

# together

a national family magazine



## aftermath of bloody conflicts

Kashmir:  
**Nightmares  
and Dreams**

NASHAFA FIRDIOUS

10

Manipur:  
**The Problem  
of Periphery**

KAPIL ARAMBAM

12

Tibet: CCP's  
**Paranoia over  
Tibetans' Faith**

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**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](mailto:editor@togethermagazine.in) before the 15th of every month.

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Franciscan Publications – Together, South Indian Bank, Branch: Christ University, A/c. No. 0396053000005736, IFSC: SIBL0000396, MICR: 560059010

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

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## ADVERTISING IN TOGETHER (PER ISSUE)

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

## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	1 year	3 years
India	₹350	₹1,000
Other Countries	US \$55	US\$160

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# Voices of Casualties: From the Borderlands to the Millet Fields of Uttar Pradesh

Now, as it was then, warfare is the most destructive activity known to humankind. Why then doesn't our knowledge lead us to quit it? Why is it so difficult to stand the other and their liberties? Why don't we settle for peace? Why do facts have no bearing on our decisions, voting, and more? Are we sold out to the era of post-truth?

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

## Weapons of war to weapons of work

The word weapon has an unholy origin. No one knows its father or mother. In the beginning there were only weapons of work – instruments of gathering and farming. In the Bible there is a brutal story of Cain killing Abel his brother. Cain took Abel for a walk into his fields; from the peaceful stillness of the fields the first war cry was heard -brother forcing brother to death. We still hear the cries of the innocent from the fields; in recent times, it has become inconsolably loud from the millet fields of Uttar Pradesh. Cain picked up one of his weapons of cultivation and murdered Abel. Perhaps that was the beginning of fields becoming battlefields, instruments of cultivation becoming weapons of war. We need to go back to the fields of cultivation and beat weapons of war into instruments of farming; beat our swords into ploughshares.

A sketch of the Peace Monument sculpture at The UN Headquarters in New York

## We have had many, but not one we remember with joy

Our history is sauced with the blood of wars, conflicts and genocides. Sauces perhaps make the dish sensational and exciting. But it is the meat in the dish that has known the heat of the fire. Whose bloody wars and conflicts are these? Do the soldiers have the freedom and knowledge as to why be they on the frontlines of attack, and why have they put their lives on the line? Did the 19 year old on the millet fields of Uttar Pradesh know, why she? Who listens to their answers? Who cares for their questions? People, at the table, have grown insensitive, indifferent. We may have questions only when we become the menu on someone else's table.

Wars and conflicts – from World Wars to tribal wars: we have seen enough of them, but not one do we remember with joy. Wars and political conflicts render people homeless and create refugees. Human rights, rape, torture, violence, mass killing, and trauma perhaps are not our day to day vocabularies. But they are rapidly becoming day to day vocabularies of an increasing number of people in our country and of those around us.

Listen to Clemantine Wamariya, an unfortunate casualty of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, who is left to tell us about the war and genocide; and what occurred after. In her own words, "Genocide does not indicate what this does to a nation. Neighbours and friends kill each other. Someone here says, those over there, they don't belong, and people believe it; and the war begins." War often begins far away on the borders, but sooner or later it reaches our home. It displaces people from their homes and homeland. Wamariya recalls with sighs the days after she and her sister were out of their home, "you hide, crawl and run, days are for hiding, nights are for running. You move from a person away from home to a person with no home. You are a refugee. You begin to see bodies not breathing.

You are not so much used to it... Years are spent as refugees, always thinking that someone will accept us as their own."

## The need of the hour

What have we, as a humanity, learned from the small and big wars and conflicts in the world? Certain acceptance, some introspection, and radical choices which may take humanity a long way. I believe that the human capacity for invention and innovation is greater now than it was thousands of years ago when humans conceived the idea of war first. We must teach ourselves that our success does not rest on the destruction of the other. We must make radical choices.

## Teach undistorted history in schools and institutions

When a man/woman is honoured or praised by one as a freedom fighter; and is vilified by another as a terrorist, there is definitely something wrong. Either one or both of them have become too parochial, self-centered and small. Teach undistorted history in schools and institutions. If we are not objective beyond our narrow patriotism, our history books will become ovens that guard the simmering coals of revenge, which will be passed on to this generation who otherwise are busy building their lives on progress, modernity and enlightened thoughts. Perhaps the tragedy has already happened. A young people's poll in Britain shows that a significant number of young people in Britain are proud of the Empire (the British Empire about which the hyperbolic compliment was made as an empire on which sun never sets); and they would love to have it back. Have they any idea as to what they are proud of; and at what expense they love to have it back? So they and we have to be taught undistorted history dispassionately. They must know that it was an empire, like many other empires, built on the bloody conquest, exploitation, plunder, death and anguish of innumerable people. There is nothing that causes greater human



anguish than wars and political conflicts. It is a huge waste of human potentials.

**All have said lies; some perhaps have said it first**

Being gifted with an amazing past is great. Being gifted with an amazing ancestry is great. Being gifted with amazing abilities is great. The relevant question for the present is; where do we go from there? The biblical people of Israel, lived in the glory and memory of their past. They were obsessed with the fact, utilizing the expressions of St. Peter from the bible, that they were a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people set apart. There were many stories to underline these beliefs. I would say that these stories were quite subjective, and at times they were even myths. They have also become part of sacred scriptures. They were canonized, as others did with their religions and with their stories. They were posited as the objective truth in quite early times. In recent times there are other organized religious groups who are trying to do the same in India and elsewhere. Of course this makes us angry. I think it is an exercise in humility to know, that all have said lies but some have said it first. And just because they did so first, it sounds more like the truth.

Today people are on a mad rush to authenticate their stories and disprove and overthrow others' stories. In that mad rush to validate what they hold as their great past, people, societies, and nations cross one another's paths. And when they cross paths not everyone manages to cross over. People die. Societies disappear. Nations become territories terrorized by the more powerful. I would go with the wisdom that proposes: humanity is not for religion; instead religion is for humanity.

**Men must take some blame, and perhaps leave the reigns to women**

Men, take an unflinching introspective look at your own selves. I paraphrase what Hector Garcia, a scholar of war studies and a clinical psychologist, had said, in our world a definite initiator and doer of violence is a single demographic -men. The vast majority of every conceivable violence; from spousal abuse to gang rapes to mob fights to world wars is committed by men. Men will go to war for the sake of honour,

and patriotism, and to protect their homeland; but, although unmentioned, most of the times, there is also an ancient and powerful reward for war, which is mostly in the subconscious minds of men, and that is, sex. Hector establishes that this is true also of male apes, chimps, monkeys, and other animals. He researches further back into history. In hunter-gather society, the powerful men in the tribes waged war against the next tribe and took their women away. In the Stone Age, women of reproductive age were not killed but taken captive. How do we know that? In many war sites their skeletons were absent. In Bible, Moses is ordered to conquer and kill all the men, boys, and old women and take the young girls who had never slept with men as captives. Everybody has blood on his hands. In the Guinness Book of World Records for the greatest number of offspring goes to the infamous blood thirsty Moroccan sultan called, Moulay Ismail Ben Sharif. He had 888 or more children, and had 500 concubines. How did Ismael manage to get all these? Yes, you are right. It was by raiding his neighbours.

Maybe, gone are the days of taking women captive away, because now men are civilized; they love to parade their impeccable social status. So the modus operandi is changed. Modernity has witnessed the terrible malevolence of wartime rape. The numbers are alarming; during the Bosnian genocide there were 50,000 rapes, the Rwandan genocide had 250,000, In World War II the numbers go up to 2 million and more. Every war, every political conflict has had as many or even more numbers. Rape is used as a device to subdue and terrorise people. The inconsolable cry that was heard from the battlefields then, is now heard from the millet fields of Uttar Pradesh, and from many other fields of many other states as well.

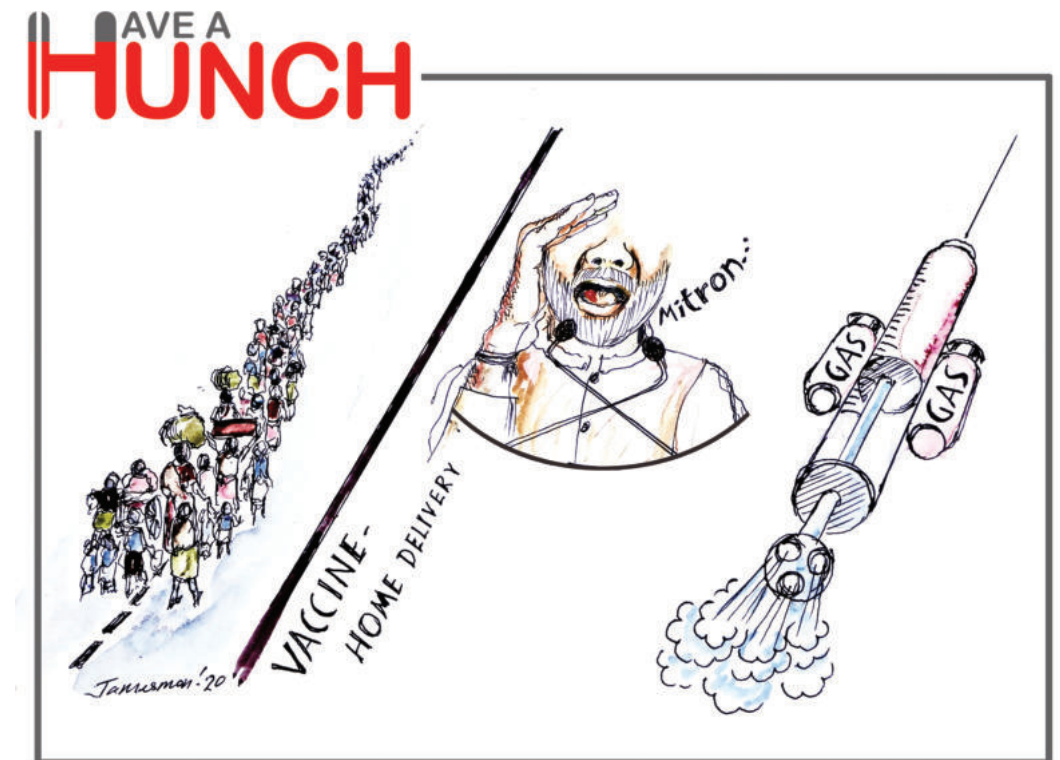
What do we do in such situations? Throughout our history, men have dominated the positions of political power. I stand with Hector Garcia who proposed, that when the ratio of women in governance increases nations are less likely to use military force to solve conflicts with other nations. Military expenditure will go down and we will witness greater political stability. Our success lies perhaps in transcending our biology

and biological dominance. As a distant and wild thought, one could say, that artificial intelligence has transcended the limitations of human biology. It does not discriminate. Will there be a time when artificial intelligence, which has already taken over much of our routine mental engagements, also take up the reigns of the nations; and humanity will thus move to live in greater peace?

**Choice. Choice. Choice.**

The power to choose, the possibility of choice, the urge to make choices has set the present generation apart from bygone generations. Civilized choice-making is the key. In one of the recent international conventions on climate change, the leader of a developing country, justified his country's right to exploit nature with the logic that so far a few countries had taken the largest slices of the cake. (meaning, they had taken

the maximum resources out of the earth and had thereby contributed to the maximum in carbon rise), it is only now we are arriving on the stage, let us also have a fair slice of the cake for a while before we think of ecology and initiate restrictions. That perhaps is clever thinking, but an absolutely self-destructive logic whether we apply it to ecology or political and economic power. I remember reading how a childhood incident that took place with his grandparents taught the exceptionally clever Jeff Bezos – who later founded the Amazon – that “Cleverness is a gift, but kindness is a choice”. It is harder to be kind, sensitive, and inclusive than to be clever, successful and endlessly lucrative. It is only that harder path that will take us to our future. The future may not be crafted by governments, but by individuals, families and communities and their initiatives. What is your initiative towards peace? What is your choice, war or peace? ■





**W**ars, conflicts and hostilities are like a boomerang, the better you get at launching it, more accurately it gets back to hit you.

The cover story explores the ways in which wars, conflicts and hostilities have ravaged people and places. The stories here are by and about the lesser ones – the victims; about whom the supposed victors never speak out, or write about in the history books. The stories here are about thoughtless aspirations and selfish deeds of the powerful who live in the constant fear of losing their powers. Wars, conflicts and hostilities prove to be readily available tools for one-sided political peace, prejudiced religious harmony and unfair economic pursuit. Watch out for the power brokers and their narratives.

# aftermath of bloody conflicts



# NIGHTMARES AND DREAMS: THE KASHMIRI SAGA

NASHAFA FIRDIOUS

## Children of Kashmir

**W**ar, stone pelting, firing, shelling are the words that I have grown up hearing. Kashmir has always been a hotbed of conflict and we Kashmiri children are called, "Children of the conflict". I have seen bloodbath, deaths of nears and dears, military raping women, killings of civilians and what not. Life has been a little harsh on me. I haven't had a blossomy childhood, for I know how many encounters I have heard about, crackdowns by military forces and abduction of political leaders. All these things have been lingering up in my mind. I remember how my grandmother used to tell me tales about the happy Kashmir. How it was named as a paradise on earth; and why people are after Kashmir. I mostly feel that people are not interested in Kashmiris, but are after Kashmir; want to exploit the unexplored resources of Kashmir. It is merely a beautiful piece of land to Non-Kashmiris. But for us, it is home, a feeling of love, an essence of true beauty and spirituality. I worship Kashmir. Kashmir is the metaphor of all my poems.

## Caught in between

Pondering on my teenage years gives me a spine chilling feeling. How Kashmiris have become puppets in the hands of government and militants! In the midst of the cease-fire common people suffer the most. On 5 August, 2019, article 370 was abrogated. It wasn't anything less than a shock for us. It was a murder of the statehood of Kashmir. Kashmir was declared as a union territory at midnight. In the name of development the whole of Kashmir was reduced to an



overpowered land. Our news channels were banned, Internet was snapped, and still remains snapped in many areas.

Curfew was imposed and every movement was curtailed. I must say if this is how the development looks like, we were better off as an underdeveloped state.

Growing up and living as a Kashmiri isn't an easy thing. Each day, when we go out, we have to face the army, who is right outside our houses. When we move about in our own valleys and towns we have to prove our identity to strangers in war uniform and wearing war ammunitions; we have to prove our identity to visitors. It slowly kills my proud idea of my Motherland whose anthem I sing and whose flag I salute as a proud Indian. What I told you about is the happenings of ordinary day; there are extraordinary, unfortunate days too. Army has got the power to abuse us, manhandle us, and accuse us of anything and everything. On the one side, we are victims of visible and invisible militancy; on the other side, people in war uniforms and with ammunitions. Caught in between, the Dal Lake and the inhabitants around are frozen in silence, fear and shame.

## An outsider in our own motherland

I remember, when I moved out of Kashmir for my studies to cultured and educated Indian cities, people encountered me with weird and odd questions, questions even as suggestive as, "Have you ever held a gun? Are you by any chance related to any terrorist groups?" In other words, the questions imply to probe, are you not a militant? Are you not one of them? It wasn't

something I liked. It hit hard and shook me from inside. I used to sit quiet and say nothing, for I had nothing to say. I know I can't change their prejudiced and stereotypical opinion. No one possesses or holds out a gun like one possesses or holds out umbrellas on a rainy day. We are as petrified by guns and gunshots as everybody else. We too are ordinary people struggling to live. Those questions were not just slaps on my face, but slaps on the face of democracy. Every Kashmiri, who steps out into the other parts of Mother India faces similar queries. At times, the trial ends in questions and questioning; at other times, people are not interested in our answers, they proceed with the verdict and punishment. Yet other times, it is still worse, no questions are asked, people just do to us what our country and the neighbouring country collectively do to our homeland – physically overpower.

## Mental health issues are on the rise

Here in Kashmir its common to hear stories like, Mr. so and so went to buy bread and milk for his family, and what came back was his body, his bullet-ridden body. That is how cheap and inexpensive the life of a Kashmiri is. Statistics and numbers say that millions of people in Kashmir suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Kashmir has the highest number of mental illnesses. The answer to the question why is obvious. Continued conflicts and war make people stressed and anxious. I myself suffer from anxiety. And this anxiety is not a normal one. On hearing about innocent people dying, my anxiety turns out to be a panic attack. I don't know how much more we Kashmiris would have to see. Mental health issues are rising day by day;

and all I can see is a black hole, which sucks all the energy out of us. It gets very exhausting to try to get up and act normal every day.

## The nightmare and the dream

Conflict is another name for Kashmir. This conflict is a nightmare, an unending nightmare. Young, old, middle aged and infants, all see it every day. Sometimes I feel sick about people, like, why aren't they helping us out? What is wrong in asking for freedom? Freedom to live, freedom to walk without fear, freedom to breathe, freedom to feel free on our own land, freedom from shackles of slavery, freedom to live with dignity and peace. Peace, well if asking for peace is too much, then I don't know what is less? I keep wondering, isn't it our basic right? Hatred for Kashmiris and calling them Pro-Pakistanis isn't just and fair. We too are humans like any other person. We aren't pro-Pakistanis or anti-nationalists. We are Kashmiris. I am a Kashmiri, who longs to live in peace and die with dignity. I yearn to sit by the banks of Dal-lake and cry my heart out and ask people, why us? Always us. Aren't we humans, may be a little fragile, yet your part? Then why our rights are being denied each time we decide to become your part. When will this binary between you/us and them end? I don't want to take never for an answer. All I can say is, I wish I could rip open my heart and show everyone that Kashmir and Kashmiris need to be heard, and we all long to live in peace and die with dignity. Peace is our dream. ■

Read the full article on [www.togethertomorrow.in](http://www.togethertomorrow.in)

**Nashafa Firdous Mir** is from Srinagar, Kashmir. She loves to write, recite poetry, read books and enjoy chai.



# THE PROBLEM OF PERIPHERY

A recollection on the difficulty of conflict resolution in Manipur, as it survives in a suffocating and peripheral corner as one of the Indian provinces plagued by issues of unrest and insurgency

KAPIL ARAMBAM

About the conflict situation in Manipur today, perhaps the less said, the better. Bordering Burma to the south and east, Assam to the west, Nagaland to the north and Mizoram to the south, the province is home to numerous armed organisations fighting for issues ranging from sovereignty and the right to self-determination to the formation of administrative districts. For the government, these issues have been bracketed with problems of unemployment, law-and-order condition or at worst, domestic issues of the union. Such an approach—without the consideration of political and historical narratives—is utterly ineffective, which is quite apparent from the fact that Manipur is also home to one of the oldest armed movements in the world today.

We can find countless literature on prolonged conflict situations in India, but unfortunately, when it comes to discussion on their resolution, the reference is made from the State's perspectives and hardly from that of its constituents and primary stakeholders in most of the cases.

Nevertheless, if we have to talk about Manipur then inevitably we need to consider the fact that many of India's 'positive' aspects, which are shown by its economic growth, success stories of liberalisation and FDIs, a self-reliant government and the likes, are no less than alien terms in the province. Picture this. India is the largest democracy while we have a state with heavy militarisation as well the army playing a substantial role in civil administration. The country is one

of the emerging economies in the world, while we are trapped in a developmental time-warp. These are just a couple of random examples.

It follows that we have to locate India in this conflict—not only because it is a party to the conflict but also as a whole of the parts. It is a given that geographically, Manipur is stuck in a literal periphery but when it comes to solving the problems, its location needs to be moved towards the centre. Coincidentally, radical guerrillas believe that revolution must start from the countryside and end at the centre. For Manipur, the starting and the ending points are seemingly a chimera.

One of the origins of the present conflict lies in the merger of Manipur into India by coercion. The erstwhile kingdom had transformed from a monarchy to democracy, with its own elected representatives and a written Constitution. India, in 1949, did not even have its Constitution but by virtue of its strength and manipulation, it annexed the independent infant 'nation-state' through arm-twisting methods while disregarding all sorts of existing political norms and international laws.

Today, it has become the issue of a minority group, further moving away from the distant centre.

History is witness to the fact that a more powerful centre will always dictate and capitalise on the periphery in politics, economics and even in the domain of culture. This is also apparent from the never-ending process of Indianisation in Manipur.



Manipur's search for locating itself at the centre of the conflict-resolution process continues

A major contention from the mainland is that India is a developing country and that there are numerous territories and people, who have no access to the basic infrastructure. However, a majority of them had existed as a people with a common history, culture and tradition or briefly, they share the idea of Indian nation-hood unlike in some of these strife-torn provinces like Manipur and Nagaland.

Besides the historical and cultural gaps, there are also numerous cases of violations and subjugation. Earlier this year, *The Indian Express* published a news report that mentioned: "the 'Human Rights Alert and Extrajudicial Execution Victim Families Association Manipur had earlier filed a petition in the Supreme Court to probe into as many as 1,528 alleged fake encounters in Manipur, which they claimed were perpetrated by the Army, paramilitary forces and Manipur Police.' (*The Indian Express*, 12 January 2020)

The problem is with the periphery and its inability to occupy a central position. One of the causes is New Delhi's strategic moves to make Manipur over-dependent. Political observers express that New Delhi has been using the four Kautilyan principles of reconciliation-split-force-and-monetary inducement to solve the crisis of insurgency, but ground realities tell a different story. Ironically, the matrix is illustrated in inimitable ways. With the rise of political mobilisation in the hill areas of Manipur, the Meiteis have become the irresponsible

Big Brother while the Nagas—hopefully—are only a few agreements away from signing the final peace deal, if we go by official reports. Somehow, Nagaland, under the aegis of NSCN (IM), has been able to place itself favourably in this political theatre. Good for them but the reality remains unchanged: we live in the periphery and a lot of conditions are set at the centre with consent or without. The current stalemate between the IM group and the Government of India, with both the sides blaming each other for stalling the peace process, is a consequence of this politics without consent.

Manipur is trapped in the periphery but not as any entity that can detach itself easily. For the province, with an international border merely 120 kilometres away to its east, the elected representatives have to go 2,400 kilometres towards the west, to New Delhi precisely, to air the mortal grievances. No wonder then, all it has are internal issues that can be solved amicably but which has hardly been done so.

To conclude, the result might not be achieved instantly by moving towards the centre. Since it is unimaginable with the present economic condition, the armed organisations believe their tactics have the leverage to do so. One way or the other, Manipur needs a fresh pair of eyes to re-look into its absurd politics that should start with the understanding that there is an out-and-out political conflict. In the meantime, though as elusive as it may seem, its search for locating itself away from the periphery continues. ■

# AN UNSETTLED LAND: CCP'S PARANOIA OVER TIBETANS' FAITH

For the fifth year running, Freedom House has ranked Tibet the second least-free region in the world. And it's no surprise at all!

TENZING WANGDAK

## The Paranoia

What is the common thread running through: one, two high profile trips to Tibet, and two, the 7th Tibet Work Forum held in Beijing? The answer – The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) increasing paranoia over maintaining “social stability” and viewing religion as a prime source of insecurity and threat to the “Motherland”. Towards that purpose, the CCP has augmented its control over the occupied territories of Tibet and sought to increase its intrusive surveillance network over Tibetans.

The two ‘high profile’ trips in question are the rare visits of China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi on August 16th and of Wang Yang, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, from August 24th to August 26th. During the two-day Tibet Work Forum held in Beijing, Xi Jinping propagated building a “new modern socialist Tibet”. He also advocated that “national and ethnic unity” be developed, for Tibetan Buddhism should be guided in adapting to the socialist reality of Chinese society.

## Under the cover of Covid-19

During this Covid-19 pandemic, Xi Jinping's regime has come under intense

scrutiny, especially over its handling of this worldwide pandemic and their curtailing of information over the spread of the virus and the international antagonism it has displayed over this issue. What received less attention are the alarming upgrades that the CCP conducted for its existing surveillance network, particularly in areas it deems as being “ethnic minority regions” such as Tibet and East Turkistan (Xinjiang). Be it the Alipay Health Code that has been deployed in multiple cities, which tracks people according to their health status, or the facial recognition technology developed by companies such as Megvii and Sense Time or the alarming number of CCTV cameras installed (numbering almost 350 million), all these technological advances serve the State's purposes, beyond the professed goal of curbing the spread of the virus.

## Attempt to bring Tibetan Buddhism under Government power

Tibet has borne the brunt of such measures ever since its forceful occupation, more than six decades ago. This event saw the emergence of experiences that significantly worsened since it saw the dawning of large scale anti-CCP protests, in the region, which extended to the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the subsequent

self-immolations by Tibetans (156 and counting) from 2009 onwards. The recent statements, as mentioned earlier by China's top brass, indicate that the Tibetans' Buddhist faith continues to be viewed as a major threat, one that needs to be Sinicised & institutionalized under government control. The most significant affront to the sentiments of Tibetans, all over the world, remains the passing of the State Religious Office Bureau Order No. 5, in 2007, that mandates that all reincarnations be subjected to state approval. It is an Act bound to have immense consequences on the future of Tibetan Buddhism and the spiritual leadership of the Dalai Lama. It's an issue that China seeks to usurp just as it attempted to do with the State kidnapping of the 6-year-old Panchen Lama, in 1995, one of the highest religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism.

According to official statistics, as of 2014, there were 3,600 active Tibetan Buddhist monasteries or temples and 1,48,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns throughout Tibet and China, illustrating the particularly important position that religious institutions hold in Tibetan communities. Of these, 1,787 religious sites and over 46,000 monks and nuns are reportedly located within the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). It is this demographic and set of institutions that the CCP seeks to place under its control. The year 2020 has seen increasing surveillance of religious sites in Tibet as well as ‘education camps’ for monks and nuns. Experts and observers have noted that religious centres are seen as potential sources of dissent against the CCP and efforts have been made to preemptively deter them from happening.

## Surveillance and control

The surveillance, and thereby control, over religion extends beyond the confines of monasteries. Tibetans observing the holy Buddhist month of Saga Dawa, in May, have been notified of tight restrictions on their religious activities. Saga Dawa occurs on the full moon, the 15th day of the fourth Tibetan lunar month, which is called “Saga Dawa” in Tibetan. The Saga Dawa Festival celebrates the birth, parinirvana (death) and enlightenment of Buddha. The residents of Lhasa have been placed

under tight surveillance by both, the police as well as military personnel who regularly stop them and check their phones.

In fact, since 2012, there has been an increase in the number of religious festivals that are restricted by the authorities, including the celebration of the Dalai Lama's birthday. Along with strict restrictions, there has been a tightening of information control, with local internet and network blackouts being reported in the Tibetan regions. A 2016 Human Rights Watch report, analyzing 479 cases of politically motivated detentions of Tibetans from 2013 to 2015, identified 71 individuals arrested for distributing images or information, a large number of which were related to protests against CCP's intrusion into the Tibetans' Buddhist faith.

The objective behind such oppressive measures, which has a long precedence in the CCP's presence on the Tibetan plateau, since the early 1950s, has remained the Party's control over a region that it deems as vital to the nation state project of the People's Republic of China and also a volatile source of insecurity. For the fifth year running Freedom House has ranked Tibet, the second least-free region in the world. And it's no surprise at all! Since 2013, the government has been harvesting the DNA of people in Tibet and East Turkistan, a massive State-led project that continues to gain momentum in its efforts to trace the movements of every one of its citizenries.

Such intrusive actions of regimes reveal their dilemma of attempting to control and incorporate regions in its nation state narrative of a “United Chinese Motherland” and also its inability to deal with the reality that the people of these regions see – the CCP as a foreign colonial power. As a result, the faith of the Tibetans and Uighurs continues to be controlled, marginalized and assimilated by the CCP and General Secretary Xi Jinping.

Read the full article on [www.togethmagazine.in](http://www.togethmagazine.in)

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# Conversations in the Time of Sanitisation



**The first time she was taken to the police, she was ridiculed and sent back. If she did not have hope in justice, decision making and seeking the truth I do not believe she would have persisted her case along with her family.**

ROSHAN

**H**ave we noticed the impact news of sexual violence has on our household? For far too long we have sanitised conversations on justice, decision making and the truth; beginning from our homes this sanitisation happens in an elegantly poor and subversive manner. So how have we dealt with news of sexual violence within our household, work places, classrooms, buses, trains, restaurants, discos, farmlands, factories, offices, media houses, religious spaces, political parties, public spaces and government spaces?

## Walk down public memory lane

It took the media to report on a young physiotherapy intern who was horrifically raped on a moving bus in the capital of our nation, for lawmakers to review the Indian Penal Code. She was sanitised as Nirbhaya – the girl into whose vagina a rode was inserted, and continually raped by five males. In response, the Justice Verma Commission worked in depth with a network of informed and concerned citizens. NGOs, individuals did their part in seeing to the compilation and processing of data received with Justice Verma at the forefront. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 was eventually passed, but criticised for not meaningfully considering the recommendations and suggestions of the Justice Verma Committee.

Seven years on, as of March this year, hours before the hanging of the convicts who raped and murdered Nirbhaya only 36% of the Nirbhaya Fund had been used; in other words the Fearless Fund was sparingly used. In the meanwhile,

what hit news headlines were the gangrape of a photojournalist in Mumbai; two teenage girls were gangraped, murdered and hung from their necks on the branches of a Mango tree; a law student in Ernakulam was gangraped and murdered – she was stabbed over 30 times on her chest (it did not stop there); another girl lured into employment was duped and raped multiple times, before being sold off and violated again in Unnao; a Hyderabad based veterinary doctor was gangraped and murdered, her body left burnt on the highway. A 19 year old girl from Hathras was gangraped on September 14, and succumbed to her injuries on September 29. Later the same day in Balrampur a 22 year old Second Year Degree Commerce student was gangraped when she was returning home. She bore severe injuries on her body, and couldn't even make it alive to the hospital.

In the case of the young woman who was gangraped in Hyderabad justice was processed differently. The accused, Mohammed Arif, a lorry driver and cleaner, boys Naveen, Shiva and Chennakeshavulu were killed in a police encounter. However in the case of the Dalit girl from Hathras, for the accused Ram Kumar, Ravi Singh, Sandeep Thakur and Luvkush Thakur it was quite different. A former Minister of Parliament called for a Mahapanchayath in his residence in support of the accused. The complaint was filed only after six days of the rape. One of the accused Ravi and his father had been arrested previously for assaulting her grandfather around 20 years ago. Yes, this complexity is what gets easily sanitised

into a hypothetical universe where everyone is equal, and by virtue of forgetfulness, justice is served without anybody being told what to do. How delightful, but sorry to burst your bubble – structural violence is an unequal playing ground, culturally rooted in a prejudice that is disseminated through an educated intolerance. Sexual violence therefore is a display of power to enforce a sense of prejudiced superiority.

## Sanitising complexities

How does news of sexual violence impact our boys and men? I am no super expert on this, but timely sanitising of this impact on our male population has been the most successful. The sanitisation of complexity becomes the alibi – it is so difficult to talk about it, we may end up being politically incorrect, how to mention words like penis, vagina, rape and sexual over the dining table to our family who we have known almost forever. So, we continue to say a prayer, feel spiritually cute and sanitise our insight more intensely so that the next time our eyes meet indicators, symptoms or actually instances of sexual violence – we promptly sanitise the Jyoti Singhs into Nirbhaya (fearless), chant hashtags on social media.

## Still more alive than dead

I wonder how she would have processed those final moments before her death. The first time she was taken to the police, she was ridiculed and sent back. If she did not have hope in justice, decision making and seeking the truth I do not believe she would have persisted her case along with her family. She would not have appeared for a delayed medical examination by the police, intended to very well erase primal evidence establishing rape. She would not have recorded her statement twice over when the police finally registered the complaint. I believe she did this simply because she was more alive in all her feeble strength trying to wake us up from our sanitised existence. She would never have wished the same for any other son, brother, father, grandfather, uncle, nephew, male friend, boyfriend, husband, brother-in-law, father-in-law and all the other types of the male population to experience the real price of sanitising the complexity of a girl, a woman who faces violation, is murdered and denied a humane funeral.



## She did not scream

A young Adivasi girl from Mathura who went to settle a domestic dispute in the police station in 1972, returned raped by two policemen in the police station. Orphaned and illiterate she went to the courts. The Sessions Court called her a 'shocking liar' amongst other things and acquitted the accused. The Bombay HC found the policemen guilty and convicted them. The Supreme Court in 1978 overturned the convictions; Justice A D Koshal said the young Adivasi girl had no bruises on her body and did not scream – therefore the sexual act was consented. 'She did not scream,' last month at 2:30 am the Hathras victim's body was burnt without the consent or awareness of her family. The police used petrol instead of sanitisers to burn her remains in the presence of the Hathras Superintendent of Police and the whole village, except her own family. She could not scream any more. ■

Read the full article on [www.togethmagazine.in](http://www.togethmagazine.in)

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# War and Art

War leaves its footprints in art. For most artists, the turmoil generated by war functioned as stimuli in many ways.

JERLY

## Violent method of solving conflicts

From time immemorial, war has always been with us as a violent means of solving disputes. Our hominid instincts push us to form groups. For an animal without sharp claws and teeth, there is no other way to survive. For every group, there must be an 'out group'. Each 'in group' must fight with the neighbouring out groups to protect their hunting grounds. After the development of agriculture, new areas of disputes opened up. Disputes over the hunting grounds now changed to control over pastures and fields. When we turn more and more territorial, the aggression increased exponentially.

Prehistoric communities fighting each other for the control of food and land gradually evolved into tribes and eventually lead to the formation of nations. In modern times, war is defined as the armed conflict between nations. Some time the conflict is between various groups inside the nation itself. These conflicts resulted in civil wars. The history of the world is primarily the history of war because the boundaries of nations were established through wars.

This violent method of solving conflicts between nations reached its pinnacle in the twentieth century in the form of two world wars. Millions of people got annihilated during those wars and many more got dispossessed from their home lands. With the development of nuclear weapons, the bloodshed during war crossed its limits.

## The artists' muse

We always consider war as the mother of all evils. But even the worst things have a positive outcome. War is no exception. It leaves its footprints in art. For most artists, the turmoil generated by war functioned as stimuli in many ways:

For some artists war is only a subject with

immense possibilities to exhibit their skill and control over the medium. The presentation of large number of figures in action presents the artists with a formidable technical challenge. Sometimes wars never fought also become the subject of art. In India, war described in the epic Mahabharata was a favourite subject for artists. M. F. Hussain's famous Mahabharata series is an excellent example of this kind. In western art there are so many works depicting Trojan War. 'The building of Trojan horse', a painting by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo richly illustrates a crucial scene from Homer's 'Illiad'. Even the artists of the prehistoric era, depicted the scenes of such conflicts on the walls of caves. The first recorded wars between organized armies fought by the city states of Sumer in the third millennium also leave such artistic remains on clay tablets.

Another genre of artists (usually commissioned by Rulers or inspired by the spirit of nationalism) celebrates war victories with their paintings and sculptures. The Assyrian clay relief (650BCE) which adorned the walls of the palace of the Assyrian Emperor Ashur Banipal at Nineveh celebrates the Assyrian triumph over the Elamites. 'The Alexander mosaic' (anonymous) of 333BCE, illustrating the victory of Alexander the Great over Darius III at the battle of Issus also is of this kind. Such paintings and reliefs simply neglect the horrors of war and glorify the achievements of the conquerors.

A third kind of artists use their artistic skills to attract the attention of their fellow beings towards the brutalities of wars. Paul Peter Ruben's 'The consequences of war' belongs to this sort. Such works always support the pacifist movements all over the world and declare the social commitment of the respective artist. The most famous antiwar painting – Pablo Picasso's



'Guernica' depicts the misery of modern war in general as for atrocity in the Spanish war. It was inspired by the bombing of the Basque civilian town Guernica by German bombers on 26 April 1937. Half of the town got devastated and nearly 1600 defenceless civilians lost their lives and many more got wounded. This tragic incident was the sole inspiration behind this great cubistic painting. It proclaims the dreadful consequences of war to the inhabitants of this planet.

Artists like Francisco de Goya use their medium to express the anxiety and pain experienced by them during the days of war. When he gets trapped in an era of darkness, Goya etched a series of 76 plates titled 'The disasters of war' which shares a disturbing insight into the monstrosities of Spanish war of independence (1810-14). A work by the surrealist Salvador Dali 'Spain' expresses the sorrow and distress felt by him during the Spanish civil war (1936-39) with the help of the universal language of art. A single stroke of brush by a talented artist can convey a lot more than a book on antiwar movement.

## Art as protest

In modern era, many artists use their brush as a means of protest, especially the Graffiti artists. They display their discontent on public places which can reach the public more effectively than a work exhibited in a gallery or a museum. If the Graffiti is photographed and shared in social media or published in print media then its impact will be unimaginable. This power is the root cause of repulsion experienced by Graffiti artists from authorities. Rulers usually treat them as antisocial elements, particularly during war or proxy war situations. During Vietnam War (1961- 73), an avalanche of such anti American-antiwar protest by the artists got triggered. These protests played a key role in the ultimate withdrawal of the American force from the Vietnamese soil. The undeclared war of Israel against helpless Palestinians also gets support from empathetic group of artists globally. 'The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist' (2018), a recreation of the stone statue of Lamassu by Michael Rakowitz at Trafalgar Square (London) also serves the same purpose. The original statue was destroyed by ISIS in the year 2015.

The impact of war on the movements in art is



Spain, 1936–38 by Salvador Dali

also worth mentioning. It is clearly visible in the post war era following the Second World War. Movements such as existentialism sprout from the chaos created by that Global disaster. In that dark period, humanity lost its faith on values and morals. The entropy of the time certainly reflects in the work of art during that era.

War is always barbaric, but throughout the history, attempts have been made to control its excess. Artists play an important role in these pacifist movements; directly or indirectly. ■

**Jerly K. J.** (Jerly Mash, as affectionately called by his students) is a teacher, environmentalist, musician, painter, author, columnist and above all a great human being.



# The Ultimate Boomerang of Human Brutality

Even before a war breaks out, the Earth suffers. Minerals, chemicals, and fuels are violently wrested from Earth's forests, plains, and mountains. War is nature's nemesis.

A FRANCIS OFM



## Nature and war

Nature and its bounties, from time immemorial, have been transposed as an integral strategic component in warfare and militarism. Obviously, this transposition of nature is not an unintended mishmash! From the first cave dweller who picked the twig from nature to fight against his neighbour, to us who resort to the highly sophisticated lethal weapons, have intentionally forced this timeless curse on nature! On the one hand, wars have been fought to satisfy man's misguided greed to appropriate and control natural resources. A 2013 UN Environment Programme report highlighted that '40 percent of all intrastate conflicts are connected with the exploitation of natural resources — land, water, diamonds, timber, minerals, and, oil.' On the other hand, in war, nature becomes the silent victim that suffers atrocious devastations. Gar Smith, an international environmental activist and author, presents a realistic impression on the continuum of war-related atrocities on nature, "Even before a war breaks out, the Earth suffers. Minerals, chemicals, and fuels are violently wrested from Earth's forests, plains, and mountains. Much of this bounty is transformed into aircraft, gunboats, bullets, and bombs that further crater, sear, and poison the land, air, and water of our living planet." He contends that war is nature's nemesis.

Warfare and militarism have the notorious history of inflicting brutal destruction on nature in measures we could never fully imagine. It is

little surprise that the details of these accounts don't make headlines in popular media and in nation-state briefings. Thankfully, environmental activists constantly lay bare the truth about the massive volume of destruction committed during wars, and in excessive militarism, even, in the time of peace. Robert Ross Brower, the founder of the Friends of the Earth International, telegrammed President Richard Nixon in 1970, protesting the US army's use of 'Agent Orange' during Vietnam war (1961-1971). 'Agent Orange', is a defoliant chemical, which destroyed over 3,100,000 hectares, approximately, 31,000 sq. km of forest with its wildlife species diversity.

Ecocide, which refers to the destruction of nature, is an intended effort in warfare and ironically, it has been a time-honoured wartime custom since ancient times. The early Roman and Assyrian armies were accused of committing the brutality of sowing salt in the farmlands of their enemies, turning them into barren wasteland unproductive for any agricultural purpose. The term "scorched earth" appeared in the lexicon as a war-related act. It refers to the intentional act of a warring army burning the crops and buildings that sustain their enemies. There are more heinous acts of ecocide committed during wars in our times. How will we ever forget the images of the 630 burning oilwells in Kuwait, that were torched by the retreating Iraqi army in 1991. The British daily newspaper, 'The Guardian' described this most inhuman act as 'advertising the inherent ecocide of war'.

## Warfare and militarism will lead to planetary 'Holocaust'

The modern warfare has, superseded all parameters of ecocide, qualifying itself capable of wreaking extreme levels of terracide, that is, the destruction of the whole earth - the planet, with its variety of life forms. Hiroshima and Nagasaki will always loom in front of us as humanity's collective trauma that triggers endless pangs of conscience, until the last human on earth! There had been shocking reports during the first gulf war, that the US used 320 tons of depleted uranium (DU) against Iraq. As a by-product of the uranium-enrichment process, DU is potential to contaminate land, water and air! In 2017, Foreign Policy (FP), an American news publication, reported the finding of a study undertaken collaboratively by FP and Airwars, another independent monitoring group, accusing the US army of firing depleted uranium munitions, in Syria.

The environmental damage, mounting to the proportion of ecocide and terracide, takes place not only in time of wars alone, but even in the so-called peace time, too, due to our involvement in excessive militarism. A 2019 study published by Brown University, throws light on the massive emission of Carbon dioxide by the U.S. military. As an institutional user, the U.S. Department of Defense leaves a larger carbon footprint than many nation-states in the world. Excessive militarism involves excessive emission of carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases.

Warmongers postulate many misleading platitudes for promoting wars and excessive militarism. The one most saleable, is the argument in favor of enhancing the security of nation-states. A dismal political cliché, indeed! Unfortunately, the morass of this political cliché seldom gets exposed and even the most reflective and the healthy minded fall for it.

In an open letter to President Regan, Robert Ross Brower, shouted it aloud to the whole world that our acts of warfare and militarism are leading us to a planetary 'Holocaust'. Rabindranath Tagore, the poet, cultural reformer and Nobel prize winner who vigorously opposed militarism, wrote about it most eloquently, a century ago in the book, 'On Nationalism', "If this persists indefinitely and armaments go on exaggerating themselves to unimaginable absurdities, and machines and storehouses envelop this fair earth with their dirt and smoke and ugliness, then it will end in a conflagration of suicide."

No doubt, the present-day warfare and militarism are ultimately pushing humanity to a one big self-defeating and self-destructive act of Suicide! Our so-called glamorous wars and militarism are navigating us to our own grave - yours, mine and everyone's! Paradoxical it is, as much as it could sound that although war turns nature into a 'silent casualty', as Ban Ki-moon, the former UN secretary General warned us, we the humans are the ultimate Victims! Call it, the ultimate boomerang of human brutality!

Human existence is deeply interconnected with the existence of nature. Our combined destinies, as intertwined as they are, demand that we treat nature not as a mere resource, but as the sustaining source for every form of life on the planet. This certainly, is a good-enough green rationale, for us to celebrate 'the international day for preventing the exploitation of the environment in war and armed conflict', on November 6th.

Read the full article on [www.togethermagazine.in](http://www.togethermagazine.in)  
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## THE LAST VILLAGE

## IN THE NORTHWEST FRONTIER OF KASHMIR

YUTIKA PAHUJA

Teetwal is located in the Karnah Tehsil of Kupwara district in Jammu and Kashmir, India. Nestled amid huge mountain ranges, green farmlands, and the river Neelam separating the two countries India and Pakistan, it is heavily guarded by the army on both sides. A bridge connecting the countries helps families unite who were once together and now separated during the formation of the Line of Control. Very few people have the permissions to cross over, due to the recent violent engagements, breaching the truce between the two countries.

As tourists, Kupwara received us hospitably; and our stay there was quite comfortable. The people around were caring and engaging. They talked about the issues that they had to face on a daily basis, such as the non-availability of network/internet, regular supply of fresh food and grocery items, etc. They only wanted us to spread the word in mainland India, so that responsible people, at the table and around the table, may know that they too look forward to a time of peace, and a place where their liberties are not constantly negotiated but respected. The policymakers must engage with people and land, show kindness to the troubled province by mutual generosity. The people there live in hopes of Azadi. ■



# Let's Work as a Global Community to Tackle Mental Health

We strive harder to learn the dynamics of augmented reality and we take pride in building our e-learning experiences and increase our relationships with our smart gadgets. But what about the real relationships that's breathing around us?



ROSELINE FLORENCE GOMES

## Mental health to the fore

Indian Mental Health at the moment is crippling with varied unheard thoughts, actions and emotions. As a psychologist and an educator when I started intervening as a counsellor and facilitator from March 2020 to now, I was amazed as to how we have changed our outlook towards ourselves, our peers, our family members and the community at large. Instead of becoming more compassionate towards the situation we have absorbed the paranoia and started seeing humans as a threat and increased our judgemental skills. It's heart-breaking to see how we as authority figures fail to recognise the needs and concerns of our children, the plight of our partners or spouses, the cries of our older citizens. During the lockdown, my encounter has been more with the youth as I had volunteered to guide them through counselling sessions in initiating skill enhancement and personal development. This lockdown has created an insecure space for the Indian youth with the addition of ever-demanding family members, educational institutions and occupational forums.

Mental health is our emotional state that guides our self-expressions and social interactions, and epitomises our approaches towards

personal and social judgement. It's the interplay of our emotions, thoughts and actions in our day to day world.

The National Mental Health Survey of India estimated the current prevalence of mental disorders in the age group of 18–29 years. Progression of mental disorders happens in the group of 13–17 years.

With this pandemic I have witnessed narrations of suicidal ideation, procrastination, self-harm, disbeliefs, insecurities about finances, jobs, relationships, parental verbal, physical and sexual abuse, overthinking, loneliness, anxiety, insomnia, and the list seem endless among our Indian Youth. At times, the elders normalise all their negative patterns of behaviours, which they term as disciplinary gestures.

## The online challenge

Online work has been the new lifestyle and we all have adapted to its nuances and upliftments. We pat our shoulders as we get along with the working of Artificial Intelligence each day. We strive harder to learn the dynamics of augmented reality and we take pride in building our e-learning experiences and increase our relationships with our smart gadgets. But what about the real relationships that's breathing

around us? Are we taking time to enhance the same and study the varied perspectives from our own people who strengthens our identities? All this burden the mental health and develop an unseen vacuum among all developmental age groups. At this moment of social crisis that we are collectively viewing, it is noticeable that we are spending most of our time in social media and facing the upheavals of cybercrime, cyberbullying, family conflicts, etc. There has been a lack of community involvement and communication. That's when the childhood trauma seems to be dominant as it affects our present adolescent or adult life.

## Self-sabotage behaviour

This lockdown has made me realise about a realistic concern that many youths faced in the sphere of mental health. It is termed as 'Self-sabotage Behaviour,' where the young are fearful about seeing change and uncertainty. Familiarization with situation feels comforting where an individual normalises the trauma. If the young are accustomed to be negated and ignored, they reinforce their thoughts of being victimised and get into the depth of 'learned helplessness' spheres.

## Towards better mental health

As a mental health professionals, there are some self-reflections that we all need to brainstorm about as a holistic unit. Family plays an important role in the Indian social structure as it symbolises culture and learning. It becomes toxic when the family forgets its role in terms of 'scaffolding' the newer generation by encouraging their strengths and not recognising only their weaknesses.

Mindfulness should be engraved into our daily working as it releases components of self-awareness and emotional regulation. Spirituality blended with consciousness delivers us from inhumane to humane practices. The ability to grasp and absorb newer conflicts or challenges would rejuvenate our abilities to bounce back and foster resilience. Favourable self-talk in applying positive affirmations are needed in building self-trust and faith in one's actions that further uplifts the personality. We should take feedback efficiently and move forward while

learning to work with rejection. Physical activities would release the happy hormone called 'Oxytocin' that is known as the love hormone which we can generate for our environment to build trust and social diversity. Thus, mastering one's social and emotional intelligence would establish self-reflective tendencies. Each one functioning in unity should believe in knowing one's worth and draw well-being. It's relevant to love and care for oneself because if we are unable to treasure our existence and see ourselves through the outer world, we can never form a holistic self-concept.

We have everything in abundance and that's our human resource. Let's not take artificial intelligence take over human relationships. When we were created, we were given innate tendencies to love without boundaries. Today we are blinded by the materialistic pleasures and personal expectations. These pandemic reflections have taught us life's important lessons, that is, to value all that we have before it becomes extinct — our individuality and mental willpower. Unless we appreciate our weaknesses, we will never be able to see our strengths. Unpredictability is the essence of life, and instead of asking 'why it happened,' if the focus shifts to 'what next?' then it will give us a new motive to live. We tend to blame the world for our present state, instead we need to see our flaws and transform them into opportunities for growth.

As I walk from my workspace towards my home, I come across many people. A few are craving for food, a few for education, a few for healthcare, a few for shelter, a few for employment, a few for clothes. Behind these apparent needs hide the initially invisible mental health pandemic. We ignore these features as we move away from them telling ourselves that it's not our responsibility. I suggest each one reading this to self-monitor actions, recreate thoughts and generate new behaviours to invent a global community in tackling mental health. ■

Read the full article on [www.togethmagazine.in](http://www.togethmagazine.in)

**Roseline Florence Gomes** is a professor of Psychology & Counsellor at Jyoti Nivas College Autonomous, Bangalore.





## Mother of the Handicapped, Angel of Pakistan! Sister Ruth Lewis FMCK

Sr. Ruth Lewis, fittingly called as the Mother Teresa of Pakistan, unbolted her heart and mind to the issues of challenged children on the streets of Karachi.

Neither Scarcities, nor inadequacies, or age, not even the pandemic could stop her caring for the children. She had no complains even when she was losing her personal battle with the Covid-19 virus; for she had courageously safeguarded her children from the jaws of the Corona virus. She cared and brought up her children (at times numbering over 300) with total human dignity. Four of her children won medals at the Special Olympics, held in the United States, in 1998. Karachi will always remember this angel's selfless service for the differently abled, socially displaced children and the elderly.

SR. FATIMA RODRIGUES FMCK

### Meagre beginnings

**H**ailing from Tamil Nadu, Sr. Ruth Lewis was born on 2nd May, 1943. She made her Religious Profession there, as a Franciscan Missionary of Christ the King (FMCK), in 1965, after which she left for Karachi. As she moved around the streets of that city, she saw children on the streets, helpless and in need of care. She was overcome with mixed emotions. The work she would soon embrace unambiguously points to one emotion that remained constant in her life – compassion. She wanted to start an institution for taking care of the children on the streets, but had meagre means to do so. But God had plans for her. She met Sr. Gertrude Lemmens FMCK (a Dutch National) and their dreams & thinking matched. Yes. Great people do think alike! In February 1969, they set up an institution called Dar-ul-Sukun (Home of Peace), to accommodate children with special needs together with physically challenged children; and even adults – for compassion has no limitations! In October 2000, after the demise of Sr. Gertrude, Sr. Ruth Lewis assumed full charge of Dar-ul-Sukun and carried forward her humanitarian mission. Since then, she has been the administrator of this well-known centre, which caters from 200 to 300 inmates. She did everything to manifest her ultimate love for her Master, Christ!

### A true woman of the 21st century

It takes a clear mind, a steady spirit and a brave soul to embrace the kind of challenges Sr. Ruth took up. She never believed in individuals leading inferior lives. She saw no human being as a menial and was quick to set right lowly attitudes towards any human beings. She did it through her life and work. Just as a mother loves her children, so did Sr. Ruth love the inmates. She often encouraged them to take the lead in sports & art activities. She was particularly proud of four of those children who won medals at the Special Olympics held in the United States, in 1998.

Sr. Ruth was a great pioneer and initiator. After co-pioneering Dar-ul-Sukun, she established many more centres, viz., a Home for Socially Displaced Boys (Quetta, 2007); a Home for Socially Displaced Girls (Muslimabad, Karachi, 2010), a Centre for the Elderly (Karachi, 2015); a Modern Rehabilitation Complex (Rashidabad, early 2020), as well as a new extension of the existing Dar-ul-Sukun Home.

Her great mission was noticed, acknowledged and awarded! She was bestowed with the...

- Pride of Karachi Award (18th January 2014): For her charitable, selfless and passionate service to 'Special Children'.
- Hakim Mohammed Sayed Award (2018): From the Governor of Sindh, for her exquisite services to the abandoned humanity.
- Less than a week after her death, the Pakistani Government posthumously awarded Sr. Ruth with the Sitara-e-Imtiaz (Civil Award), for being one of the best-known figures in national civil society in the Sindh.

Sr. Ruth was truly the Mother of the forgotten ones. She will always be remembered for her unparalleled contribution to humanity, and service to the inmates of Dar-ul-Sukun, for 51 long years.

### A life that made Karachiites believe in angels!

Modernity constantly looks for proofs and evidences. Though they were believers in God, Karachiites, in their eventful and busy life they had seldom seen Him or His messengers. This sister in a white sari, with crimson red borders, made them see and believe in realities that they had hitherto only heard of so far. She took the road less travelled, by average humans, and made a difference in the world. She took nothing, but gave everything; 51 years of life caring for children with disabilities in the port city of Karachi; and finally she even gave her very life for the same. They needed no further proof, they spontaneously called her, the Angel of Pakistan.



### The greater end

Sr. Ruth showed the same dedication and care for the 150 people hosted by Dar-ul-Sukun, when the novel Corona virus breached its doors. At least 21 children were tested positive for Covid-19, but Sr. Ruth strove on. She contracted the disease herself, and on 8th July was admitted to the Aga Khan Hospital, where she required ventilator support to stay alive. There, on 20th July 2020, the 77-year-old Sr. Ruth Lewis breathed her last.

The Sindh Government was well aware of her contributions, and the great vacuum she had left behind. People from all walks of life expressed deep grief on her demise:

- Many famous television channels in Pakistan, India and the Vatican flashed the shocking news of her death, calling it “a tragic loss”; praising her for her remarkable service.
- Imran Ismael, Governor of Sindh Province, described Sr. Ruth as a “True inspiration”, adding that Karachi would always remember her selfless service for the differently abled & socially displaced children and the elderly.
- Syed Murad Ali Shah, Prime Minister of Sindh Province, also expressed his sorrow and condolences on the occasion, saying, “She rendered

extraordinary services for children in need of special care in the Sindh province.”

- “Pakistan has lost a great asset,” expressed Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, daughter of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and former President Asif Ali Zardari.

The government did not stop with words, but paid all the hospitalization costs of Sr. Ruth. The team members of the Sindh Government stepped in, working in the specialized quarantine ward set up in the premises of Dar-ul-Sukun. The government also provided a grant of Rs. 25 million to provide assistance and medicines to the patients of Covid-19 residing at the Centre. Now we know why Sr. Ruth was fondly called... Mother of the Forgotten, Mama, Angel of Pakistan, Loving Mother, Devoted Soul and more!

The FMCK Congregation can only be grateful to God for giving it so great a soul to carry out His mission on earth. I pay my sincere and rich tributes to her service and ask the good Lord to reward her bountifully in heaven. May Her Soul Rest in Peace. ■

**Sr. Fatima Rodrigues FMCK** is the Superior General of the Congregation of Franciscan Missionaries of Christ the King.



## The Twilight

It is the mystery of the imperceptible interface, the delicate border and the inevitable transit. It seems closed and confounding, but is actually open to all gates. One can take any flight to the infinite sky. The pandemic is a twilight.

FR. K M GEORGE

The sun has just disappeared below the horizon. It is twilight. My photograph of the Kodoor and the rice fields beyond is tinted pink. A deep stillness and silence settle over the surroundings. Flocks of birds seen all over the sky some minutes ago have vanished to their nesting places. Grazing cattle have returned home. No breeze. No movement. No water lily bud has opened yet. Frogs and crickets are silent. Trees and plants become dark masses, sort of gestalt images, that ignore all details.

Twilight is a passage, a transit from day's light to night's darkness, and also from night to day. Some sensitive observers might feel, particularly at the evening twilight, a vague but deep nostalgia, for what, one doesn't know.

With the transition of light to darkness in the evening, or of darkness to light in the morning significant biochemical changes occur in all creatures. All plants, birds, animals and insects, both diurnal and nocturnal, respond to the change in their own ways. Humans seem to be the only species that deliberately ignores it. With artificial lights, intercontinental fast travel and unusual hours of global work style, and night-long entertainments they defy the natural rhythm of the Circadian cycle that attunes us to nature's benevolent order.

These are joints (*sandhi* in Sanskrit) of time. So *sandhya* is the joint of light and darkness. There is an evening *sandhya* as well as a morning *sandhya* though we popularly associate the word *sandhya* with the evening. There is also the division of the 24-hour day into *yaama* of

three hours each. So at the passage of every *yaama* there are prayers and rituals particularly in the monastic tradition. Umberto Eco's celebrated novel *The Name of the Rose* structured on the ancient Christian monastic practice of the canonical hours or offices at a medieval Benedictine monastery.

All religions have devised special rituals or prayers for these joints of time, particularly evening, noon and morning. One may say that it is an ancient and established way of dealing with the transition that frightens human beings. Passing of time is scary because the next moment is totally unknown and unpredictable. The spiritual practice of prayers and rituals at the *sandhis* or joints of time may be compared to maintaining the flexibility of the joints in our body by applying balms and medicinal oils.

The religious routine is understood to streamline the energy of the body and mind of the worshiper to a transcendent focus so that the uncertainty and anxiety associated with the transit of time is overcome. The scattering and chaotic effect of the passage of time in human psyche is minimised, and a sense of order is restored by the unwavering regularity of the prayers and rituals at every *yaama* or joint of time.

The twilight holds an elusive mystery. It is the mystery of the imperceptible interface, the delicate border and the inevitable transit. It seems closed and confounding, but is actually open to all gates. One can take any flight to the infinite sky. The pandemic is a twilight. ■



# A Political Call

**The real problem is that Fr. Stan has awakened the Adivasis to understand their rights to their land and homes. They have started resisting. They are demanding a share in the wealth that lies beneath their land. Fr. Stan asks, “Why truth has become so bitter, dissent so intolerable and justice so out of reach?”**

ALEX TUSCANO



## The call

**O**A young boy from Tiruchirappalli was called by God, like liberator Moses was called in the Bible, to go to the tribal region of Bihar/Jharkhand. After his priestly ordination on 14th April 1970 in the Society of Jesus (SJ), he left for Bihar/ Jharkhand to work with the Adivasis.

Stan believed that it was not enough to dole out material goods and food relief to the Adivasis. He should work for their emancipation and development. The only way to work for the development of the Adivasis would be to educate them to understand their rights and fight for their rights.

After working for several years in Bihar (Jharkhand) he was asked to work in Indian Social Institute the Nation's premier research, training, and documentation institute in Bangalore. He enabled the students to understand the social, economic realities of our society and equipped them to work effectively with the Dalits, Adivasis and weaker sections of the society.

## An advocate of the Adivasis

After completing his term at the Indian Social Institute, he went back to Jharkhand to work with the Adivasis. He knew that the Indian Constitution and the



legal framework has enough space for the rights of the Adivasis. For example, “the 5th schedule of the Constitution” deals with the administration of Schedule areas as well as Scheduled Tribes residing in different states. Secondly, in 1996 the central government had passed a law called “Panchayats (extension to Scheduled Areas) PESA Act 1996.” By virtue of this Act, the Constitution gives to the people living in the schedule area the power of self-governance through traditional Gram Sabhas. These laws prevent outsiders to enter the schedule area to exploit the people and the natural resources for their private gain.

The successive governments did not have political will to implement these laws which protect the lives and livelihood of the Adivasis. Fr. Stan was concerned about non-implementation of the 5th Schedule of the Indian Constitution and PESA.

One does not need rocket science to understand why these laws were not implemented. The schedule areas where Adivasis are living are rich with mineral resources. The hitherto practice has been that the government would evict the Adivasis from their homes and lands and hand over their land to the corporates and multinational companies to excavate the minerals below their land. To put in the words of Fr. Stan, “Every mine that is dug not only destroys the green forests, fertile lands and water bodies but displaces entire village habitations.”

Perhaps, in olden days when Adivasis were ignorant and unorganized, they could be easily pushed out of their land. With sustained work of conscientization by people like Fr. Stan, Adivasis have woken up to understand their rights. Through their prolonged struggles PESA Act was passed in 1996. They have started resisting the oppression. They started a movement called Pothal Ghadi. They started erecting stone slabs at the entrance of every Adivasi village. They inscribe relevant parts of the Constitution and PESA Act on the slab. They also inscribe the names of the people who have given their lives in the struggle to protect the rights of the Adivasis. The government has dealt with a heavy hand with all the resistance of the Adivasis to their

eviction. More than 6000 youth are languishing in jail without charge sheet or trial.

## The arrest

Fr. Stan has meticulously documented the torture and the sufferings of these Adivasi youth. Along with other civil right activists, Fr. Stan has filed public interest litigations to bring relief to the Adivasis.

In response to this, the government filed the case of sedition against Fr. Stan. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has implicated him in Bhima Koregaon violence. At first, he was only a suspect; but now they have accused him of being involved in Bhima Koregaon violence. They have further accused him as a cadre of the Maoists. They raided his office in Ranchi and took away his mobile phone and laptop. The most atrocious thing the NIA has done is that they have planted material in his laptop to prove that he is a Maoist. What is ludicrous is that such material the NIA has planted in many who have been arrested in Maharashtra contain the same spelling mistakes and Marathi words. Since Stan does not know Marathi one wonders how could he use Marathi words in the documents planted in his computer.

Fr. Stan has actively promoted communal harmony and believed in dialogue and peaceful resolution of all issues. Fr. Stan being a staunch Christian and a Jesuit priest does not believe in indulging in falsehood, let alone using violence. The real issue is not that Fr. Stan is a Maoist or uses violence. The real problem is that Fr. Stan has awakened the Adivasis to understand their rights to their land and homes. They have started resisting. They are demanding a share in the wealth that lies beneath their land. This creates difficulties for the government to hand over their lands to the crony capitalists for excavating rich minerals from the lands of the Adivasis. Fr. Stan asks, “Why truth has become so bitter, dissent so intolerable and justice so out of reach?” ■

Read the full article on [www.togethertmagazine.in](http://www.togethertmagazine.in)

**Alex Tuscano** has worked with Fr. Stan for about twelve years in training social activists in the premier Indian Social Institute, Bangalore.



# Beyond Ahimsa: It Is Not for the Fickle Minded

How do I look at others: is it in terms of what they have and how I can use them? Or what can they do for me? Or what can they give me? The elderly and infirm housed in the Home for the Aged, for example. Can I behold those people with my eyes turned to God in thanksgiving? “Not for what they can do for me, but simply because of what they are.”

JOY PRAKASH OFM

In the 60s I was a teenager. It was a time of the Flower Power. Progressive Kids of the 1960s disillusioned with the conservative upbringing of the times wore unconventional clothing: bell-bottoms, long side-burns, and shouted slogans like, “Make Love, Not War” and created innovations in music such as ‘Rock’n’Roll’ and ‘Metal Music’. It was a time of Graffiti art, Hippies and ‘Woodstock’. There was also a credibility gap which was magnified by the US invasion of Vietnam and the atrocities the war had unleashed. As all teenagers, I too was drawn into what was then current and popular in the flower-power. The pop culture of the day being the hippie-culture, I too wore my hair long and put on a metal Peace medallion over my shirt. Looking at my peace medallion my Rector in the Minor Seminary said to me, “You must have peace all the more inside yourself!” I did not understand the implications of “peace within”. I continued to wear it as part of my hippie out-fit and went about my tasks without creating an impact on anyone.

## Encounter with Francis of Assisi

Then I enrolled myself for studies in Franciscan Spirituality. These sessions made me realize that my idea of peace had a long way to

go. I was told that peace comes from the Hebrew or Aramaic word, ‘Shalom’ meaning, health, sanity, safety, prosperity, salvation, benevolence, joy, serenity, security, beatitude, solidarity, collaboration and reconciliation. In other words, we can say that peace is the sum total of all the goods possessed by our first parents in the Garden of Eden and which were restored to us by the resurrection of Christ. It is, therefore, a positive behavior and capacity by which we relate to God, to ourselves, to others, and finally to the whole creation.

One day my Professor of Spirituality related a story from the life of Saint Francis which baffled my whole understanding of peace. He said, that one day Francis of Assisi was crossing the Lake Trasimeno in a small boat and was heading for the hermitage of Greccio. A fisherman offered him a little water-bird, a duck, so that he could rejoice with his brothers. Saint Francis received it gladly, and with open hands, gently invited it to enjoy its freedom. But the bird did not want to leave him: instead it settled down on his hands as though they were a nest, and the saint, his eyes lifted up, remained in prayer. Returning to himself as if from a long stay in another place, he sweetly told the little bird to return to its

original freedom. And so the bird, having received his permission and with a blessing, flew away expressing its joy through the movement of its body.

“A simple story”, my professor said. And he continued, “In fact, what is important, is what Francis does not do with the bird: he doesn’t hold on to it; he does not keep it, he doesn’t eat it, or pluck its feather, nor does he dispatch it to the poor, or send it to his brothers, nor does he send it to Clare. He allows it to rest on his hand. Francis’ contact with that duck is prayerful. He does not want to hold on to it. The touch of this bird, transforms Francis and causes him to lift his eyes up. This contemplative rapture, this prayerful attitude of his, is for me the most apt expression of not owning anything of one’s own. Encouraging the bird to move away into its freedom is what it means to live without appropriating, without owning.”

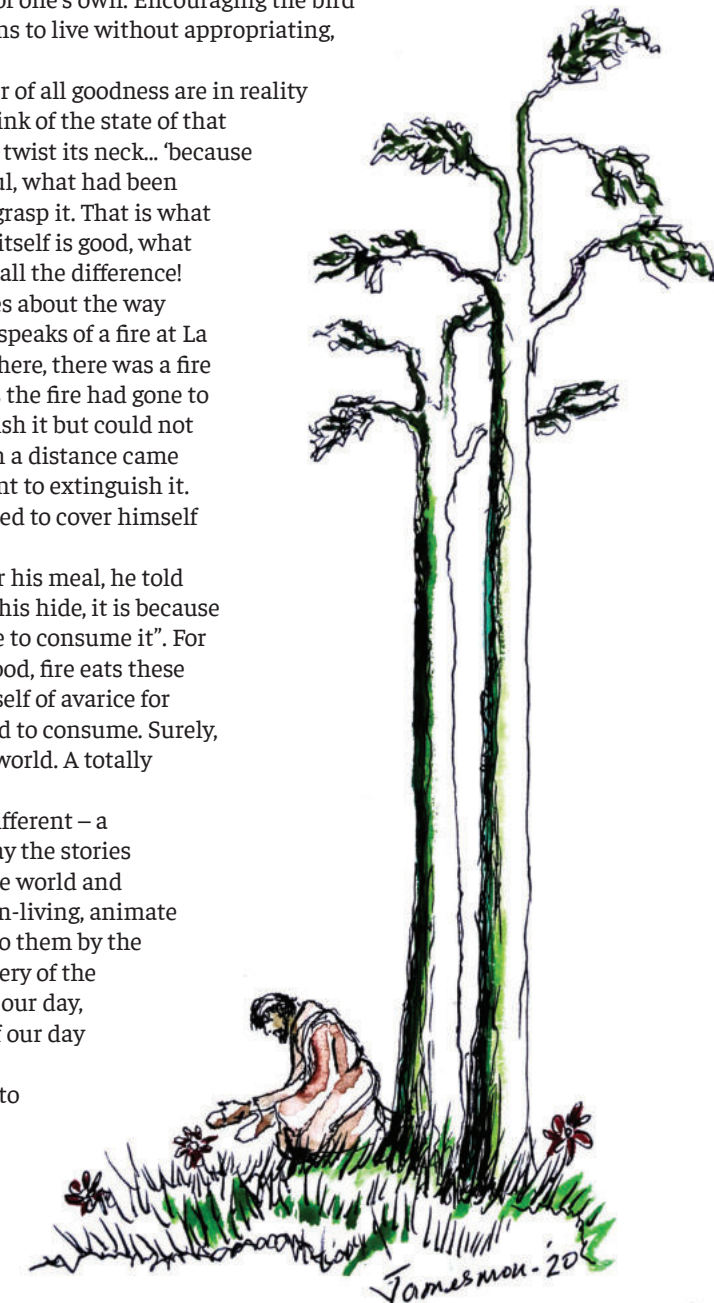
The things that are given to us by the Father of all goodness are in reality gifts, gifts to be received with open hands. Think of the state of that creature had Francis decided to grasp it; or to twist its neck... ‘because I want to make it my own’. What was beautiful, what had been vivacious and was created to fly, dies when I grasp it. That is what happens when I hold it, possess it. The thing itself is good, what changes it is the way I react to it. That makes all the difference!

My professor told me, there are many stories about the way Francis reacted to this world: One such story speaks of a fire at La Verna. When Francis came to have his meal there, there was a fire in the cell in which the food was prepared. As the fire had gone to the roof, his companion, Leo, tried to extinguish it but could not do so by himself. Brothers seeing the fire from a distance came to extinguish it. But Saint Francis did not want to extinguish it. Instead he took the blanket with which he used to cover himself at night and went into the forest.

Later Francis returned to eat his meal. After his meal, he told his companions, “From now on I don’t want this hide, it is because of my avarice that, I did not want Brother Fire to consume it”. For Francis, brother Fire, needs these things for food, fire eats these things, consumes them. Francis accuses himself of avarice for taking away from this creature what it wanted to consume. Surely, this is a man who has a different view of the world. A totally different mind-set to live in the world.

Francis’ attitude to the world was so very different – a reverential attitude! I stayed riveted at the way the stories developed. This is a different way of seeing the world and relating to creatures. All things, living and non-living, animate and inanimate have an innate dignity given to them by the Creator. They are not just at the wanton mastery of the human person. Getting used to the culture of our day, getting used to the ‘Use and Throw’ culture of our day won’t make a “Common Home”.

Saint Francis told the brother who wanted to get firewood, need not to cut down the whole tree, but cut it in such a way that one part





# Art as a Spiritual Journey

ROY M. THOTTAM SJ



Art is essentially spiritual because human beings are essentially spiritual beings. There is an urge in everybody to surpass the external and material into a realm deeper and beyond. I consider this inclination as a primal spiritual urge of Man to attempt to transcend himself and his situations. To a great extent this is achieved through artistic expression. The spiritual in art gives expression to what is deeper and beyond, the invisible and incomprehensible reality. A sense of mystery in the life in which we live is integral to human consciousness. It is a basic primitive consciousness with which we search the 'ground of our being'.

Paul Tillich said, "everything in human culture has a religious dimension". The religious dimension he stated is in a broader sense, not as the activities of a group in which the direct relation to a divine being is expressed in ritual and doctrinal symbols. Religion in this sense "can appear in all expressions of man's cultural activity, both in the created works and in the creating persons".

The awareness that surface of everything is not real, drives us to break through the layers of deceptive surfaces to the deepest, to the real. "We constantly search for an ultimate reality, something lasting in the flux of transitoriness and finitude" (Tillich, 1989). According to Sri Sankaracharya, a classical Indian philosopher, everything that appears is 'maya'-illusion. The real lies behind the visible, which can be seen by the 'inner eye', the eye of the 'Self', through which we can experience the realness of the realities. In art we seek and express what lies behind the visible. This expression does not evade the

cultural, historical, mythical and other aspects of human consciousness. So the artistic experience, both creating and viewing, is the experience in its totality. My artistic practice and journey is a dialectical process between the inner and outer realities and it is not distinct from the other aspects of my life. The impulse and struggle is to transcend the outer realities and imageries into a primal and pure experience of reality.

The painting "Towards the Unknown" (see next page) is a work that stands at the threshold of transition of my artistic practice. As the title indicates, it was a struggle towards the unknown mysterious spheres of art; leaving behind what I was holding onto.

The painting is not an articulation of what I wanted to represent, but it is an expression of my inner world. In the painting, the figure of a man is stretching forward as in a weary journey but with full of energy and hope, looking forward with open hand to reach out to the unknown; leaving behind his ego or false self seen as a dead head at the right side of the painting. The figure of woman at the centre is integrated with the figure of the man, which is his own anima. The yellow and blue background gives the feeling of both desert and oasis; a sense of both weariness and enthusiasm. It gives the sense of life and death. I consider that every artistic process is a process of liberation.

An artist, through his works, liberates himself and the viewers from the illusions of surface and images. The concept of liberation encompasses all aspects of life in relation to the inner and outer world. It is not negating the outer reality, but detaching ourselves from its falsification and getting into the elementary

of it remained. He also told the brother who took care of the garden to leave a piece of land for wild plants, and not just for flowers. He said all this proclaims that God made all these things for me. The brothers who were with him found him always praising things God had created, and touching and looking at them. It appeared that he was no more on earth, but in heaven.

Besides his attitude towards creatures, particularly towards the animals, insects, worms, what is seemingly unimportant, and what is not useful: he would reverently pick up pieces of paper thrown on the floor, pieces with words, pertaining to the Word though in themselves ... not very useful, as they were not even a book, but just pieces of paper, he did so as they might contain the words of the Lord. Such an attitude is surely a contemplative view of things. He constantly asked this question: where does the good come from? He knew the answer. It comes from God. He creates it from nothing and gives it to us. To whom does it belong? All good belongs to Him. Francis' constant prayer was one of praise and thanksgiving, rather than one of asking, "give me, give me..." but instead, "thank you, thank you." This indeed is living in the world without appropriating...Do I feel the need to own anything? To own anybody? Questions like these are contradictory to the spirit and attitude of Francis!

## Beyond ahimsa

This is an attitude so different from our modern, technological and consumerist mentality. It poses questions like, what can I use that for, how can I transform it to be useful for me. The non-appropriate attitude on the other hand would mean: not owning, not grasping, and not always making things productive or efficient or useful. This makes us question how we treat the world and other people and ourselves.

Is my attitude with regard to myself, in terms of my utility? How useful am I? Francis wanted to call himself a useless servant. The time Francis spent with the lepers, was for him an experience of sweetness. He deliberately associated himself with these lepers, people who are not useful or productive for their society. How do I look at others: is it in terms of what

they have and how I can use them? Or what can they do for me? Or what can they give me? The elderly and infirm housed in the Home for the Aged, for example. Can I behold those people with my eyes turned to God in thanksgiving? "Not for what you can do for me, but simply because of what you are."

Thus, The canticle of Brother Sun composed shortly before his death sprang from this mentality of Francis: It was not how can I use it for myself, The medieval agriculturist would make every bit of land produce but Francis was not interested in the things the land would produce. It was not efficiency which drew his attention. For him property was not just a matter of ownership, which invested me with the right to do what I want, so that I could cultivate the land to produce sufficient vegetables for me, and leave the rest uncultivated. Be careful how you use the land!

When I sense and see pollution, I don't denounce it just because it's bad for the economy, and harmful for breathing, but because it doesn't respond to the plan of God who created us all.

If the human person is master of the earth, it means he has to recognize the place allotted to every creature. Respecting them would mean that we do not invade the vital space allotted to every other creature. Hence space has been provided by God for wild animals, for flowers and for coral reefs in the depths of the sea. We need to make peace with each and every reality we encounter, just as we have to make peace with every person, "Praise be you, my Lord. For those who pardon for love of you." And we need to make peace with illness as well, "and sustain infirmity and tribulation". None of these realities are against you, they exist for you! They must also exist with you!

Hence every inter-human and inter-creature relationship and relationship with God makes up for peace. Peace is not just a job or a task to be done but a state of being on the earth. Indeed, I really need to make a long journey into peace within me and around me and with my God! ■

Joy Prakash OFM is a scholar, writer and a professor in Franciscanism.





*Towards the Unknown*

substance where we come in touch with the essence of the reality. Thomas Merton stated that, "In art we find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time". Giving up and finding out is the inner working of art. This is a constant process of stripping away. This is what I have experience in my artistic practice. Every work was a process of stripping me away.

There is an urge within me to get in touch with the ground of my being and to give expression to it. This is a journey towards the ultimate freedom of the Self. This is an inner necessity in the artistic process, which is stressed by Kandinsky. "The spiritual life to which art belongs and of which it is one of the mightiest agents, is a complex and definite movements above and beyond.... The determination of the form of a work of art is determined by this irresistible inner force." Within this view art sprouts from an 'inner necessity'. Many a times during my art practice, the works emerged mysteriously before me, as if from the unfathomable cosmic and inner sphere.

There is a hidden mysterious universe in every work. It is an experience of pure consciousness, rather than discovering definite answers. So I consider that all my paintings are unfinished in this sense. It continues its journey of 'becoming' even if it is a finished work by interacting with the viewers.

Paul Tillich says, "It is not the beauty of art, but its expressiveness that matters". This expressive power characterizes a painting a

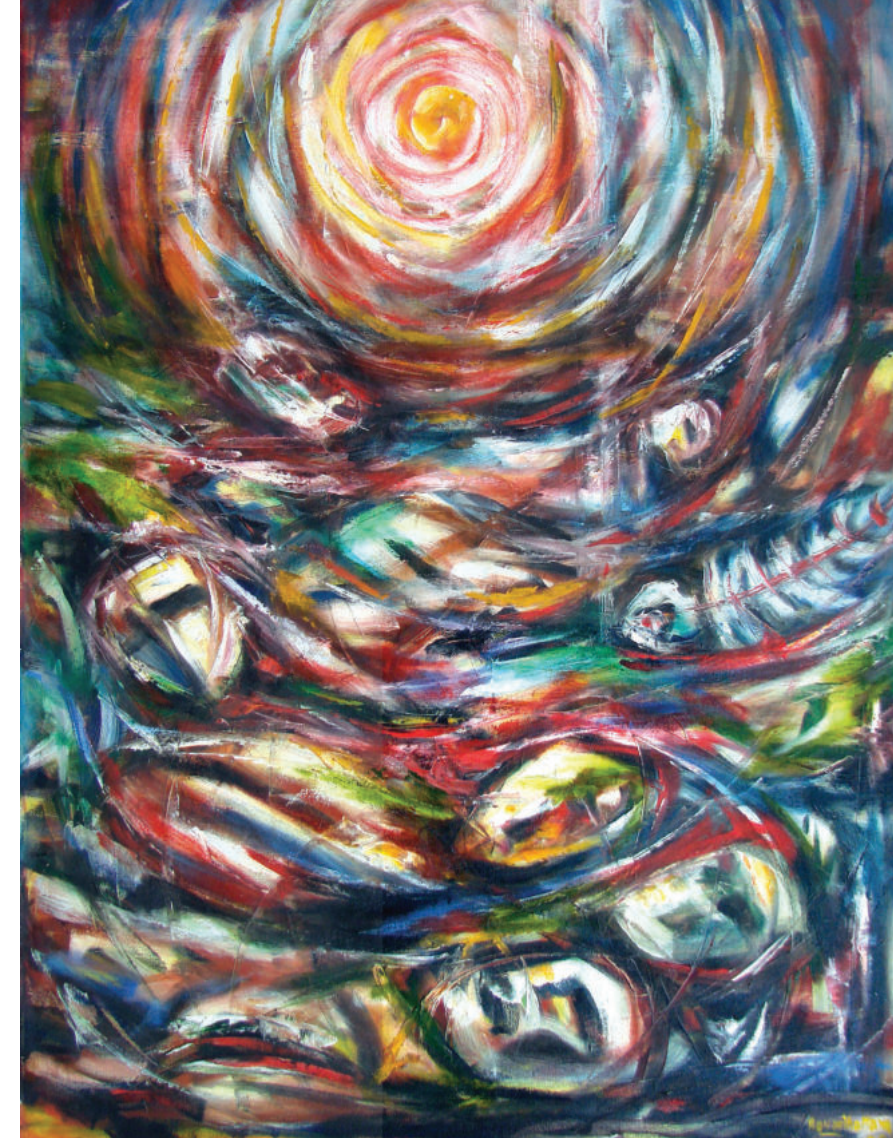
work of art. Anything can be a subject matter in this expression, the terrible and tender, the strange and familiar, the absurd and sensible. The expressionist element breaks the surface of reality, pierces into its ground, it reshapes it, re-orders or annihilates the elements in order to have even more powerful expression, in order to express their deeper dimensions forcefully and conspicuously.

The painting 'Breath of life and Dead Bones' (right) is based on the subject of human violence. But it is not telling the story of the events but turned to be an expression of the deeper dimension of my artistic inner journey. Spiral movement of light is seen as the breath of life and the dead figures are seen in relation to the spiral movement. (The symbolism of spiral is universal in primitive art. it occurs frequently in Indian art and mythology in the form of the cosmic Serpent, 'Ananta' the endless one. According to the philosophy of Yoga, the cosmic spiral force known as 'Mahaakundali', 'the great coiled one' has also its seat in the human body. Spiral is a symbol pregnant with meaning because it represents the progress of the soul towards 'Nirvana', the ultimate freedom and the whole scheme of cosmic evolution).

The personal experience of hearing about destructive violence happening in India was the starting point of the painting and then it related to the mythical story of the vision of the valley of dead bones by the prophet Ezekiel described in the Bible (Ezekiel. 37)

*Breath of Life and  
Dead Bones*

An artist's inner world of feelings and emotions, at times conflicting, and other times, complementary, become more important than any subject. Art transforms crises into creative freedoms.



An artist's inner world of feelings and emotions, at times conflicting, and other times, complementary, become more important than any subject. Art transforms crises into creative freedoms. It becomes a life-giving force. It is a process of liberating our real 'Self' from social disguises and pretensions, revealing in all its expressive nakedness. Expression with certain madness reveals the primitive depth of the psyche. This whole process is a psycho-spiritual quest, as Emil Nolde states that he "yielded to an irresistible desire to portray a deep spirituality, religion and inwardness; descending into the depth of human divine being".

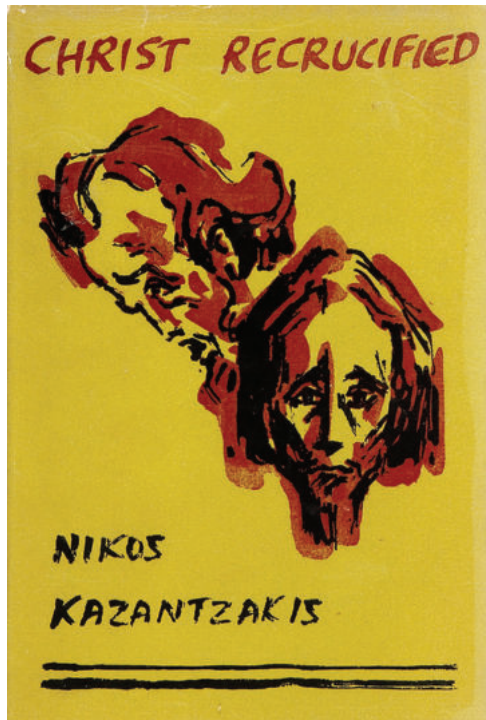
As Kuspit affirms for me, painting is, "to be caught in a trap – in a vicious closed circle of rebirth and death – the rebirth of authentic selfhood and the living death of self falsification". Creativity is the moment of dying to our self and experiencing the rebirth. This is a recurring theme in both Indian and Christian thought. Every work of art was a process of death and a process of coming into being. ■

**Fr. Roy M. Thottam, SJ** is an artist, writer and a founding member of CARP (Company of Artists for Radiance of Peace). He completed his studies in painting at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. He is the editor of a literary and cultural magazine *Ezhuthu*.



# Power Abuse and Misuse

SUSANNA CORREYA



When I finished *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1952), I knew it would not be my last Nikos Kazantzakis novel. While *The Last Temptation* was introspective; *Christ Recrucified* is extrospective.

Both are equally compelling.

Individual identity is manufactured without consent by the powerful and is forced on the powerless. The notables confer after Easter to discuss the next year's passion play. They deliberate on the flaws and the merits of the commoners and assign them roles which cannot be declined, exchanged or disputed. The actors are advised to step into their characters and this engenders moral dilemmas and conflicts between personal identity and assigned identity.

The bottom line: just as sinners were essential to emphasize the perfectness of Christ, just as the persecutor was essential to emphasize the virtues of the martyr, lesser people are needed to emphasize greater people.

Privileged castes and races use the same *modus operandi*. To preserve their superiority, they ensure the inferiority of the "other". Consider how white colonizers cherry-picked verses from the Bible to vindicate the slavery of blacks and how elite castes appeal to ancient texts to rationalize the socio-cultural hierarchy.

We also see how people latch on to fatalistic and deterministic creeds to justify the misery of their fellow humans. When a band of starving foreigners begs for alms in Lycovrissi, they are treated with contempt and ridicule by Pope Grigoris, a miser and hoarder of wealth. Manolios, the shepherd chosen for the role of Christ, moves people to charity. Money and wealth are not inherently evil and poverty does not predispose people to charity. What the Buddha called "attachment" or "desire" and what St. Paul called "the love of money" are shown to be the roots of all evil.

If not identity, the overarching theme of the novel is the misuse and abuse of power. Pope Grigoris thinks he owns God and can dispense Him to people at a price. The commercialization of religion is a pressing concern which did not end with the Reformation. The grace of God is still peddled and cheapened, but this is a subject for another article.

The word "passion" is derived from the Latin *pati*, which means "to suffer". *Christ Recrucified* urges us to not passively spectate at the passion, Christ's or anyone's, but actively engage in "compassion". ("Compassion" means "to suffer with".) Maybe then, we will not lament at the end of our journey like the author at the end of his book, "In vain, my Christ, in vain." ■

# Fratelli Tutti (All Brothers)

An encyclical on fraternity  
and social friendship

SAJI P MATHEW OFM

Pope Francis' new encyclical comes with the much needed unequivocal confirmation of a NO to war; and a clear call to end death penalty. It urges all to cross borders of every difference; and shun globalized indifference which leads to poverty, discrimination and conflicts.

It provides concrete ways to build a more just and fraternal world in ordinary relationships, in social life, politics and governance. Pope Francis borrows the title from the *Admonitions* of Saint Francis of Assisi, who used these words to address his brothers. Perhaps that explains why the title gives the impression of a document which is meant for a male-only world.

Pope Francis points out that the days of the pandemic has taught us the stress and anguish of living in isolation; and he strongly advocates that time has come to dream of a single human family in which we are all brothers and sisters.

The encyclical begins with the *Dark Clouds Over a Closed World*. It holds a mirror to the many distortions of the contemporary times. The document continues to say that ideas and principles like, democracy, freedom, justice etc. have taken a beating; and evils like, racism, poverty, unemployment, the disparity of rights, human trafficking, organ trafficking are going unchecked. Pope, also sounds an alarm against a *culture of walls* that favours the proliferation of organized crime, fuelled by fear and loneliness.

Pope responds to the above with a glowing example of the *Good Samaritan*, whom he calls a *stranger on the road*. We are all called – just like the *Good Samaritan* – to become neighbours to others by overcoming prejudices, personal interests, historic and cultural barriers.



The document challenges to build a culture of love by going *outside the self*; and live *the art of encounter* with everyone, even with the world's peripheries and with original peoples, because *each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable*.

The book ends with an appeal "*In my fraternal meeting, which I gladly recall, with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, we resolutely declared that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. God, the Almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want his name to be used to terrorize people.*" Are religions listening? Are Christians listening? Is the Church listening? ■



# WALLS

Pavan Kavitkar's visuals depict "the strong impact of the social and political situation" with respect to the present "space and time".

REBECCA MARTIN



As an exploration of space, Kavitkar's work transforms the psychophysical realm in context with the contemporary situation. Contrary to his minimalistic approach are the opulent interpretations his works offer. The stark geometric divisions of space visually put one in mind of Paul Strand's photography depicting shadow play. The attention to minute detail and the realism offered in specific fragments of the works delegates to the meticulous care one experiences in the company school paintings.

Amusingly, traditional elements from the past make way to Kavitkar's landscaping allowing the thematic relativity to venture into its roots as well as be universally acknowledged and accepted. The aforementioned can be justified comparing the greenery to the visual representation of flora in the Pahari Miniature Paintings dated back to the 16th century. Aside from this, usage of constituents like the 'bamboo mat' and 'thali' reinstall the attempt to establish the connection between nativity, heritage and culture on a general level.

Although compositionally contrasting, one can find a tonal resemblance with respect to Sudhir Patwardhan's work. As evidently noted, his pieces are unquestionably pervaded with substantial elements which is offset compared to Kavitkar's minimalistic approach, but the overall thematic treatment of space to a certain

extent can be deemed similar.

The artist's usage of flat washes in muted colours authorises an inescapable depiction of the highlighted subject adding value to the artwork's undeviating implication. This specific style of subdued colours allowing the enhancement of the featuring subject can be visually justified in the works of Bikash Bhattacharjee which inarguably adds to the gravity of the motif.

Kavitkar wrote that his visuals depict "the strong impact of the social and political situation" with respect to the present "space and time". Undoubtedly, on observation, his work does portray the isolation one experiences during the pandemic and analyses the relation with the outside world. The structure and configuration effectively heightens the loneliness that Kavitkar transparently divulges with self representation as an effort to associate personal experiences with a universal context.

The assurance that the viewer needn't second-guess the inference visually offered in no way limits the interpretations and conclusions that can be drawn from Kavitkar's work. Attention to detail, paired with his choice of components, allow his minimal style of work to echo volumes about the pervasive virus revealing to us the requisite simplicity and humility with which life can be approached. ■



Artist  
Titles

Pavan Kavitkar  
*Do we need perfection?* (Top)  
*Isolated Space-3* (Below)  
*Isolated Space-5* (Right)



Rebecca Martin is a BVA graduate with a keen eye for detail, always ready to seize any opportunity coming her way.



# Come and See: What Cinematic Language of Sight and Sound Can Tell Us About War

Almost 35 years after its release this movie is still known for its most visceral depictions of war and lingering impact on human lives.

SUMIT DASGUPTA



*Come and See*

When Elem Klimov, the director of the film *Come and See* was nine, his family ran away from Stalingrad for the Ural Mountains. It was 1942 and Hitler's Nazi army had pushed the Eastern Front deep into Soviet territory. Klimov poked his head out from under the blankets as his family crossed the Volga river.

A thousand miles away, teenager and co-writer of the film, Ales Adamovich aided his partisan family in Byelorussia. Nazi Germany wanted the territory to be a new frontier for ethnic Germans, but millions already lived there. The Nazis had a solution to that problem. They tortured, brutalised and killed people from around 628 villages.

Forty years later, on the anniversary of the Soviet Union's triumph over the Third Reich, the two men made a film about their experiences called *Come and See*, a Russian language film formally known as *Kill Hitler* in 1985. It's one of the most devastating, haunting and surreal (anti) war movies you will ever see. Klimov post

the release of the film never made another one and went on record saying he had said what needed to be said through *Come and See*.

*Come and See*—adapted by Klimov, with Ales Adamovich, from the 1978 book *I Am from the Fiery Village*—is a war narrative about a teenage boy, Florya who digs a discarded gun out of a sandy trench with the intention of joining the Soviet partisans gathering in his village against his mother's wishes. He later meets and forges a bond with a young girl, Glasha. This movie is based on true events unlike other current war time films.

The film begins with an ambiguous scene, as a man calls out commands to invisible others on a beach. Who is he? Who is he calling to? Why is he fed up with them? It's revealed that he's calling out to children who have concealed themselves among the reeds. They are playing games of war, and digging in the sand for weapons concealed or lost during some earlier conflict.

The film goes to unspeakable lengths in

trying to capture the surreal atmosphere of war. The editing of the film is disjointed, as if it is designed to make you feel disoriented and uncomfortable. I neither know the time of day nor the day. All I know is that survival is a must.

The steady camera is a tool to show the chaos of what is happening, and this is why many of the shots are long, panning shots that highlight the mental and physical mutilation that is occurring in the film. The camera bears witness to the surrealistic nature of war and violence through natural lighting and POV shots. Almost a quasi-breaking of the fourth wall when moments feel like they are stretched in time where no one is speaking into the camera but just staring into the void seemingly aware that we, the audience are watching them.

The sound design has a feverish pitch to it. The hum and drone never stop, the cries ebb and flow out of the trees and hills. It makes you feel like you have lost more than just your inno-

cence and humanity in those rolling hills. One sequence that had me reeling comes at the end where Florya dismayed and angry shoots for the first time a portrait of Hitler as Mozart's *Requiem in D Minor* grows in intensity. A true feast of sight and sound that has to be seen.

This film sets itself apart from the rest of the war films because they tend to look away from the realities of war, and give the atrocities of war a redemptive arc. War films are not generally designed to desolate their viewers, and so in time and again, the unthinkable actions of war are structured in a palatable format of an action war film, typically seen in *Uri* or *Pearl Harbour*. Because they allow their audiences to make sense of what they have witnessed but *Come and See* refused to budge. Almost 35 years after the release of the film this movie has been one of the most visceral depiction of war and its lingering impact on human lives. A true cinematic experience indeed albeit difficult to consume. ■

Read the full article on [www.togethertmagazine.in](http://www.togethertmagazine.in)





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