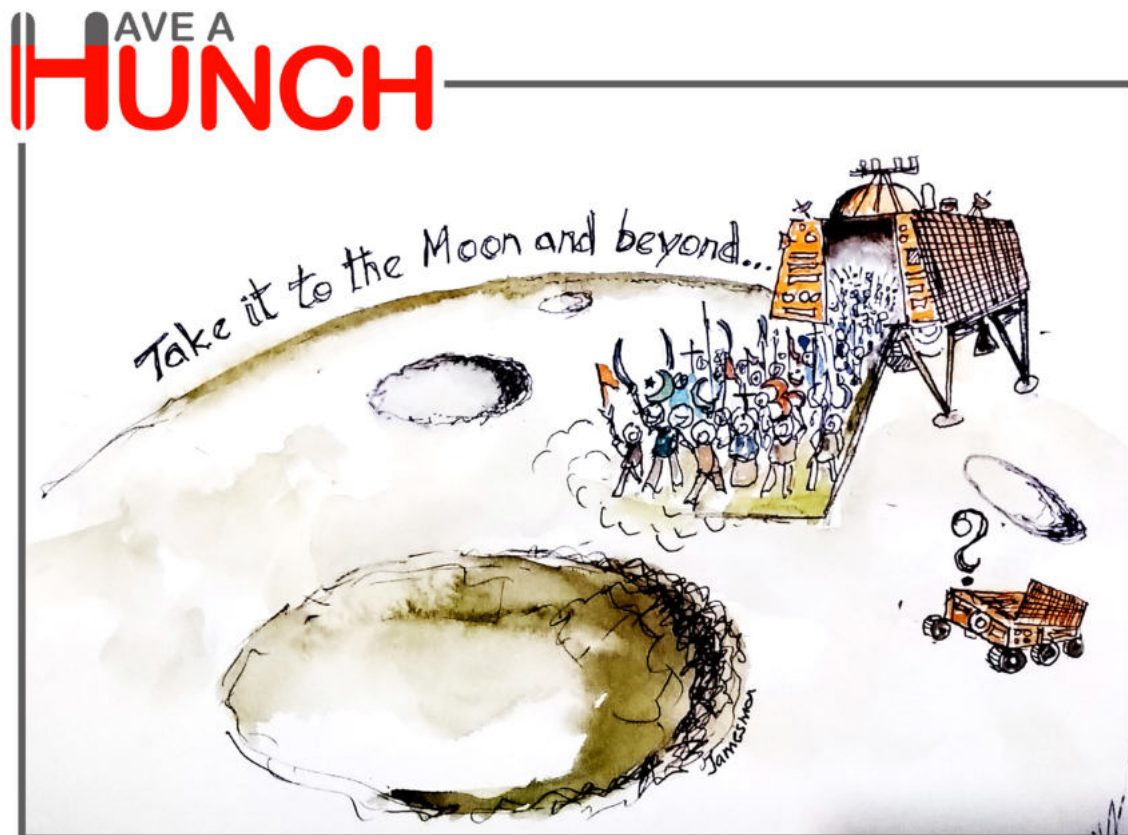
It focuses on punishment and not on rehabilitation: The stress on retributive punishment rather than rehabilitation can perpetuate cycles of criminal behaviors. By focusing more on rehabilitation than retribution, the criminal justice system will be doing more than just punishing, as it makes it possible to actively identify factors that could have encouraged these criminals to undertake their deviant ways and correct them. There must be a shift from corrections from incarceration to alternative programs that address the special needs of offenders. Whenever a crime is committed, incarceration without rehabilitation offers a lesser effective process towards deterring offenders from the crime. Rehabilitation does not ignore society and the individual.

Overall, these arguments suggest that there are limitations to relying solely on criminal justice in dealing with sexual violence in criminology. A more comprehensive and victim-centered approach may be needed to effectively address this issue.

The Delhi Gang Rape Case and Criminal Justice: A Case Study

The 2012 Delhi gang rape case (Nirbhaya Gang Rape Case) involved a 23-year-old female physiotherapy intern who was beaten and gang raped in a private bus in which she was travelling with a male friend on 16 December 2012 in the southern part of New Delhi. The victim later died due to her injuries. The incident generated widespread national and international coverage and was widely condemned, both in India and abroad.

Within a day of the crime all the six accused



including a juvenile were arrested. There was a huge demand for speedy trial and immediate prosecution in the matter. While five of the accused were tried for the crime before the Additional Sessions Judge in the Special Fast Track Court, the sixth accused, who was a juvenile at the time of the crime, was tried before the Juvenile Justice Board. However, during the trial, one of the accused, Ram Singh was found dead in his prison cell. Others were sentenced to death penalty by the court. The juvenile defendant was sentenced to three years imprisonment in a reform facility.

After five years of the above incident and making the laws and criminal justice stern and severe, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) studied the situation of sexual violence in India. The 82-page report, *Everyone Blames Me: Barriers to Justice and Support Services for Sexual Assault Survivors in India*, finds that women and girls who survive rape and other sexual violence often suffer humiliation at police stations and hospitals. Police are frequently unwilling to register their complaints; victims and witnesses receive little protection. These obstacles to justice and dignity are compounded by inadequate health care, counseling, and legal support for victims during criminal trials of the accused.

The report stated, 'Today there are stronger laws and policies, but much remains to be done to ensure that the police, doctors, and the courts treat survivors with dignity' (HRW Report 2017). The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), in 2015 told Indian parliament that the number of rape cases registered had 'dramatically risen' since 2013 after the Indian Penal Code was amended to make the laws and punishments stringent.

The case and how the Indian government approached the case clearly indicates that criminal justice in sexual violence is far from bringing in the desired change. The focus should be to try and get to restorative justice, which focuses on repairing the harm caused by a crime rather than punishing the offender. This approach involves bringing together the victim-survivor and the offender, along with other stakeholders, to facilitate a process of healing and repair. This approach may be particularly effective in cases of sexual violence, where the harm caused to victim-survivors can

be difficult to address through punishment alone. Restorative justice has the potential to offer a more victim-centered approach to addressing sexual violence. Victims have the opportunity to voice their story and to be heard. They can be empowered by confronting the offender and by participating in decision-making on outcomes. Restorative justice may be used in conjunction with the criminal justice system, or as an alternative to it, depending on the needs and preferences of victim-survivors.

In conclusion, the debate over the use of criminal justice in dealing with sexual violence in criminology is complex and multifaceted. While criminal justice may provide a way to hold offenders accountable and provide justice for victim-survivors, it is not a panacea and may perpetuate social inequalities and fail to address the underlying causes of sexual violence. A more victim-centered and comprehensive approach may be needed, one that includes restorative justice and addresses the root causes of sexual violence.

The criminal justice system must respond to survivors' needs. This includes ensuring that survivors are treated with respect and dignity, that investigations are conducted in a thorough and sensitive manner, and that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. Efforts to improve the criminal justice response to sexual violence may include training law enforcement and legal professionals on trauma-informed practices, increasing resources for victim services and support, and implementing policies that prioritise the safety and well-being of survivors. It is also important to engage in community education and prevention efforts to address the root causes of sexual violence and promote healthy relationships and consent.

Prevention is better than cure. Addressing sexual violence requires a multifaceted approach that includes education, prevention, and social change. Focusing solely on criminal justice may not be enough to address the underlying social and cultural factors that contribute to sexual violence.

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

Unhealed

The political stance must change from animosity to befriending the Opposition, the enemy at the door.

GERRY LOBO OFM



Battered and broken are the lives of millions today, and another Covid is not required to prove it. Covid, an epidemic which swept the entire world, lingered quite long and mercilessly took its toll on millions. Today millions are under heavy burdens of one sort or another, not caused by natural phenomena, instead, by sheer obstinacy of the human heart and by a lack of compassionate commitment. Social, economic upheavals, political instabilities and religious, moral uncertainties looming large over our planet have also been responsible for the human crisis even though one has

mastered the art of technology and has super-powered knowledge, including the Artificial Intelligence knowledge. The free flow of ideas and market ideologies has destabilised the ordinary life of individuals and has displaced values which were nurtured and cherished for centuries and were rooted in one's consciousness. Wars, once thought were only a forgotten memory of the past, are still haunting humanity and have found a renewed space with prolonged strategies, only to eliminate legitimate human existence from the face of the earth. What broke out as invasion of Ukraine has not come to any ceasefire. The enemy oppressor, Russian dictator and a modern day destroyer, is only growing strong in atrocious arrogance, determined to see even until every ant crawling on the earth is eliminated from his neighbor's land. Such is the attitude of many a people today, who unquestionably rule the world.

Human lives are, indeed, battered and broken because the warring dictator within every one reigns supreme only to kill human life and with it, the human spirit. The Manipur crisis in India is a proof of the destroyer within us. More than three months of its prolonged violent existence, almost backed deliberately by the perpetrators of war and by an interested political party, has caused greater and even a sustained hatred among the conflicting tribes in view of a total displacement of people. It is done only in order to appropriate the earth for one's monetary profit. In the bargain, the dignity of human beings, particularly that of women of Manipur (could also be of any other place), their honour and their person is completely stripped off and left battered and broken for all their life long. The guardians of our

► Human lives are, indeed, battered and broken because the warring dictator within every one reigns supreme only to kill human life and with it, the human spirit.

Constitution, during this catastrophic crisis, prefer to remain mute spectators to the utterly, dastardly, tragic events, by absolutely deepening the wounds already there in the mortal flesh of humanity and frailty. Phenomenally, women of our nation are more and more being made easy targets and are weaponised systematically and quite liberally, as if whatever harm is done to another is in perfect order and justified with no one confronting the rapacious act. Instead of safeguarding human beings of whatever religion, tribe, caste or language, and protecting their rights and dignity by the guardians of the Constitution at the highest realm, they spew cobra's venom through their high-powered speeches attacking anyone who stands for truth and justice. It is improper for our Prime Minister, for instance, to engage himself in election trail in election bound states, rather than rush to the distressed people in Manipur or anywhere else, and heal their wounds by his personal presence. The obstinate stand and unbending posture of any ruler, in human crisis, for that matter, only batters and breaks the heart and the flesh of mortal humans.

Manipur crisis is a proven example of battered and broken lives of all the tribes living there and are involved in the horror story known to the world at large. Brazen indifference towards the plight of people by the responsible political leaders from the inception of the crisis is nothing but an act of deliberate killing in the broad daylight. The ordinary citizens in different parts of the country are expressing their 'anger' about the prolonged violence in Manipur by way of silent or vocal protests. The Parliament roared during its winter session against the silence maintained by

the Prime Minister, who seemed to be an unmoved mover of the ruling dispensation. The Opposition legislators, donning black attire during the Parliament session, staged their protest at the darkness covering the country, as human beings are stripped naked of their sacred dignity and paraded forcefully on the streets or men being tortured brutally or having debilitated their physical and emotional strength and burning their houses. It is not only Manipur and her children are in disarray, death and in a hopeless condition of life, but the entire country of concerned citizens who share the dreary darkness, for, no man is an island!

One is made to understand that the politics of profit and the politics of hate are continually wounding the human spirit causing darkness in the country. The prime leader of our nation has the tendency of flashing his own image as the only one in the country who has the ability to bring about progress as if everything has come into being because of his leadership which no other leaders before him had ever done. Our Prime Minister's monthly airing of his mind to the nation always pictures the perfect performer in whom there is no flaw. Not undermining his powerful ability to draw the attention of the listeners, he counts himself as the only hard working citizen. Perhaps he closes his eyes to the numberless women of our country whose hard earned sacrifices have, in fact, are making the nation today. The political party he belongs to and its ideology has the absolute prominence in everything bereft of the sensitivity towards the cry of the victims of political policies. It is unfortunate that today, someone, whose concern should have been that of a

► One is made to understand that the politics of profit and the politics of hate are continually wounding the human spirit causing darkness in the country.

compassionately mindful servant leader, is diverted primarily to party concerns with relentless campaign slogans with an appealing demeanor and theatrical pronouncements. The lives of people which are battered and broken are soothed with the balm of platitudes and empty promises. Ours could have been a harmonious nation with the co-existence of differences at all levels and in all spheres. Unfortunately fragmentation is surfacing, beginning with the Parliamentary process and seen in the ethnic polarisation gradually emerging. Having given little attention to the Manipur crisis, the feelings might surface in other parts of the nation. The political stance must change from animosity to befriending the Opposition, the enemy at the door.

Shashi Tharoor is right in his remark: 'There is darkness in the country today.' Perhaps the entire political environment needs to eliminate suspicion, hate and judgmental attitude from its discourse in order to perceive economic, social and religious reality from an upholding and encouraging stand-point so that the prime place is rendered to citizens who are constantly mired in their struggles, anxieties and the daily distress. Violence, which is often caused by vested interests, need to be rooted out of hearts that thrive on it. Manipur has always been green in every respect and should be so for all eternity. The 'Manipur' of our green environment and bright lights, should never be burnt down by the shadows of darkness, hatred of indifference and the hard-heartedness of wrath. Politics of pleasure and wealth, profit and power should never let human lives battered and broken!

Caught in the Crossfire

Dr MN PARASURAMAN

I had absolutely no plan of sharing this here. But a dear psychologist friend of mine (who was among the many to receive this informally) felt I should do it.

CAUTION 1: To those of you who knew and loved my parents, please remember that I love and revere them deeply too, though both have long been dead.

My post is not an attack on individuals but on harmful thought processes.

CAUTION 2: To those who never knew them, please don't judge them harshly after you read this. I myself don't. Again, look at thought processes and the need to change them. There are no culprits in this really.

I was supposed to start on my mountain of pending work and touch my mobile only once in 60 minutes. But I saw the news on TV about a little girl in Adimali, Kerala who committed suicide because of distress that can be traced back to parental conflict. And I could not prevent myself from typing out this last message.

Growing up with parents who are in a bad marriage is one of the most terrible things that a child can suffer. For 20 years (1983–2003) I grew up in a house with parents constantly at war. Quarrelling several times a day over any and every issue. Both of them had quick and fiery tempers, loud voices and very harsh word selection habits. It was terrifying. They didn't share a room. They didn't sit together for a meal. In Delhi, where our sarkaari bungalow was big enough, they spent very little of the day on the same floor. When they were not actually quarrelling, but talking to me, one would rarely give up an opportunity to speak insultingly of the other. And Indian culture teaches

you to worship parents like Gods, so this can set up terrible conflicts in the mind of any child.

I have been scolded and beaten by one parent for the crime of talking to or going out with the other. Whenever one parent was upset with me, usually for reasons unconnected with either of them,

they would routinely accuse me of taking after the other too closely (in colloquial Tamil the phrase is so harsh, that to this day, I wince when I recall it).

If I am alive and sane enough to tell you all this today, it's because, from 1985, I spent 265 days a year in hostel. Taking shit is a very difficult to break habit, especially if you have been doing it from childhood. I was all of 20 years of age when I finally found the courage to fight back and grad-

ually insist that they had no inalienable right to put me in their crossfire and involve me in a conflict that wasn't of my making.

Do I love my parents? Emphatic yes. They were terrible parents as a team, but sometime



in +1, a friend's father gave me the idea that I should look at them as individuals and not as parents. That's not very fair, true, but it did save me greater pain than what I went through.

Did they love me? Emphatic yes. In their individual capacity they did a lot for me, sometimes even selflessly.

Do I respect them? Emphatic yes. They were great people in their own several ways and some of the best values I try to live by are definitely taken from them.

In 2003, I walked out on them and stopped all communication. My mother wrote me a letter of unconditional apology, and God gave me the wisdom to see that it was a great gesture coming from a 66-year-old woman who had a terrible history of her own personal suffering. I restored communication with her.

My father lamented to the whole world that I had broken off with him. It was a brutal blow but at that time my bitterness triumphed over compassion. He never reached out to me. Four months before his death, he told my wife that he had wronged me greatly, but that wasn't communicated to me, and the last I saw of him was on his ICU death bed, when he was too weak to benefit from my desire to get back into talking terms with him.

You are all intelligent and sensitive enough to draw your own lessons from this story. But I end with a warning: if, God forbid, your marriage turns out to be unhappy, by all means, walk out of it. By suffering 'for your children's sake', you might actually multiply their suffering. But please work hard at keeping your child out of the conflict zone. And fight with your life to prevent anyone else from dragging your child into it.



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Karnataka State Central Library: The Bodhi Tree of Bengaluru

NUPUR RAVIKUMAR and PURVI PATEL

Set in a quaint red building at the centre of Cubbon Park, the Karnataka State Central Library always attracts the attention of those passing by. It celebrates the service of Sir Seshadri Iyer, maker of modern Bengaluru. Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India pushed for the library to be built in his honour. Through the aid of numerous generous donations, the public library began in 1915.

With three lakh books and almost every genre you can think of, from yoga to rocket science, from rare books to encyclopedias, it is every book reader's haven. The Central Library—which is known as the Seshadri Iyer Memorial Hall—stands elegantly with tales and trials that the city has witnessed in over 108 years of its existence. The massive collection of books, a Braille section and desktops installed for the public's benefit has played a vital role in building interest, knowledge and accessibility among people of all ages. It is truly a place where you can come to study, work, or just to dwell in silence and experience peace away from the city cacophony. The roof-high bookshelves make people gaze upward in awe and reverence, as if entering into a divine presence.

Tucked away in the midst of greenery, the Central Library continues to be one of the real treasures of Bengaluru, offering knowledge and enlightenment to every seeker. This truly is the Bodhi tree of Bangalore.





New Beginnings

RICHARD ROHR tells how painful transformation can be and reminds us to be patient with ourselves and the process.

The word change normally refers to new beginnings. But the mystery of transformation more often happens not when something new begins, but when something old falls apart. The pain and chaos of something old falling apart invite the soul to listen at a deeper level, and sometimes force the soul to go to a new place. Most of us would never go to new places in any other way. The mystics use many words to describe this chaos: fire, dark night, death, emptiness, abandonment, trial, the Evil One. Whatever it is called, it does not feel good, and it does not feel like God.

We will normally do anything to keep the old thing from falling apart, yet this is when we need patience and guidance, and the freedom to let go instead of tightening our controls and certitudes. Perhaps Jesus is describing just this phenomenon when he says, 'It is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it' (Matthew 7:14). Not accidentally, he mentions this narrow gate and hard road right after teaching the Golden Rule. He knows how much 'letting go' it takes to 'treat others as you would like them to treat you' (Matthew 7:12).

Spiritual transformation always includes a disconcerting reorientation. It can either help people to find new meaning or it can cause people to close down and slowly turn bitter. The difference is determined precisely by the quality of our inner life, our practices, and our spirituality. Change happens, but transformation is always a process

of letting go, and living in the confusing, shadowy, transitional space for a while. Eventually, we are spit up on a new and unexpected shore. We can see why Jonah in the belly of the whale is such an important figure for Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

In moments of insecurity and crisis, shoulds and oughts don't really help. They just increase the shame, guilt, pressure, and likelihood of backsliding into unhealthy patterns. It's the deep yeses that carry us through to the other side. It's those deeper values we strongly support—such as equality and dignity for all—that allow us to wait it out. Or it's someone in whom we absolutely believe and to whom we commit. In plain language, love wins out over guilt any day.

It is sad that we settle for the short-term effectiveness of shaming people and shutting them down, instead of the long-term life benefits of true transformation. But then, we are a culture of productivity and efficiency, not terribly patient or even open to growth. God is clearly much more patient—and, finally, much more effective, patiently supporting our inner transformation through all of life's transitions.

God's Goodness Is Dynamic

I used to think that things were real, and change was something that happened to them over time. Now I think that change is real, and things are events that happen over time. Change is the constant and things come and go, appear and disappear, says, Brian McLaren. Christian theology has in many ways been more influenced by the thought of Greek philosophers than by Jesus' thinking. A case in point is the Greek idea of absolute perfection, the idea that if something is transcendent, it is unchangeable, immovable, absolute, and incapable of transition. Because we want to lift God to the highest level possible, many of us were taught to conceive of God in this Greek category of perfection. After all, what's the alternative—imperfection?

McLaren reflects on his own study of Genesis, I had been preaching through the creation story of Genesis, and I realised that the universe described there didn't fit with the categories of Greek philosophy. The universe fashioned by the word and creative character of God was not immovable. It was not absolute and incapable of change. It was not immutable or static or, in the Greek sense, perfect.

In the Hebrew poetry of Genesis 1, God's creation was, simply put, in process. It started simple and grew more complex. It started in chaos, and order took shape. It started without life, and life 'sprang forth' and 'multiplied.' A sentence formed in my head that day, 'Hebrew good is better than Greek perfect.' In other words, Greek perfect is static, but Hebrew good is dynamic. Greek perfect is sterile and changeless, but Hebrew good is fertile and fruitful.

Sometime soon, I hope you can take a walk outdoors or find a place to sit and observe the created world. Seasons change. Trees grow. Rivers flow. Rocks roll downstream and go from rough and sharp to smooth and round. You can look in the mirror and sense the same reality in your own face: new wrinkles, new wisdom. Perhaps you can look at this world in transition and dare to echo God in Genesis, 'behold, it is good... it is very good'. Perhaps you can see transition as an essential part of that goodness that is better than perfection.

Embracing Change

Benedictine and Celtic scholar Esther de Waal finds inspiration to manage life's transitions in the Scriptures: If we are going to see life as a succession of thresholds to be crossed, we are reminded of the journeys of the people of Israel in the desert, and we then find symbols and images that we can apply to our own experience. The very words pass-over and exodus carry a fullness of meaning as a journey from bondage into freedom. It is important to remember that the Passover was a yearly ritual, so that its memory was kept alive and the cycle lived through time and time again....

The psalms are the journey songs of the people who made that passage. Time and again they raised a fist to God and shouted angrily at him.... They are the songs of a people who were moving away from a known situation into the unknown, and they were often angry with a God who removed all those certainties, who instead seemed to be leading them along an apparently precarious path. They did not sit down for long beside gently flowing streams or linger in lush meadows...

In the Gospels we watch a Christ who, in dismissing certainties, shows us what freedom might mean. We watch the way in which he enters into people's lives and dissolves an existing situation,

whatever it might be. The likelihood was that the condition had promised security, safety, but now Christ challenges the people to leave their nets, or to leave a nice safe booth, and follow him. He says to Peter, James, and John, ‘Come,’ and to Matthew, ‘Stand up, move, walk, come with me.’ Our God is a God who moves and he invites us to move with him. God wants to pry us away from anything that might hold us too securely: our careers, our family systems, our money making. We must be ready to disconnect. There comes a time when the things that were undoubtedly good and right in the past must be left behind, for there is always the danger that they might hinder us from moving forward and connecting with the one necessary thing, Christ himself.

De Waal shares how we might navigate the resistance we feel as we stand on the threshold of something unknown: Of course there is loss and it is right to grieve and not to pretend otherwise. Insecurity makes certitude attractive, and it is in times like these that I want to harness God to my preferred scheme of things, for it is risky to be so vulnerable. Yet it is this vulnerability that asks for trust and hope in God’s plans, not mine. So I try to learn each time that I am called upon to move forward to hand over the past freely, putting it behind me, and moving on with hands open and ready for the new.

Holy Transitions

The Latin word *limen* means ‘threshold.’ Liminal space is an inner state and sometimes an outer situation where we can begin to think and act in new ways. It is where we are betwixt and between, in transition, having left one room or stage of life but not yet entered the next. We usually enter liminal space when our former way of being is challenged or changed—perhaps when we lose a job or a loved one, during illness, at the birth of a child, or a major relocation. It is a graced time, but often does not feel ‘graced’ in any way. In

► Liminal space is an inner state and sometimes an outer situation where we can begin to think and act in new ways. It is where we are betwixt and between, in transition, having left one room or stage of life but not yet entered the next.

such space, we are not certain or in control. The very vulnerability and openness of liminal space allows room for something genuinely new to happen. We are empty and receptive—blank tablets waiting for new words. Liminal space is where we are most teachable, often because we are most humbled. Liminality keeps us in an ongoing state of shadowboxing instead of ego-confirmation, struggling with the hidden side of things, and calling so-called normalcy into creative question.

It’s no surprise then that we generally avoid liminal space. Much of the work of authentic spirituality and human development is to get people into liminal space and to keep them there long enough that they can learn something essential and new. We all need to consciously spend time at the thresholds of our lives, and we need wise elders to create and hold such spaces for us. Liminality is a form of holding the tension between one space and another. It is in these transitional moments of our lives that authentic transformation can happen. Otherwise, it is just business as usual and an eternally boring, status quo existence.

Over the decades, I’ve seen the need for such liminal spaces again and again. Without some sort of guidance and reframing, we don’t understand the necessary ebb and flow of life, the ascents and descents, and the need to embrace our tears and our letting go as well as our successes and our triumphs. Without standing on the threshold for much longer than we’re comfortable, we won’t be able to see beyond ourselves to the broader and more inclusive world that lies before us.

Revelation 3:20 tells us that Christ stands at the door and knocks. Too many of us want to show up at the doorway looking prim and proper and perfect. We stuff our egos and anxieties in the front hall closet so Christ won’t see them when we open the door. But Christ isn’t showing up to see our perfect selves. Instead, we are invited into a real, deep, transformative conversa-

tion, there on the threshold between who we are and who we can become, if we are willing to let go of what holds us back.

Letting Go of What We Have Known

CAC teacher Rev Dr Barbara Holmes writes that our Western habits of acquisition and clinging make life’s transitions more challenging: Transitions can only take place if we are willing to let go of what we have known, the worlds we have created, and our assumptions about ‘how things are.’ To let go is the precursor to being reborn. We discard the baggage of societal expectations and, like a morning glory, open to the possibilities of each new day, each new moment, even if those possibilities are shadowy and disorientating.

Unfortunately, in the West, we don’t let go of anything. We hold onto reputation and material goods long after they are no longer needed. We store acquired stuff in every nook and household cranny before renting a storage unit so that we can continue to hold onto our stuff. Dazed, we clutch at relationships long after they are on life support and cling to a past that no longer exists, grasping, desperate, and confused.

We say that we are letting go, but, in our society, letting go is more like a tug of war. We diligently guard our stories (true or not), our lifestyles, and our belief systems until they are ripped from our sweaty palms. And yet, letting go is a necessary part of transformation.

Letting go may be the only path toward rebirth. The truth of the matter is that we are clutching at nothing! The stripping has already begun. When the worst happens, our addictive desire for control and the futility of our desires are fully exposed. If we are wise, we open our minds, our hands, and our hearts, and let go.

However, I do not want to mislead you: Letting go has consequences. Finally, the striving is over, the effort to salvage and fix, be or do something, is over. It is as if we have been clinging to the wall of a mountain of our own making, a mountain of expectations, striving, and goals. When that mountain disappears, we plummet....

When we let go, the only constants are God’s love and God’s promise that we will never be left alone. We let go of our public persona and our striving and pursuits. Sometimes it takes a crisis

to remind us that we are not in control. This space that I name contemplative is a place of breaking, relinquishment, and waiting.

Fly Loose

The Rev Cameron Trimble is an author, pastor, and leader in the United Church of Christ. As a pilot, she honed her wisdom for navigating the turbulence of transitional times:

‘We are going to hit some turbulence ahead,’ [my flying instructor] went on, ‘and you will learn something about your airplane... If you tighten your grip on the yoke, you reduce the aerodynamics of your aircraft. You, as the pilot, actually make the flight less safe, steady, and stable. So, remember: When the going gets rough, fly loose.’

Our world today is nothing if not swirling, turbulent wind tossing us around. Recently, we have experienced economic meltdown, climate countdown, racial throwdown, political breakdown, technology showdown, and religious letdown. We are living through the breakdown and breaking open of much that has defined modern life. In the face of such extraordinary transition, it’s natural to look for solutions to our problems. We tightly grip the yoke of our families, businesses, government, and communities, trying to regain control of people and systems that feel broken and dangerous to our safety and survival. Of course, no amount of control will create the conditions needed to traverse these rough winds of change. Trimble offers challenging yet hopeful advice: We must resist looking to the frameworks of the past to lead us into the future. Doing so is a way to pretend to control, to tighten our grip and reduce our cultural aerodynamic flexibility. Instead, perhaps we turn to ways of wisdom that cultivate intuition, patience, and ingenuity.

We embrace the ways of a Mystic Wayfinder, one who purposefully gets lost in order to chart new ways forward. By getting lost and welcoming the reality that we do not have the answers or know the way forward, we enter a space of liminality and emergence. We are not attempting to fix ‘broken systems’ but are, instead, summoning entirely new worlds. We do not have the answers today. We have the wondering. We have the gifts of being lost to guide us. We must now use the wisdom of our wounds, both caused and carried, as portals into new ways of becoming.



The Right to Not Write

SUSANNA VAS

Content generalists like me work with a great miscellany of clients and, as a rule of thumb, must be open to learning and writing about everything under the sun—from pet grooming and the circular economy to costume wigs and underwear with rubber duck prints.

Everything is all well and good until you are asked to endorse things like vaping, adult toys, bawdyhouses, escort services, gambling, and recreational drugs. Maybe even cook up conspiracy theories and churn out hate speech to promote skewed religious or political agendas.

Have a gander at this brief I was sent back in September 2022:

Most of the content I request will have an anti-China sentiment. Every paragraph and every word should reflect this. You have to write about China's Evil Plans Against Nepal. Here's a glimpse into the topic: China is dispatching its men to Nepal where they spawn Nepali-looking children with Nepali women. Once these mixed-race children grow up, their Chinese fathers pack them off to India to execute nefarious plans against India. Proper research is required for this article—1,200 words.

If someone tosses you a topic that makes you uneasy, guess what? You have the right to refuse.

Here's why:

- It is important to set personal boundaries and de-

cide what subjects match your values and comfort levels.

- By drawing a clear line, you discourage indulgence in dirty jokes or inappropriate conversations. (Everyone has had the misfortune of knowing someone who waits for half an excuse to violate somebody's comfort. And some workplaces are just more harassment-prone than others.)
- Topics involving sex, drugs, or alcohol can trigger distressing feelings and memories in victims of sexual abuse or struggling addicts.
- The company or team lead will be compelled to rethink their choice of clientele.

Refusal might seem scary, but it's necessary. Be professional, but firm.

Try these responses:

- I am not comfortable writing about _____. It is against my personal values.
- I prefer to use my talent to write about things I am passionate about.
- While _____ might be relevant to the project, I will not be able to contribute.

- I would like to maintain professionalism and focus on subjects I feel comfortable and confident addressing.
- We are a content agency, not a hate speech factory.

Drawing the line at harmful content bolsters your professional integrity and saves you from a shedload of negative consequences:

- Associating with controversial topics will damage your reputation, making it harder to attract reputable clients and projects in the future.
- Turning down uncomfortable topics demonstrates professionalism, signalling to potential clients that you prioritise quality and responsibility.
- Avoiding polarising subjects allows your work to remain accessible and appealing to a wider audience, opening doors to diverse opportunities.
- Collaborating with questionable clients on risky topics may lead to legal liabilities or conflicts that could extinguish your career and affect your personal life.
- Selective content choices showcasing versatility and depth in various niches lead to a higher-quality portfolio you can share without qualms.
- Clients seeking ethical and responsible writers will be more likely to hire those who steer clear of controversial subjects because no one wants to get tarnished by association.

- If you focus on constructive and meaningful content, you can build credibility as an expert in your field, garnering respect and trust from peers and clients.
- Writing about sensitive topics might lead to short-term gains but could hinder long-term career growth due to limited scope for advancement.
- As a content writer, you play a pivotal role in shaping societal perspectives. Shunning inappropriate topics allows you to contribute positively to public discourse.

Remember, pushing your comfort zone should never be for somebody else's sake. If your instincts caution you against writing something, it's wise to listen. Don't cross lines that clash with your principles. Not every discomfort is worth it, especially if it lacks consideration for you as a person and does not genuinely interest you. Declining to discuss or write about offensive topics does not make you prudish, petty, or intolerant. It just means you have boundaries you want respected.

Susanna Vas is a word sorceress. She will work for food, gift cards, certificates, exposure money—like any normal human being.



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Elon Musk Unveils Twitter's Mystifying X Logo: What's the Secret Message?

LIZ BENNY

In a move that has the internet buzzing louder than a swarm of bees at a picnic, Elon Musk, the Chief Twit of Twitter, recently dropped a digital bombshell—a brand new logo! Out with the old, iconic blue bird, and in with the sleek and enigmatic X against an abyss of pitch-black darkness. But what does it all mean, and why is the Twitterverse going bananas over this radical rebranding?

While the Twitterati remains baffled and befuddled, a cunning report from CNBC now suggests that Musk's scheme goes far beyond a mere logo change. Brace yourself, for it's speculated that X stands for his audacious plan to create an all-encompassing, ultimate 'everything app.' Move over, Swiss Army Knife—Elon's got this covered!

The 52-year-old tech titan made it clear that the name 'Twitter' was once the perfect fit when 140 characters flew back and forth like chirping birds. But let's face it, times have changed, and now users can practically post 'almost anything' under the sun. So, is the X a symbol of unlimited possibilities, or is it simply an enigmatic algebraic equation that only Musk can solve?

This daring move comes with its fair share of risks, as it thrusts Twitter's decades of carefully crafted branding into the abyss. But when you're

Elon Musk, you don't play it safe; you strap into your electric rocket and soar into uncharted territory!

Since his acquisition of Twitter in October 2022, Musk has been shaking things up like a snow globe in a hurricane. Staff cuts, subscription models, verified badges for all—you name it, he's done it. Heck, he even temporarily turned Twitter into a platform for dog lovers with that adorable Shiba Inu logo.

But the most significant revelation came with the appointment of Linda Yaccarino, former NBC Universal executive and new Twitter CEO. She took the reins on June 5, and now the X marks the spot for her biggest challenge yet—leading Twitter into a new era of profitability and growth.

Linda's got some big plans up her sleeve to lure back advertisers who fled like startled gazelles when Musk took over. Think video ads, A-list celebs, and a Twitter team that'll rival the size of the Roman Empire at its peak. Talk about ambitious!

So, what's the big secret behind X? Is it a treasure map to an all-powerful app, or just Musk messing with our minds like a digital wizard? Only time will tell. Until then, fasten your seatbelts, folks; we're in for one wild, Twitterific ride! And remember, when it comes to Elon Musk, expect the unexpected, or as we like to say, 'X-pect the X-traordinary!'

TRUE LIES

MONICA FERNANDES

Business Standard calls Zohnerism 'the art of selective communication'. There is an interesting story behind the term Zohnerism. In 1997 a fourteen year old lad, Nathan Zohner, decided to conduct an experiment on his classmates to prove how gullible human beings generally are. He presented his pals with an argument in order to ban what was purported to be a very toxic chemical used daily, di-hydrogen monoxide. Zohner informed the others that this chemical causes severe burns in its gas form. It also corrodes metals, kills a lot of people annually, is found in acid rain, could cause brake failure in vehicles. A scary list indeed! He asked them that, if they had the opportunity, would they ban this very dangerous chemical. Forty-three out of fifty boys present voted to ban it.

Then Zohner presented the boys with the trump card. What was this highly dangerous chemical? It was none other than H₂O, water needed for our very survival. Zohner had twisted facts to get his classmates to arrive at the wrong conclusion. After all people do die in floods. The Titanic did sink, resulting in the loss of lives. Brakes do fail when flood water gets into them. Zohnerism, a term coined by journalist James K Glassman, is evident today in the news presented by news channels.

Business Standard further cautions us not to fall into the trap of believing everything we hear on news channels or read in newspapers. Many journalists and newspapers are pawns in the hands of wily, power hungry, unscrupulous politicians and as a consequence, resort to sensationalism or distorting news in favour of their political bosses.

For instance, the bogey of conversion to Christianity is being raised time and again. Is it true? Of course! The question is 'WHEN?' Christianity was introduced in Kerala as early as 52AD when the apostle Thomas began to preach its precepts. After the discovery of a sea route to India by Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama in the 15th century AD, the Portuguese colonised Goa and established Christianity. But regrettably these facts are being distorted. Rabble rousers, experts in manipulation, ignore these facts.

If conversions are taking place, what explains the decreasing Christian population in India? What rational explanation is there for no conversions in the scores of Christian schools and colleges? These are malicious canards. Unfortunately even the educated are falling prey to professional mischief makers.

Another strategy is that of misinformation, of spreading fake news. Men from a minority community are being lynched by mobs who are led to believe that the men are transporting beef. Minority bashing has become the order of the day. Countrymen are dying and places of worship are being destroyed as currently in Manipur and there is not a single word of sympathy from the PM.

It is pointless being educated if we fail to think for ourselves and fall a prey to Zohnerism. The future of our country is in our hands when you go out to vote. Are we going to be gullible or thinking voters who take the trouble to check out facts before arriving at a conclusion? The decision is ours.

You Are on Earth, There Is No Cure for That

Having been born into this strange life we must accept the wasted gamble of our days.

VANIZA DOLWANI

Ah, the curious parallel between psychology and black holes! Picture this: during the global holidays, when Covid-19 hit the scene, I, like many others, decided to dive into different courses and workshops. Amongst the mental health psychoeducation options, I stumbled upon Cognizavest—an organisation offering a 15-day course. Naturally, I signed up, hoping to unravel the secrets of the mind.

On the first day and in the very first session they asked us to open google and present an image we think represents and describes psychology. People presented pictures of the mind, body, cute dogs, quotes, brain networks, white flowers and music. I opened google and typed blackholes but I was shy enough to present my idea, so here I am writing about it (finally spilling the beans).

I did not speak that day but I remember writing down in my diary saying, 'I believe psychology is like blackholes.'

Do we know what psychology is? Do we know what blackholes are? Only one sure thing about them is that they both exist, otherwise as psychology is to read minds, blackholes are to consume mankind and yet both are undefined.

To a layman what is more to explain or what more will they understand? Psychology is eating every researchers head, humans are afraid to know it, and if you know it, gets more scary, there is not much awareness about it, people are afraid to know about it, it reveals a lot of things, it gives a picture of the future, it shows uncertainty and no human has ever survived the concepts of uncertainty, simplest example being death, the most uncertain event to take place and none can survive; aren't blackholes

the same? We do not have much information about them, we all are afraid of it, there is research after research yet there is no solid explanation for it, and of course it is again one of the most uncertain phenomena to happen.

Interesting how psychology can explain the fear of uncertainty of humans and blackholes. Uncertainty as the common factor between both is what binds humans, blackholes and heisenberg together, let's dive into that. That word sends shivers down spines like a spine-chilling horror movie. Death, for instance, is the king of uncertainty—no human has managed to escape that plot twist! And lo and behold, black holes play the same trick on us. Scientists have been researching them forever, and yet we're still in the dark—literally!

How do you get yourself out from this uncertain black hole, the one that is inside and the one the well outside, to answer that I have a poem to recount:

*too much
too little*

*too fat
too thin
or nobody.*

*laughter or
tears*

*haters
lovers...*

*there is a loneliness in this world so great
that you can see it in the slow movement of
the hands of a clock.*

*people so tired
mutilated
either by love or no love.*



*people just are not good to each other
one on one.*

*the rich are not good to the rich
the poor are not good to the poor.*

we are afraid.

*our educational system tells us
that we can all be
big-ass winners.*

*it hasn't told us
about the gutters
or the suicides.*

*or the terror of one person
aching in one place
alone*

*untouched
unspoken to
watering a plant.*

*people are not good to each other.
people are not good to each other.
people are not good to each other.*

*I suppose they never will be.
I don't ask them to be.*

but sometimes I think about it.

(From *The Crunch* by Charles Bukowski)

**I have satisfied my thirst at the well of
myself and that wine was good, the best
I had and tonight sitting staring into the
dark, I now finally understand.**

Unaccountably we are alone, forever alone, and it was meant to be that way, it was never meant to be any other way, I guess nothing ever works for us, we are fools, but how are you going to tell a dreamer there is a 15% tax on that dream? He will just laugh and say is that all? I miss those sparks. I have been alone but seldom lonely, I have satisfied my thirst at the well of myself and that wine was good, the best I had and tonight sitting staring into the dark, I now finally understand.

Peace of mind and heart arrives when we accept what is: Having been born into this strange life we must accept the wasted gamble of our days... and take some satisfaction in the pleasure of leaving it all behind. Cry not for me, Grieve not for me, Read what I have written then forget it all, Drink from the well of yourself and begin again... and that is how you pull yourself from the blackholes of mind and body.

A Midday Sun of Love

A FRANCIS OFM

He sat aimlessly inside the gazebo, on the beach, as he did not want to dare the heat of the scorching midday sun. Just like the sea reaching for the beach for a brief caress and a hasty return to where it came from, folks kept coming from the beach to the gazebo to have a brief relief from the attack of blazing sun and a quick refreshing drink of water.

Looking over everyone and everything existed there - the people, the sand, the beach, and the water, he sat, obviously seeing nothing. Sitting beside him in the gazebo was the beach vendor, an older woman, who sold only the drinking water pouches. A short, skinny woman in black complexion. She was chewing betel leaves, and at every short interval she kept spitting out the dark scarlet red spittle.

Feeling slightly thirsty he ordered a pouch of water from her, and in order to fall in line with the culture of the place, inscribed on the gazebo walls, no one is a stranger in this land of God's own creation, he started to strike a conversation with her.

'There is a good number of folks out there,' he said it with a tone that was neither asking nor imposing. Without any hesitation, the woman responded to his untargeted words suspended in the air: 'O, these are the lovers. They are brave, as all lovers in the world are; braving the heat of the sun is like a piece of cake for them.'

Her words evoked an interest in him for the people on the beach, slowly brewing in him a fresh perspective about them. Until a moment ago, these were a bunch of impersonal, uninteresting strangers drifting on the beach. 'Who cares about who they are or what they are doing'—that was all

As he was leaving the gazebo, his mind was full but at ease, with one big fulfilling ray of hope.

the attention they deserved from him. But with the fresh perspective that came upon him following the words of the vendor, he started to feel attached to them.

A minute ago, they were strangers seen in the distance, miles far away from his mind, but in the wink of an eye, they came alive to him, feeling at a very close mental distance. He watched them as if in a close-up shot. He could see them vividly as people bubbling with life, passion, hope and dreams, a similar personal transformation occurred in him too -a moment ago, he was an aimless and discombobulated individual, but now he turned out to be a keen observer, like a passionate fellow sojourner with them.

He kept looking at them, intentionally letting the beach and the sea recede far off, beyond the horizons. He got engrossed in watching them, and the celebration of their togetherness. He felt that all of them were happy too. He said to himself: 'Love certainly brings happiness!'

His brief rumination of them was abruptly interrupted by the friendly voice of the beach vendor, 'Are you not from this place, son?' 'No, I am settled elsewhere now.' He replied somewhat vaguely.

'When I saw you here alone at this time of the day, I knew that you are an outsider. Only the lovers come to the beach at this time of the day. You see families by sundown.' She said while leisurely leaving enough gap in-between her words to comfortably chew the juicy betel leaves in her mouth and spit it out when it started to spill out through the crack of her lips.

'I don't think if anyone of them is married or

will ever get married to the ones they are with. She took a short pause and continued, 'Who says that everyone should get married to the one they are in love, now?'

She said her words softly, in a self-reflective tone. Keeping the same soft tone and the overextended pace, she added, 'Gone are the days and the thinking that you could love someone only after you get married to that person. Thank God, that thinking is changed now.'

Her soft voice and the reflective tone made him feel that she did not want him to respond. He said nothing more. The rest of the time he spent in the gazebo, he was caught up thinking about her words, particularly what she said at the end.

'In the grand schema of life, change is like time and tide. No one can stop them,' he thought as he got up to leave the gazebo. But before leaving, he gently asked the woman 'Did you have a love story when you were young? I mean were you in love with anyone?'

'You mean against the odds of the time and the thinking? Who doesn't have it? You, me, everyone - the birds, the animals, the sea, the beach, and I guess even God. We dare everything when we are in love' the woman retorted pointedly. She spat out a mouthful of scarlet red spittle, and went on shoving a fresh lump of betel leaves into her mouth.

As he was leaving the gazebo, his mind was full but at ease, with one big fulfilling ray of hope. 'Everyone is lovable to someone,' he said to himself. He began to walk away from the gazebo with a smirk on his face that betrayed the long-lived loneliness which he just left at the beach.

Seraphina

Ethereal Brushstrokes: The Avian Muse at a Summit of Minds

VINEETH MATHEW

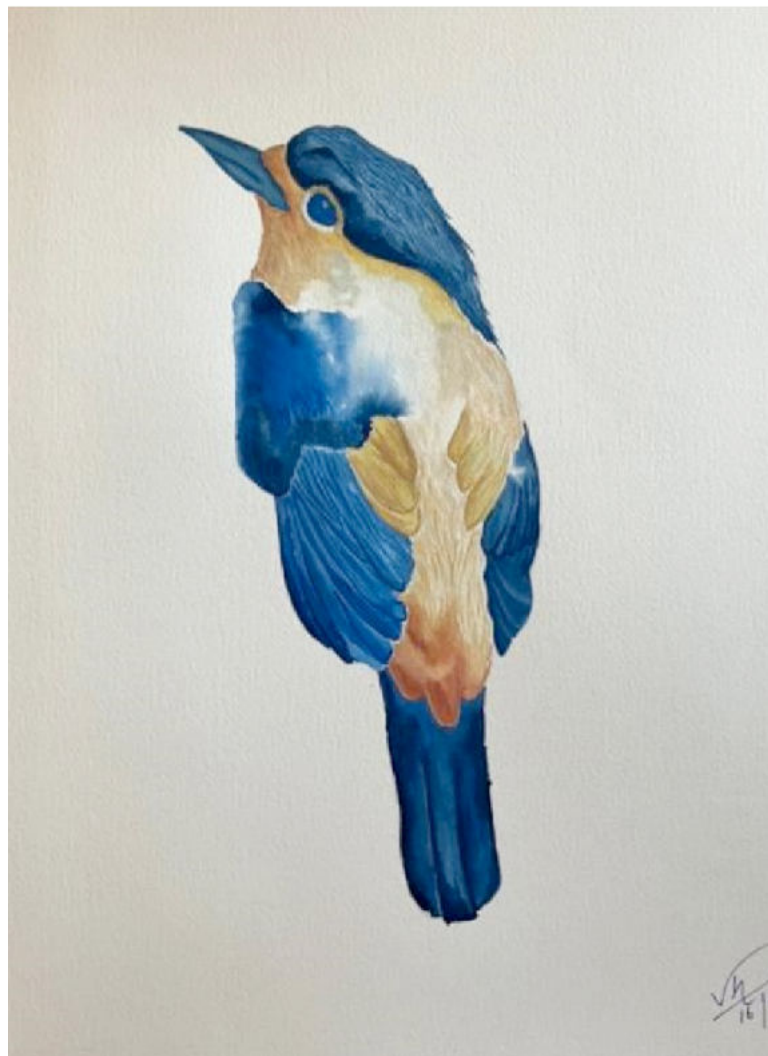
The exquisite bird painting and the beautiful poetic and philosophical text that accompanies it are by Vineeth Mathew, a Bangalore-based engineer-artist working with a global firm. Having received advanced professional training at Carnegie-Mellon and the MIT, Vineeth skillfully combines his inborn artistic talents and creative thinking with the demanding professional work. In this piece the artist, who usually shies away from limelight, relates how by pure accident and serendipity, the cute, blue-feathered visitor bird reawakens the 'dormant artist' in him and enters into his deeper self, the inner canvas as well as the outer canvas—a simple sheet of paper. Vineeth's write up ends with a very insightful reflection on art. I was deeply moved by his meditative rumination around his ethereal etching of a mystical bird that he most evocatively names 'Seraphina'. — **Fr KM George**

In the bustling heart of the garden city, amidst the arena of a global discourse, where the world's envoys and scholars converged to discuss global affairs, economic policies, sustainable development, financial stability, and climate mitigation, an unexpected and whimsical tale unfolded, intertwining the destinies of a curious bird and a dormant artist. This narrative revolves around a mystical bird named Seraphina, whose iridescent plumage and shimmering feathers reflected the aura of the event itself. Beneath her splendid appearance, Seraphina harbored an unassuming desire that diverged from the political dialogues and economic discussions taking place within the hallowed walls.

Seraphina's intrigue with photography blossomed when she observed the 'Group of 20' photographers capturing the conference's grandeur during her flight over the summit venue. The idea of having her own likeness immortalised piqued her imagination, as she envisioned a photograph that would capture not only her physical form, but the essence of her perception of the world. Unbeknownst to her, the hand of destiny held

artistic designs yet to be unveiled in her path.

As Seraphina elegantly traversed through the corridors of the summit venue, a fortuitous encounter unfurled — an open window revealing a world imbued with the captivating hues of inspiration. Drawn by an invisible thread of serendipity, she fluttered into a chamber where an unexpected union awaited. Inside the room stood a dormant artist-delegate, who had left the canvas untouched for some years. Unaware of the artist's background, Seraphina sensed a connection between her presence and a canvas, as if they were bound by an enigmatic bond. The artist captivated by Seraphina's mystical beauty, felt an unfamiliar stirring within him, rekindling the flames of creativity that had long slumbered. He recalled the euphoria of



his earlier artistic endeavors and knew that this moment was too precious to ignore. His eyes widened in astonishment as he beheld Seraphina, a creature of vibrant beauty that seemed to have transcended the confines of the summit's protocol. A spark of inspiration ignited within him, and he recognised the bird as an unexpected muse.

'You're the missing muse of the Summit,' the Artist murmured, his voice tinged with a mixture of surprise and wonder. 'A presence I hadn't anticipated.'

The Artist's long-dormant passion awakened like an old friend reacquainting itself with his soul. He acquired colours and brushes with a sense of newfound urgency, his fingers trembling with anticipation. This was a moment too poignant to ignore—a

juncture of creation and diplomacy, orchestrated by the unassuming Seraphina. The stroke of the brush marked 'The Beginning', guided by the avian presence and the yearning to manifest an image on the canvas. The artist painted with a fervour born of the unexpected muse and the revival of a dormant passion. As the brush pirouetted upon the canvas, a tangible vitality flowed, releasing emotions long restrained.

Seraphina, seemed to grasp the significance of the moment for she posed with an unwavering spiritual grace, instinctively holding positions that

would birth a portrait steeped in ethereal allure. Time itself seemed to bend as the Artist's brush caressed the canvas, creating a symphony of colours that mirrored the vibrancy of Seraphina's plumage and the atmosphere of the summit.

In the rhythmic cadence of scholars moving through the chamber during their breaks, they encountered the manifestation—an artwork that transcended the mere portrayal of Seraphina's avian elegance. Instead, it encapsulated the very essence of inspiration reawakened within the depths of the artist's being. Amid discussions shaping global trajectories, a bird's presence transcended political and scientific rhetoric, forging a connection between diplomacy, science, and creativity. The bird's accidental foray into a global odyssey had become a conduit for artistic revival, a bridge that transcended the language of diplomacy and science. Seraphina's collaboration with the Artist was an emblem of the unpredictability of fate, the union of disparate worlds—art, diplomacy, and science—into an unexpected partnership. During dialogues shaping the course of humanity, an avian encounter led to the birth of an artwork that traversed realms, evoking emotions and ideas that spanned beyond borders.

In the end, after casting her gaze upon her portrait, Seraphina comprehended that art's purpose surpassed mere moments—it entailed capturing souls, whether belonging to a bird or a slumbering artist. The portrait was a testament to the enchantment that emerges when intention and serendipity entwine within the fabric of existence. Their collaboration whispered a profound universal truth within the dialogue of nations: that even within the intricate intricacies of diplomacy, a canvas possesses the power to resonate beyond mere words, becoming a silent harbinger of emotions and ideas that transcend political rhetoric. Just as a bird's presence can evoke inspiration that transcends the confines of policies, so too can the strokes of an artist's brush illuminate the tapestry of human connections, weaving threads of shared understanding and unspoken sentiments. In the realm where negotiations transpire, this truth reminds us that art possesses an unspoken language capable of forging connections that diplomacy alone might struggle to achieve—a language of emotion, symbolism, and profound meaning.

Oh, My Sweet Daddy

SUSAN D'SOUZA

While I journey through life's trials,
I wish you were here,
To hold my hand and lead me on
To complete the plan that God has set me upon.
I miss you dear Daddy,
And I know I will never get a person like you;
Who loved me unconditionally,
Without waiting for anything in return.
You never said no to anything I demanded,
But gave me in your best capacity much more than I asked.
How could you never get angry on me?
For being a person who took advantage of thee.
It surprises me of how you never raised your voice or hand on me,
This is something I still fail to understand,
Your calm, patient and understanding nature,
Leaves me in awe in today's harsh world.
Oh Daddy what was the secret which made you be so,
When ups and downs of life, make one fall very low.
Taking care of all my needs,
Without waiting to take a rest.
The minute you left me to your heavenly abode,
I realised how life changed for me,
I was thrown into an ocean,
Desperately swimming to find the shore.
As soon as you were gone,
Reality dawned, and it was bitter to see
How harsh the world could be,
And I realised that I was an orphan without anybody to love me.



Oh daddy today while I remember you,
I thank the Lord for the gift of a dad like you,
Reminding me of how much more our Heavenly Father can give us,
If we continue to focus our eyes on Him.
Thirty-three years have gone by, you have earned your well-deserved rest,
And while I look back at the days we spent together,
Sweet memories of you always continue to linger
And I wish at the moment you could be near.
Oh my sweet daddy,
Wherever you may be,
May God lift you in paradise
Where we hope to meet you again.



Aavasavyuham

ROMIL UDAYAKUMAR TNV

The second movie by Krishand RK is a mockumentary that tells a poignant tale about society, the environment, and how people connect with one another. Nevertheless, it never fails to entertain with some excellent acting, dialogue, and scenes. It has as well subtle, nuanced humour.
The movie deftly combines elements from the mainstream with worries about the environment in general and, specifically, the environmentally vulnerable mangroves in Kerala. It is surrealistic and satirical at the same time. The movie is filmed in the mangrove-forested areas of Puthuvype, Azhikode, and Munnar. Notably, protests by locals and environmentalists opposing the construction of an LNG facility there put Puthuvype in the news as a location with extensive mangrove forests that was under threat from the monstrous industrial establishments.
Rahul Rajagopal plays a mysterious character in the movie who has a mysterious bond with all living things and the natural world. In 2015, elusive snakes and amphibians responded to his unusual noises on a nature walk. He has a talent for luring shoals of fish and crabs when fishing at Puthuvype and Azhikode. He represents man's intrinsic connection to nature and her creations and is referred to as Joy in one scene of the movie.
The delight that humanity experiences as a result of its symbiotic interaction with nature

is perhaps even reflected in his name. Despite speaking Malayalam fluently, even his close circle is unaware of where this mysterious man is from. In the film, scientists learn that worms extracted from his body develop into plants at one point. If his close relationships with nature are organic, his interactions with people are unnatural, perplexing, and abundant with difficulties.
Parallel to the hunt for a rare amphibian is the hunt for this enigmatic man. Scenes of a scientist discussing rare species found in the Western Ghats and mangroves are ingeniously inserted into the narrative that follows Joy. Viewers get to see Joy through the perspective of the people who connected with him in various ways thanks to the film's format of a series of interviews. Even the scene where Lissy, an Azhikode woman, yearns for Joy is intriguing. It is clear from the start that Aavasavyuham is a movie that stands in solidarity with the environmental problems faced in a remote location.
The narrative's surrealism and magical realism do not, however, become obscured by the challenging topics covered in the movie. The film has received the FIPRESCI and NETPAC Awards for Best Malayalam Film, as well as the Kerala State Film Award for the best feature film (2021) and the award for the best original script. It also took home the Kerala State Film Award for Best Film.

Loss, Deception, Trauma, Scars, and More

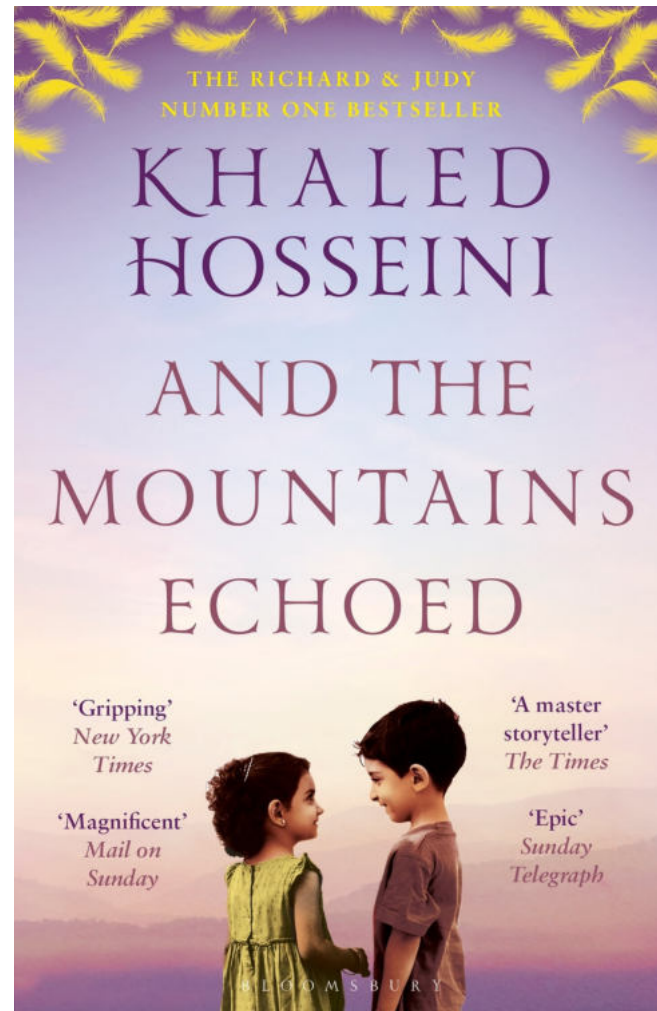
DR SUSHEELA B

‘You want a story and I will tell you one,’ Hosseini begins and takes us to 1952.

A father is telling his children a tale as old as time as they begin their journey through the deep valleys and majestic mountains towards Kabul. Pari, the three-year-old daughter, has an unusually powerful bond to his elder brother Abdullah. He has been her protector, a shoulder to rely on, and a source of happiness to each other all this time. The two siblings do not understand the horrible fate that is approaching them, the echoes of the coming event will change their course of lives upside down. A sacrifice has to be made, a decision, like a small ripple in the water, that’s all it takes, which will haunt through the leaps of time. There will be loss, deception, trauma, and age-old scars yet redemption with a bit of twist.

Khalid Hosseini’s novel has been written after a gap of six years and it was published in 2013. *And the Mountains Echoed* displays like many other postcolonial works of literature, a complex non-linear multi-voiced narrative that crosses cultures, generations and continents—from Kabul to San Francisco to the Greek Island of Tinos.

Khaled Hosseini’s formula—separated siblings and the sweep of Afghan history—is a



winning one when his narrative chemistry gets to work. There is a bland, almost corporate flavour to the title of Khaled Hosseini’s third book, suggesting a large but windy Afghan epic. Its narrative wares are clearly advertised in the book-jacket blurb to reassure his tens of millions of worldwide readers that they will be getting the brand they want. This effectively marketed product informs its consumers that, as there was in *The Kite Runner*, here there will also be siblings separated by hardship and tragedy. There will be nostalgia for old Afghanistan, ironised by its clashes with western freedoms and shattered

by modern wars; there will be leaps in time, speaking of the cruel tricks of history through wildly emotive tales of loss, betrayal and redemption.

But the threat of bland formula is instantly dissolved in Hosseini’s elemental narrative chemistry. The opening myth is a substance that permeates a network of tales, its meaning developing and diversifying across 400 pages. A div, or demon, draws a father into a terrible pact. The father can gift his favourite son a better life by giving the child away, never to see him again. This is what Saboor, the poor Afghan father telling the story, is himself about to do to his three-year-old daughter, Pari, who has an unusually powerful bond to her brother, Abdullah. From the moment the realisation dawns that Saboor is going to give Pari to the wife of a wealthy man in Kabul, Hosseini saturates the various layers and characters of his novel with a yearning for the moment that brother and sister will reunite.

‘A story is like a moving train,’ as Hosseini has one of his many tale-telling characters remark, ‘no matter where you hop on board, you are bound to reach your destination sooner or later.’ True enough, but Hosseini isn’t restricted to any single route, or mode of transport. He is a master of that deeper narrative principle: get your audience where they want to go, but not in the way they expect.

While events ricochet between countries, Hosseini’s recurrent concern is the same: the relationship of Afghanistan to the wider world; what its traumas have done to those who remain and what happens to those who leave and then come back to rediscover their country. Two expats, Timur and Idris, return to reclaim a house in Kabul, near the one to which Pari was first stolen away. Idris, the sensitive doctor, is embarrassed by their Americanised attitudes and the power that money bestows on them. But through him, Hosseini turns a simplistic critique of the US into a nice irony. The culturally sophis-

► Hosseini skilfully manipulates form and time, and sets his characters’ actions against crucial moments in Afghanistan’s recent history.

ticated Idris turns out to be ineffectual. It is the crass and ethically dodgy Timur who gets things done and makes a difference.

Khalid Hosseini feels proud to have an opportunity to portray women characters with their sufferings under patriarchal subjugation and marginalisation in his works especially in novels. There are five types of oppression that are observed in his novels. They are exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

Women faces many struggles in life because they are viewed as the weaker gender. This leads many women to depression because they feel inferior and are not treated equally to men. One gets to know how women were portrayed in the society in comparison to men through gender roles or patriarchal constructs.

Of course, his novels’ long-standing place on the bestseller lists should also be attributed to Hosseini’s gifts as a storyteller (which are considerable) and the literary tastes of the reading public. *And The Mountains Echoed* surpasses Hosseini’s other novels, from a literary standpoint and by its ability to illuminate and make real Afghanistan’s modern history. If you want to know Afghanistan—that is, know more than each day’s revised body count—imaginative literature might just more closely resemble real life.

Hosseini skilfully manipulates form and time, and sets his characters’ actions against crucial moments in Afghanistan’s recent history. A must read as Hosseini is a marvellous story teller. Hosseini is the magician who can take his reader throughout the story with a flow like poetry. Though this book is severely intense and one of the hardest to read, yet, this could keep you hooked with a yearning you hoped from the very beginning. This book is highly recommended to anyone who wants to experience a heart-wrenching story with twists and turns along with a tapestry of true chemistry of emotions that will leave the readers thinking and speechless.



HAVE WE LANDED YET?

JAMESMON PC OFM

India successfully managed the soft landing of Chandrayan 3 on the Moon's south pole, a first by any country so far. It carried the dreams and aspirations of millions of people from India, both in and around the world. What makes it even greater is the fact that Russia had attempted a soft landing a few days before India, but was unsuccessful. The rover from within the lander has already begun its specific work and will continue to explore the Moon's surface for fourteen earth days. But as a nation, have we really landed?

The earth's surface has a different story to tell. This morning, we were deeply disturbed by the sight of a teacher in a classroom calling on the students, one by one, to slap a boy who belongs to a particular religion. She does it with great impunity. This video is making rounds as I write this little article. The classrooms are the temples of learning, learning to respect, care and work together. Learning to respect the differences and learning to agree to disagree and still be friends. The roots of hatred towards the other who doesn't belong to my religion, caste or ethnicity are now fostered and nourished in the primary class rooms. The boy who was thrashed is deeply traumatised and it might take days or even months for him to believe that the earth is habitable.

The Prime Minister who came to congratulate the scientists and the staff at ISRO in Bengaluru stated that the spot where Chandrayan landed will be known as 'Shiva Shakthi'. There is no problem in naming it that way. But, in the given situation in India, the statement and the decision reeks of favouritism and an objective of patronizing a particular religion. The success of the mission is the result of the collective effort of hundreds of scientists and other personnel, who belong to all kinds of faith and also people who do not have any religion, whatsoever. A neutral stand is called for, especially at such important decisions. In India, scientific temper has truly taken a beating. In the case of progress, we take one step forward and two steps backward. India will continue its space program, but the ground report is not very encouraging. We haven't yet landed where we should.



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



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

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



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

Little Sisters of the Poor

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