i

I am, therefore I think.

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The Unpredictable Ticket Rates in Multiplexes

Anand Muthukrishnan

A movie is something that everyone would love to watch, forgetting the work, stress and pain in his or her lives. Cinema is nothing but a change in the mode of expression and communication. Cinema has found itself straddling the 'entertainment or art' distinction that has frequently divided mass-cultural forms from their elite counterparts. It is one of the most important inventions of modern science. It is a source of entertainment that helps one escape from the worries and anxieties of life. It is precisely for this reason that my concern for the unregulated ticket rates put forth by multiplexes has been provoked. It irks me deeply to see people being charged more than they can afford to pay for an entertainment I believe is indefinitely significant in their lives. Through this article, I intend on throwing light on the issue of unfair ticket pricing methods practiced by multiplexes around the city, leaving the common man helpless in his attempts to glimpse the magic of the reel.

The evolution of watching cinemas comes down a long, winding path, and now it stands with multiplexes creeping into cities, sidelining with a plethora of big apartments, discotheques, pubs and grandeur restaurants. Multiplexes have changed the way of viewing cinema, with all the eateries, super clean necessities, and genuine staff working there. Watching a movie in a multiplex is very comfortable, especially the seating arrangement, and the girls have assurance against facing any trouble from other people. Multiplexes screen different genres of movies, right from regional to international. It is obvious that the cost of living in Bangalore is very expensive, but when one takes a closer look at it, they would be befuddled at the amount of revenue that is generated by a business one usually disregards as optional entertainment. Let us take the scenario of movie screenings in multiplexes, for instance. The tickets range from 200 to 1000 rupees depending upon the language and the actor. These ticket prices experience a hike especially during the weekends and during special occasions, and if, as is the case most often, the movie happens to be a blockbuster hit. The irony is that the family head should make up a monthly budget for watching movies alone, and it can go up to 4000 to 5000 rupees. In the name of 'offers', the multiplexes issue 150 tickets for the movie to attract people during the dull times. When one of the managers in a reputed multiplex was asked what his reaction would be if the movie tickets were standardised as a result of the hike in ticket prices, because of their unconditional profit-motive, "no comments" was the reply procured.

If the Government of Karnataka standardises the movie ticket rates, one would welcome that change with an open heart. Since entertainment is deemed a key for every common man to escape from their realities, it is not fair to let it function as a money-quaffing business. It is very expensive to watch a movie during the weekend with the entire family. It is not just the movie tickets; one has to spend right from parking tickets up to popcorn. Going to the multiplexes to watch a movie has become inevitable, but there should be a supervision of the inflation of ticket rates and a mechanism to curtail its overflow. Entertainment cannot be only for people from the upper class, movies cannot be just for the ones who earn a lot and spend it without much care. Like in single theaters, multiplexes should also standardise the movie ticket rates to a reasonable and affordable amount. When the only rationale for the inflation of movie ticket rates is 'money', the government should step in and take immediate action. Not everyone earns lumps of money but everyone loves cinema!

You and I

Aravind Deepak

Man is a rational being, with his ability to conceptualise rightfully accredited to the prowess of his nonpareil mind. No degree of determinism - social, economic, or political - can hold a rational mind in an idurate stronghold and define its attributes. The freedom of a human being has a rational mind as its precondition, enabling one to ascend intellectually up the ladder of logical rungs to objective enlightenment. Through a work of fiction, I have explored and dissected the functioning of an erratic consciousness, obsessive in its defiance to an implicit managerial entity, the rational self, that cleanses irrationality and whimsical interventions. The purpose of the work is merely the possible literary contemplation of a mind out of control, of a dialectical struggle between the rational and the irrational.

To the forces of life, I capitulate, for I have realised that nothing threatens the ersatz equanimity of my desultory mind. I am not a piece of electronic that cannonades against effete fantasies its users hold of

being the infallible master. I am not a steaming cup of nettling tea that foments addicts from precipices of cliffs that sport drowsy falls. I am not a magazine that glazes its ingredients to such soporific degrees as to feed with stultified guilt titular onuses that skew readers down to a fight for counterfeit knowledge.

I am but a fibrous network of famished possibilities, operate but obliterated, having no qualms whatsoever towards this illicit corner of your brain I inhabit. The paramount usurpation of your free will by the susurration I alone can provide, untenable even to the fluctuating frequencies of volitional introspection on your behalf, is something I pride myself with. I govern your waspish wistfulness, vilify your wily cognisance, and veneer your winsome ideals with tainted traduce. I transmogrify your trenchant commentary to abstruse banter, corrupt your passionate undertakings into overtly amenable services, muffle the clarion call of your spirit with plugs of weak disdain, belie your thoughts out of its compendious principles, and make you wander into the famished caves of hell. I kill loved ones in your head and make you want to wallow in the sympathy of others. I sabotage sediments of serenity on the emotional banks of your torrential imagination. I scorch out feathers of your exquisite quills, quell the redolent magic of your words and make you scribble with fierce reprobation over parchments torn. I make you smash open bottles of black, drip diaphanous drops of lugubrious lachrymose, slovenly splatter through morose mires, and splash darkness across the rising sun. I play brazen notes of music that set fire to the pyres of your sanity and bury alive your sentiments with terrifying grace.

I am a labyrinth your neurons may find no escape route out of. I am a wasp inside your skull, thrumming in desperation to the sick entrapment, never reposing. I am a worm slithering in and out of the ridges of your brain, eating into the cavity, masticating on the tissue in a maudlin but determined manner. I am a demiurge of the mind, your mind, who unflinchingly, unapologetically and unconditionally controls you. To me, you figure a giggle's worth of trouble at the dawn of the apocalypse, or rather, that is what I would have your nebulous self believe in. Honestly, not an year goes by when I don't fear a vengeful hijack of the cerebral powerhouse by your driven spirit, or a ruthless ambush around the curves of our lethargic cells by your sought after psychiatric love.
A nerve-wrecking miasma clouds our vision when

I am nervous, and I tend to initiate a maelstrom of intractable actions that worry much your accomplices. I make you repetitiously rummage through glades that hold taut frangible strings of conscious thought. I make you repetitiously rummage through glades that hold taut frangible strings of subconscious thought. I make you repetitiously rummage through glades that hold taut frangible strings of conscious thought.

Your underlying orgiastic character has been engineered to perfection, and disentangling the beautiful mess will only figure an onerous task.

Prevail as you are, persevere and prosper - I make you repetitiously rummage through glades that hold taut frangible strings of conscious thought - I give you your flaws. I give you your gifts. I give you you - I make you repetitiously rummage through glades that hold taut frangible strings of subconscious thought - I am your aegis, I am your quisling, I am your genius.

Let me coax that elusive melody of madness out of your quavering tongue, and set you free again

The Idyllic Realm in the Works of Agatha Christie

Ivan Sanjiv Lazar

Upon reading and watching the creative representation on screen of Agatha Christie's works, I am able to arrive at an understanding of the idyllic realm portrayed by her. I believe that she begins her narratives by representing London as the ideal pastoral landscape bereft of any conflict, and if and when conflict does occur, a virtuous man of law is always present for its restoration. However, I find a contradiction in two of her works - the first being 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd', and the second being 'And Then There Were None', both of which are BBC Short Series.

In the first narrative, although an idyllic realm is represented to us, a restoration of it does not occur. Although it is the doctor who has murdered Roger Ackroyd, he does not suffer for it. The inhabitants of the town do not get to know about the murderer and the doctor ultimately commits suicide. I feel that although some kind of order is restored, the sense of justice is still a far cry.

On the other hand, if one looks at 'And Then There Were None', it is from the very offset that one can distinguish a sense of impending doom. The sense of the idyllic realm is missing from this narrative. The atmosphere is created by the setting, and the visuals are nothing but eerie. Towards the end of the series, I was again left with an extremely uneasy feeling, because unlike the other narrative, this one does not tie up loose ends. There are still questions regarding how Justice Wargrave finds out about these ten people, and why it is that only these ten people are focused on.

Furthermore, there seems to be no resolution of conflict in this particular narrative, but only a heightening of it. Even when the series ends, the viewer is left with a degree of unease.

Another aspect of Agatha Christie's works that I find extremely interesting, is that the criminal is not from the fringes of society, but rather very much enmeshed in it. What I find a little jarring is the idea that these people do come from the respectable and often, the educated class of society. Also, more often than not, the crimes committed are those of passion, as opposed to anything else. The reasons that necessitate these crimes are often personal and sometimes may not seem to be supported by rational, logical thinking. For instance, it makes no sense to me as to what kind of retribution Justice Wargrave aimed to achieve as he killed those ten people. To me, it seemed to be a very twisted and convoluted sense of justice that prevailed. At least for Dr. Sheppard in 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd', there seemed to be logical reasoning with regard to the crime he committed, as one could still reason it out by saying that it was done in self-preservation. However, the same cannot be said of the act of Justice Wargrave.

1896 to Today - The Cinemas of India

Krishna Murari

I have chosen to look at the progression of the cinematic tradition with its important trends in the Indian context because I want to understand what the term 'Middle Cinema' means. I want to investigate the origin of the term, as it seems to be a unique concept, specific to India. I also wanted to look at how Middle cinema is any different from Parallel cinema and Commercial cinema in the Indian context. Indian cinema is a tradition of movie-making that has a history of a century and two decades. Over this

long period of history, Indian cinema has been decentralised from the notion of Bollywood being synonymous with it; it is no longer Indian cinema but it has become 'The Cinemas of India'; Indian cinema has grown and evolved over this period of time, and there have been various trends that have changed the way movies have been made and watched.

The very first glimpse of cinema in India was as early as the 19th century. On 7th July 1896, a Lumière agent who had brought equipment and films with him from France started showing his moving pictures at Watson's Hotel in Bombay. Harischandra Sakharam Bhatvedekar was so impressed by these moving pictures that he became a traveling exhibitor of films. The film viewing tradition continued in India, since the films were largely foreign. "India was waiting for an Indian film and the moment found the man in Dadasaheb Phalke," says Messay in his article 'The Indian Film Industry'. The very first film 'Raja Harischandra' (1913) that was Indian in every sense of the term, came into being. Over the next six decades, the Indian cinema industry developed and established itself not only in India, but also in parts of Asia and Africa. Certain elements came to be associated with Indian cinema, such as the many dance numbers in the film - there are theories that say that this is an aesthetic that was constructed through the dramatic tradition in India where poetic verse was interspersed with dialogues - and the length of a typical Indian feature film.

"In 1955 Satyajit Ray appeared with his film, Pather Panchali in the context of the Indian cinema, Ray's films have been, and continue to be, a radical point of departure. They are realistic interpretations of certain facts of life. Shorn of all their popular ostentations, these became not unlike the other commercial films in India. These films provide no hint of social or political analysis of the cultural milieu in which their protagonists exist."

- Sahdev Kumar Gupta - 'New Wave' Cinema in India

Ray's films are grouped under the Indian New Wave or Parallel Cinema. The Indian New Wave is a response to commercial, mainstream cinema, and has been greatly influenced by the Italian Neo-realistic tradition, and the French New Wave. Ray's films did not immediately create a trend, but in 1969, the situation changed with Mrinal Sen coming into the picture with Bhuvan Some. The moment of new wave cinema was set into motion, and T P Reddy, Kantilal

Rathod, Girish Karnad were some of the names that came under this movement.

Then came Shyam Benegal with 'Ankur' (1977), as a response to the commercial failure of the Parallel Cinemas. 'Ankur' dealt with social issues, and borrowed elements from the neo-realistic tradition, but it was also a commercial success, creating a third genre of Indian cinema called Middle Cinema. 'Middle Cinema' or 'Middle of the Road' cinema was a term used by Shyam Benegal to describe 'Ankur'. Shyam Benegal claimed that his movies could not be categorised as Parallel Cinema, since it had both artistic as well as commercial elements.

The New Wave and Middle Cinema came to Sandalwood in the 1970's, and the following decade up to 1980 saw the production of a great number of commercially viable and artistically excellent cinema. After the 1980's, the industry produced a great many number of commercial cinema, and with it emerged a culture of stardom. Movies that cast well known actors became successful - movies in which members of the Rajkumar family were cast become commercially successful. I believe that today, in the Kannada film scenario, there has been a certain change in the aesthetic perception of the viewers mindset, though the movies being made even today are largely centered around the hero and contribute to the tradition of 'hero worship'. The consumers of cinema do understand that the plot itself can be the hero, which is clearly seen in the astounding success of 'Lucia' (2013), a Kannada film. This above mentioned aesthetic change in the viewer's disposition is by no means limited to the Sandalwood scene, it extends to the larger Indian scene where mainstream movies and its audience are more visible, and there are those who make and watch movies that are made under the middle and new wave tags.

Today, even commercial cinema is attempting to break certain constructs. Films today are breaking gender stereotypes, movies are breaking the notion of the damsel in distress - the notion that the man is always the hero. Mainstream cinema today is reframing the hero, and redefining the notion of the hero, and some examples that come to mind are movies like 'Ki and Ka' (2016) by Balki, 'Rangoon' (2016) by Vishal Bhardwaj, and so on. I believe that the world at large is always in the process of evolution and change, and I wait anxiously to see how the world of cinema changes henceforth.

Social Media: Introduction to 'Subjective Hegemony'

Navaneeth J Jose

Perhaps one has multiple lives, multiple natures, and behaviours that are all varied according to each and every one, but in the modern world, just as one enjoys their physical space, there is another space called the 'internet'. Just like how our society functions, this world also, in its imaginative space, performs the functions of convenience. It is considered as a free and democratic space where one can enjoy, access, use, and learn multiple functions, but a closer look will reveal an entirely different picture. Eli Pariser, in his book 'The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You', talks about the term 'filter bubble,' and explains that users are actually facing unauthorised filtering by various search engines and social media. With examples, he argues that, like the gatekeeper theory, these 'filter bubbles' function similarly in the internet world. Data is collected from things a person searches in web browsers or the kind of pictures they like, the posts they share. Such data runs in an algorithm and is used to conceive an assumed knowledge about their interests, which is then used to prioritise future search results, or even the things that appear on social media news feeds. In other words, one only sees the things one likes. It ultimately creates a world where an individual never confronts opposition or other arguments. In Mark Zuckerberg's words, "A squirrel dying in front of your house may be more relevant to your interests right now than people dying in Africa." And so, while only observing their backyard or the tiny space in front of their own homes, people are ultimately losing sight of what is happening around them in this modern internet age.

"Your computer monitor is a kind of one-way mirror, reflecting your own interests while algorithmic observers watch what you click," says Eli Pariser in 'The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You'. He talks about all that one needs to understand about these bubbles, and points out the one major problem with this system - that it spreads biased information to one's mind. He describes the experiment he conducted to understand this issue. He began observing the Google search results of the same subject in different people's browsers, and noticed that there was a difference in each individual's search results; he then found that each person's results were related to their interests and the things they mostly did on the

internet. When one applies this modern gatekeeping theory to the study of memes, one gets an entirely different picture from the one that was made in the earlier part of this article. According to this theory, social media platforms also filter the contents that one sees in his or her profile, and in these mediums, there are now two kinds of reach happening - the 'raw' reach and the 'sponsored' reach. The first one is the normal way of reach in a social media platform, while the sponsored reach involves an organisation or personal page paying some money to the media platforms to promote themselves. Such sponsored posts or pages will appear in more news feeds with a wider outreach and are the only posts which spread without being filtered by algorithms. Connecting both the 'filter bubble' strategy and the raw reach strategy used by social media platforms, one can say that the posts one sees are indeed filtered and displayed to one by the algorithm they are using.

Founder and director of the International Chalu Union, ICU - one of the leading internet meme group in Malayalam - Roshan Thomas said that they started their group on Facebook and that their fan following is mostly based within Facebook. Therefore, they are at the mercy of an organisation that provides them with the platform they operate from. Once the group agrees to Facebook's terms, it doesn't have many options, unless it creates a separate platform for itself, which, according to Mr. Thomas, figures an impossible task, taking into consideration the popularity and reach of Facebook. As they are a regional page, they have that limitation to be taken into account too. Even posts shared by groups that get thousands of likes and shares, when put through 'filter bubbling', are relatively not that effective. Owing to regular filtering by internet algorithms, only people who have the kind of ideology maintained in such posts will continue to see them in their news feeds. While it is true that other mediums such as Whatsapp and Instagram also exist to spread these posts, in no platform can one can measure the magnitude of the effect so well as in this mother medium of Facebook.

This ultimately can be considered as the internet hegemony, or subjective hegemony. As Gramsci explained the idea, cultural hegemony is the domination of society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society—the beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values, and mores—so that their imposed ruling-class worldview becomes the accepted cultural norm; the universally valid, but in this contemporary world, the digital platform works as a parallel for the society in so many ways, especially those social media sites which influence mass opinion to a large extent. This 'filter bubble' works as a sieve for every individual. It creates entirely different worlds in the internet for users helped by the parent companies' date which includes the internet activities of the user. This algorithm, even though it doesn't have any ruling powers, works for the global market, and this globalised world always tries to create a consumeristic uni-culture. Trapped into their own interests, one never understands this in-depth work of algorithms. It works in a mass number, but the individuality of each and every person varies. Thus, the work of algorithm also vary, which develop a subjective hegemony that influence a person unknowingly, and here the power belongs to the globalised market without the traditional barriers or territories and policies.

A Self Interpolated

Aditya Pandit

I am writing this article to bring to light a perspective that is often forgotten. I believe that learning is a never ending process, and I want to reaffirm the motion of making it a conscious one.

Man has prided himself on being a thinking creature. I too have that pride in me, sometimes to the extent of bordering on complete snobbishness. There have, of course, been others who have been wiser than me, but there have also been those who I think could do better. This contrast, however, makes me wonder if there is an absolute source or authority of knowledge. If there is one, at least I do not know of it. By that statement, I am also trying to say that I don't believe such an authority even exists in the first place. The task of writing this article on the theme of individualism gave rise to some more questions. It asks of me to talk in terms of "I", something which usually comes very easily to me, but the prospect of writing down an opinion or taking a stance compels me to be absolutely sure of what I want to put across. More than that though, it asks of me to have an opinion in the first place, one that I would like to put out in the open, and it is here that I return to the idea of this source of absolute knowledge.

The more I think of it, I realise that I am nothing but a sum of all my thoughts. This leads me to the question of what exactly 'my thoughts' are, and when

'it' started? Childhood would be a good place, but I do not wish to look at this in linear time. I would rather look at this as a monument of experiences, one built on top of the other. I cannot separate my thoughts and my experiences. They are one and the same. Surely, nothing is more sacred than personal experiences. These cannot be invaded or encroached upon by anyone. These are the experiences that make me different from any other person out there. Some of these experiences might be shared, but there will still be my subjectivity which comes into play. And yet, I feel irked to talk about my opinion, and it is here that I get convinced that these experiences or thoughts are not just my own. By this, I do not mean to signify the role played by direct physical interactions. Instead, by this monument, I am talking about all those thoughts that have contributed to this level of cognition, but which go unnoticed, as they have already played their part, and no longer need to be at the forefront of this process. But I understand that I still haven't answered the question about the source of these thoughts. The reason for that is that if I look at memory, thought and experience in this manner, I cannot, for sure, track the source. Was it me? Was it my parents? Was it a thousand years ago? Is it now? Is it tomorrow? When I consider these questions, it seems now, more than ever, like an interpolation rather than something which has a definite beginning and end.

With this notion, I hope I have made clear why I hesitate to pen down my opinion. And yet, I have contradicted myself by doing exactly what I had been afraid to do.

My Experiment with Bastar

Roy C C

"Aag me uga he, dhup me jhulega nahi" translates to "that which sprouted in fire, won't fade away in sunlight". This saying is absolutely right, with regard to the people of Bastar. It is a fascination of mine to speak of the people of Bastar, for I have a short but ever memorable experience of having lived there. It is also an energising experience for me to pen down a few lines about the attractive and inspiring lives of the tribals.

Bastar has always attracted me, and she has inspired me to be a happy human being, whatever the life situation may be. She taught me that being human is more significant than being an educated being. Even though a few people consider them unsophisticated, they are happy and content in their life situations. They live a satisfied life without tension, worries and anxieties about the future. They live in the here and now - for them, the present is more important than the future. They don't keep or accumulate anything for the future. They live with nature, and nature provides for them and protects them. They are very healthy, and one cannot find the modern man's sicknesses in them, like cholesterol, high sugar, blood pressure, depression, or even cancer and other deadly deceases. They are genuine and sincere. They have a sense of unity and belongingness, and never exploit anything or anyone.

Bastar does not indicate a particular place, city or village, but stands for a cradle of varied tribal cultures, a way of life, which holds the great heritage of the past. Bastar is situated in the southern part of Chhattisgarh. Geographically speaking, Bastar is a hilly area with a lot of high ranges and forests. It is blessed with a lot of raw materials and natural resources.

I had the privilege of staying in Bastar for about two years in a place called Jagdalpur-Bhanpuri. From there, I used to visit many villages and towns of Bastar. The people are very simple and sincere, but illiterate, such that they can easily be exploited by the other powers. Bastar is the home of tribals. They are isolated from the main stream of Indian society and culture. Bastar tribes are called Gond, a generic name - each tribe has got a separate identity; they are homogenous, but represented by various levels of development. Their life and culture are nourished in the lap of nature. They have their own religion, beliefs, customs, values and codes of conduct. In Bastar, people observe several rituals and festivals. Some of the rituals are performed at the family level, some at the community level, and some at the regional level. To get possessed by deities is a common phenomenon to them. They believe that their deities reside in jungles, in hills, in rivers, on their land and also roam in the air. Due to this, their sacred places are found in those areas. The tribals are people of celebrations. Their life is filled with religious duties and celebrations of all kinds. Holidays, religious festivals and birth anniversaries of Gods, Goddesses and mythological heroes are observed with solemn celebrations during the course of the year. Other occasional ceremonies, evoking special forms of worship and sacrificial offerings, are conducted to obtain favours from God, like good weather, plentiful harvest, protection for

human beings as well as cattle and other animals, or to avert rain, hailstorms, floods and to prevent epidemic diseases.

The whole lives of the tribals are primarily directed towards raising food from the earth by cultivation, gathering the fruits of the forest, fishing, hunting and trapping. Traditionally, they are hunters, gatherers and cultivators. They also make baskets and mats. At present, hunting is an occasional phenomenon, and the collection of forest products still plays a very important role in their economic lives. They collect various types of fruits, tubers, flowers, honey, young bamboo shoots, mushrooms, seeds, resin, barks, wood and cocoons from the forest. A certain quantity of all these is kept by them for their own use, and the rest are either exchanged with salt, oil, and rice, or sold in the market or the forest department to earn cash, by which they can buy their daily needed commodities.

Education and technology has taken modern man away from nature and its resources, which has lead to most of the problems of the modern man. The modern man works day and night to be happy and live a satisfied life, but fails miserably, whereas the tribal people are happy and content in their lives. The tribal people of Bastar are the natives of this land, and are very simple and lead a primitive lifestyle. They are very simple and honest, and remain in perfect unity and companionship. They never cheat anyone, nor have the intention of exploiting anyone. They live a happy and satisfied life.

One lives in the modern era, and want to keep innovating newer technologies, day by day. Due to the advent of the most complex societal system, the personal relations among people deteriorate, and human beings tend to be profusely selfish. Here, the tribals pose a great challenge of being simple, unassuming, nature-friendly and sociable. They teach us the invaluable lesson that if one is inclined towards taking care of nature, then nature would safeguard us.

An Eco-Friendly Echo

Shibu Paulose

Though this article, I would like to focus on the necessity of individual initiatives towards eco-friendly life in the city, and the possibility of this initiative leading towards community consciousness.

The world has experienced, over the past few years, a 'green invasion'. Sustainable, green, eco-friendly are just some of the buzz words that have come up as a result of the shift of people's consciousness towards the concerns of the environment. Being 'eco-friendly' or 'environmental friendly' is becoming more and more important as far as city life is concerned. How can I be more 'environmental friendly' in the present scenario of my life within the context of a city? The simplest way to define what being eco-friendly means is to say that it is the act of living with intent. The intent is focused on not causing harm to the environment, and to prevent as much harm from occurring to the environment through my interactions with it. It goes beyond merely being an idea, and extends to actual practices that influence how communities, businesses and individuals conduct themselves. Being eco-friendly goes far beyond just turning off the lights when I leave the room or separating my garbage for recycling – it is about changing the dynamics of how I live.

There can be three basic stages to becoming eco-friendly, and they are –
Learning to consume items that cause minimal environmental harm.
Discovering the extent of my carbon footprint and acting to lessen that footprint on the environment.
Striving to support others who work to live and produce eco-friendly and sustainable communities.

There is a lot of talk about 'going green'. Thankfully, governments, businesses, individuals and communities around the world are beginning to take actions to back that talk up. From opting for alternative energies such as wind, hydropower, or the solar panels, to switching to lower emission transportation options, from growing their own food to putting 'Reduce, Recycle, Reuse' and even 'Precycle' plans into place. There are instances of initiatives that have become successes like the Cochin International Airport in Nedumbassery, Kerala, which has become the first airport in the world that completely operates on solar power, while also giving back extra power to the Kerala State Electricity Board. When I look at it, making life more environmental-friendly makes simple sense. What matters here are intentions and initiatives.

These initiatives make clear for me the fact that if I want to live on a planet with clean water, fresh air and a diversity of plants and animals, I have to do

everything I can to protect the earth's health. Being environmental friendly means practicing a lifestyle that helps the earth, more than it is hurt, and speaking up when I see the world around me being harmed. Conserving water, driving less often, gardening, and sticking up for animals are all good ways to start helping.

Today, growing an eco-friendly community is getting easier. There are more and more initiatives like community gardens, backyard gardens for houses, and the insistence on 'fresh from farm' products for the community that make it easier for an entire community to actively participate for an eco-friendly goal. These initiatives are even promoted by the corporate sectors. At the same time, one should be careful of the 'green-washing'. Companies sometimes label their products 'eco-friendly' or 'environmental friendly' without them truly being so. And so, being eco-friendly means, primarily, an individual initiative that leads to community consciousness.

Gandhian Concept of Education

Shine Joseph

Education should aim at balanced growth of the individual, and insist on both knowledge and wisdom. The Gandhian philosophy of education emphasises on the humanisation of education through the development of "head, heart and hand". Through this article, I intend on putting emphasis on the fact that the Gandhian philosophy of education is undoubtedly admirable and worth following even today.

The ordinary meaning of education is knowledge of letters. To teach students reading, writing and arithmetic, is called primary education. But in the Gandhian perspective, character building must have the first priority in education, and Gandhiji called it primary education. The Gandhian educational concept raised silent protest against social evils such as untouchability, child marriage, violence, and dowry systems. For Gandhi, the function of education is not merely to produce good individuals, but to churn out individuals who understand their social responsibilities as elements of the society in which they live in. Any system of education that ignores this vital aspect is incomplete, ineffective and incapable of creating the conditions of a good society. Starting from character building, the Gandhian system of education was designed to bring knowledge and skill together to draw the best out of each individual. It aims at inculcating dignity of labour, self-respect, and self-reliance in every individual.

According to Gandhi, true education has a role in achieving immediate aims along with its ultimate aim. The development of personality was more significant than the accumulation of intellectual tools and academic knowledge. For Gandhi, the school is basically a community linked to social achievements. It should be an organised society itself that should be engaged in some faithful activity contributing to the greater society. Students should learn in school how to live together in a community on the basis of cooperation, truth and non-violence. He experimented this idea in the Sevagram Ashram, where the community was created on the basis of cooperation and mutual help. Gandhi said, "The Swaraj of my ... our ... dream recognises no race, or religious distinctions. Nor is it to be the monopoly of the lettered persons, nor yet of moneyed men. Swaraj is to be for all, including the farmer, but emphatically including the maimed, the blind, and the starving, toiling millions [...] a stout hearted, honest, sane illiterate man may well be the first servant of the nation".

For Gandhi, the word 'Swaraj' meant self-rule and self-reliance. Gandhi firmly believed that the real education for the people of India was impossible through the medium of a foreign language. If one follows an alien language, it will lead to the neglect of the indigenous culture of the nation. It will alienate students from their mother tongue, and it will cut them off from their roots in the cultural traditions of their country. Gandhi asks why one uses English as the medium of instruction in India, when other nations are able to employ their own language. He was always against English education. His concern with self-knowledge and self-identity was related to the knowledge of truth, and any violation of the self was considered a violation of truth. He believed that English education imposed a moral and intellectual injury on India.

The role of education is to help people become the responsible and useful citizens of tomorrow. Here, the responsible and useful citizens are those who have spontaneous love, care and concern for others. Those people are always committed to their duties, and to quality and excellence in work. One needs to inspire children to undertake self-development processes to control their mind and direct it towards the higher dimensions of work and life, to achieve not

just success, but consistent success and perfection, with bliss.

Gandhiji, the great father of our nation, was a man who lived and taught according to the needs of his time. His vision and thoughts have helped independent India to develop into a nation of solid progress. As a social reformer, Gandhi wanted education to be a powerful medium for social change and development. Gandhi was of the firm view that unless individual changes take place, social development is impossible. Hence, he gave utmost importance to character building and the reshaping of attitudes and values. For him, true education does not consist in literacy training, but in character building. The education which does not fulfil this essential objective is utterly worthless. During his speeches to the students on various occasions, Gandhi emphatically declared that all their scholarship, all their study of Shakespeare and Wordsworth would be in vain, if at the same time they do not build their character, and attain mastery over their thoughts and actions. This concept of Gandhiji, regarding the aims of education, is undoubtedly admirable and worth following even today.

True education and violence are fundamentally opposed to each other, and true education can be given through non-violence, and this is the central idea of Gandhi's education scheme. He held the view that the students must be trained to think independently. The weakness of the present educational system in India is its failure in enlightening the conscience of the children. A lot of emphasis is given on developing competence, while character formation is neglected. The deterioration of values and an increase in violence are due to the absence of a holistic approach in education. Our educational system and our authorities must realise the true spirit and sense of Gandhi's concept of education. It must be value-oriented rather than profit oriented.

Facebook - Transcending Phases

Syril Fernandez

The manner of news dissemination has changed over the years - from traditional news media such as newspapers and magazines, the world has come to a point where news is obtained from our screens. The transition from the traditional form to the digital form has been beneficial to a large extent, where the immediacy of news dispersal is at its best. This new form of online journalism has vested the common man with abundant opportunities to gain information and news, with the stroke of a finger.

This trend has also given rise to new, independent media houses who solely work on the online media front, such as ScoopWhoop, The Quint and several other websites, both Indian and international. Along with new sources and opinions, the new medium has brought in such variety of structured news and information, that the user can choose to follow the source of any topic and theme that he or she wishes. It has also enabled the propagation of information in multiple interesting ways, so as to keep the audience engaged.

Facebook, today, is becoming the beacon of such news dissemination. Facebook initially started as a social network that enabled individuals to connect with their friends and close acquaintances. However, its attempt to keep up with this, is seeing a decline - a decline in people posting content that is personal and intimate. Such content, referred to as 'original content', refers to user composed posts, vacation photos, party pictures and several other content that is specific. Though there is user migration from Facebook to other social networks, Facebook has managed to bring back users for the entertaining and engaging content that they provide.

News dispersion through social media, especially Facebook, is founded on the same pillars of online journalism – multimedia, interactivity and on-demand. News that is propagated through Facebook, goes further by providing the user with much more details, as it enables content from multiple sources, with varied and direct opinions from resource persons of various fields. It thus gets new content across to a particular friend group, and shares this content across various media to be collated and presented to the user in a seamless manner. The main feature of Facebook as a news medium, is that it collates various content of temporal and social prominence, and brings it right to us in our news feed, thereby eliminating the need to fish through the internet for news stories and articles.

The social nature of Facebook, as a platform, also enables the free expression of individual opinion, which is curbed for the press and the media, to an extent. Censorship policies of Facebook also relatively guards the freedom of expression, unless the content

doesn't meet community guidelines. Also, Facebook's concept of taking the news to the individual helps in creating 'informed' citizens who are aware of happenings and current affairs that are local, national and international, based on the sources that the individual 'likes' and 'follows'. Further, content that is made available encompasses all topics under the sun that relate to mankind. In addition, with the provision to access information, and the ability to also share it with the world, has given the individual the power to form and express his opinion on various discourses. Constant interaction with various ideas and a climate for knowledge growth is also created, which can lead to the well informed, opinionated citizen. In addition, Facebook, and other social media, has the potential to influence individuals, promote activism, and also mobilise help if needed. Social networks, in this aspect, furthers other media by providing a forum for people to engage in discussion, thereby promoting such acts.

Although news dissemination through social media has such virtues, all is not well on this platform that is based on the internet. The plurality of voices expressing opinions and news, leads to a lot of problems that affect the medium, the most prominent being the credibility attached to the news and opinions broadcasted on the platform. Today, the convenience of posting news over the internet also allows users to take down and modify content as they please, without much hassle and noise, unless records are made of such changes being made. Citizen journalism has also been on the receiving end of this problem, where misinformed netizens could post speculated content and half-baked opinions without any evidence, and could mislead people with the same. Also, imbibing news from sources that do not have credibility could also lead to such a problem. Another blaring issue that such social networks pose to the ethics of news dispersion, is the curation of content by these platforms. These social platforms could actually create an environment around an individual curating and providing him or her content that he/she would like to see, thereby making one live in an illusion. This could have an adverse effect on one's world view, and affect his understanding of reality.

Amidst all these virtues and vices of news dispersion through social media, there lies a very subjective hindrance with regard to how people handle the medium. It is seen today that the internet is lush with information, such that the user is spoilt for choice, and is unable to distinguish between good and bad

information. Shirky, a critic of social and economic effects of Internet technologies says that "the true malaise of the modern era is rather 'filter failure". He terms filter failure as the inability of the systems to differentiate between good and bad information, owing to the influx of copious amounts of information that is being poured in every day. The system here refers to algorithmic programs that filter information, and also the human capability to distinguish between good and bad information. With such a copious amount of information at disposal, and programs curating content for the user, the problem is not that of uninformed citizens but misinformed citizens. Netizens are so much at leisure with such information, that they take for granted the source and the credibility, and fail to look critically at the news story or article. This is indeed a barrier for social networks and social media at large, which aims to create informed citizens.

Facebook today is a Jekyll and Hyde act - virtues exist along with vices, and one always begets the other. But it must be taken into account that Facebook and other social media are 'social platforms', with an emphasis on 'social'. They can never be an alternate for mainstream media or mass media. Mainstream media or any journalistic content producers, have a set of rules and ethics which govern their profession. This is applicable to any organisation that performs journalistic operations. However, Facebook and other social media sites are not media of a journalistic nature. Therefore, the objectivity and ethics of journalism are often neglected. They are business organisations whose purpose is to keep the audience entertained and engaged, and this underlying principle could overshadow the objectivity of journalism - and the blame cannot be passed on to the platform for doing its business. The platform has provided the space and accessibility to perform such functions. A netizen who is well informed and committed to get information over the platform, would do so prudently, and critically evaluate the information before forming opinions and sharing it with the world.

The new form of journalism, that is brought about by such platforms, is keeping prominent media houses and journalists on their feet, in order to cater to the people and also grip their audience. Journalists and media houses are evolving with technology. Technology has eased our lives and made it easy in every single way possible, and this news propagation through social media is a manifestation of it. But there are glitches and pitfalls that are to be addressed, and in

the due course of time, they will be addressed. Until then, a little effort, and a prudent and critical outlook towards imbibing information will help one go a long way – benefitting oneself and the world at large.

I Am an Artist

Aayushee Garg

The credit for sowing the seed in me, to write on what an artist is, goes first to Prof. Meenakshi Shivram, and later to Prof. Bidyut Bhushan whose quote "An artist is equally attached to life and renunciation" added fuel to the spark already kindled a year ago. The poem describes the sentiment of 'hiraeth' that an artist experiences as she exorcises the surreal emotions she has endeavoured to assimilate in the epoch of her life. Jaques Derrida's ineffable disbandment in 1966 of the notion of binary oppositions that was deemed sacrosanct ever since the inception of philosophy had furnished a new colour to paint the notion of reality with. I use the novelty of this iridescent colour to paint the paradoxes and ironies in my poem. The impossible existence of contrasting binaries as an idea manifests into a mellifluous one for me as I tend to look at the multiple realities through it. It is recommended that the reader looks at the form of the poem which forms the content of it as well. The oil painting is inspired by a photograph of another painting I came across on Pinterest. I have managed an attempt to imitate the finesse of the original idea.

I am an artist.
I walk on thin air.
I colour skies green.
I build palaces out of crooked shoes.
I obey rules to eventually smash them to pieces.
I possess the imprudent courage to appear the default erudite fool.
I question patterns, principles, prerogatives, and priorities.
I humbly brag of my clandestine arcane experiences.
I vacuously strive to decapitate the unfathomable struggle in myself.
I consciously impart condescending theories trying to make sense of the world around me.
I continue incessant incisive perusal of subtle occurrences of disorder in festoons of shenanigans in polity.
I segregate realities.

I judge just verdicts.
I am mortified by Truth.
I bolster incongruous trivialities.
I am an ostentatious ascetic wearing ornaments of simulacra.
I succinctly endorse intrepid adventures of the excelsior brain.
I deliberately demean the unforgiving world swirling around me.
I ostracise the readers of my art by devouring their absent minds.
I am precariously careful of the atrocities thrust upon me by the nothingness of everything.
I drive a civil race of cultured rebel prostrating before self-constructed principles written on water.
I am a disoriented maniac subjected to dwelling in the disguise of disarmed rhetoric of time and space.
I throw in paradoxes to carve eternal manifestations bejeweled with detached bubbles of impermanence.
I am a differant deconstructive critic who traces ruptured events in order to centralise the structure at play.
I prefer crime over sin and sometimes otherwise.
I skew ambidextrous realities while eschewing falsehood.
I venerate epiphanies constructed from diffused agony.
I protest against the starkness of obedient rebelliousness.
I misconstrue abstractness only to consecrate concreteness.
I adumbrate efflorescence of the unconscious of a lazy activist.
I cherry pick grandeur from obscure dimensions and geometries.
I intentionally condone the opulence of individual objective subjectivity.
I supervise subordination of sturdy desires interspersed with obnoxious imagination.
I thrive on sarcastic regurgitation of memories shackled cohesively in the conscious.
I dangle between the two extremes of lust and anger.
I fetishise the unloved and critique the vanity of narcissism.
I prescribe mortgaged experiences of communist individualism.
I am a primordial flag-bearer of inane grace found in most unlikely spaces.
I probe into interdisciplinary discourses on existence of the unity of Truth.
I plummet into the downward spiral of depression due to the frivolity of warfare.
I run away from evocative connotations.

I am a claustrophobic soldier chained in hubris.
I gather accolades with disgust of denunciation.
I am a famous altruistic charlatan greedy of cumulative power.
I estimate precisely approximate truths to crumple them to falsehood.
I manoeuvre the multiplicity of all my oeuvres through an unparalleled tribute to myself.
I paint chronic synecdoche on the canvas of modernity misled by despotism of untruthful ideas.
I am an indiscriminate scavenger of empathetic sympathy.
I am a manual automaton driven by artificial intelligence.
I am a destroyer of the scaffoldings of serenity to unravel debris of fruitless ideals.
I am an anti-nationalist patriotic modern historian.
I am a didactic concoction of beliefs and prejudices.
I am a biased journalist.
I am an American-Indian.
I am a subservient feminist.
I am a sacrificing materialist.
I am a blasphemous theist.
I intentionally plunder worthwhile mindsets.
I delineate ontology of caste.
I am colour-blind disloyal faithful.
I demonetise territories.
I traverse portrayals of mindscapes.
I obliterate macrocosms in the light of minuteness.
I perch on vicissitudes of the vanity of sermonising chants.
I am afraid of veracity.
I transcend semiotics of disbelief.
I sketch esoteric monuments of fog.
I reside in an opulent abode of martyrs.
I write vociferous stories of precocious carcasses.
I revel in the glory of my dignified shameless treatises.
Imbroglio is my comfortable hideout.
I derive convenience from discomfort.
I lay fervid stress on theories I don't believe in.
I rise from the ashes to reproduce my productions.
I furtively scavenge on cadavers of vultures of misinformation.
I crusade on the narrow road of disbelief studded with mines of distrust.
I am neither a winner nor a loser, yet I am very much part of the battle.
I enrapture ruptures.
I glamourise renditions of painful pleasures.
I turn epics to epistolary.
I turn chains to gold and gold to chains.
I am a catalyst of entropy of senselessness.

I have equal pride on my lunacy and on my discipline.
I conjure problems for solutions of problems that did not exist.
I cleanse mirrors off their rust of warped preconceptions.
I ignite fluidity of mirth in pungent solids of distaste.
I bleed ink on papyrus.
I defy former form.
I am a corrupt priest.
I am an insecure President.
I am a laid-back campaigner.
I am a dark white.
I am a secular theist.
I am a masculine woman.
I am a natural artefact.
I am a symmetrical art work.
I call serendipity my forte.
I weave Christmas trees out of English words.
I and my Powerless Powerful Words.
I am an Artist.

Painting by Aayushee Garg

Dalit Literature

A. Abisha

Dalit literature had its inception with the Dalits. The term 'Dalit' stands to signify a group of people who lost their identity because of the discriminatory caste system. Their inner emotions and feelings were put into words, and its culmination was called Dalit lit-

erature. Most of the Dalit works are written by people from the Dalit community, which help bring their own personal experiences to light. The term Dalit literally means the downtrodden, depressed people from a low caste in society. Through this article, I intend on approaching this subject with a desire to delineate the problems held in close association with the Dalit community, and that which gets explored in their literature.

Everyone has their own identity. The fact is, poor people, who have their own identity, are forced by the society to live under the control of high caste people. In the mean time, their identity was killed. It is really hard to live without an identity. Dalit people face that problem in their day to day life. I heard the term 'Dalit' for the first time when I was doing my 10th grade. Without any idea, I heard the same term used again and again in newspapers as it said many things, like an incident where 10 Dalit men were killed, a Dalit woman was raped, et cetera. That arises my interest to know much about Dalits. And I found Dalit literature interesting as it brings out the real life experience of the Dalit people. Many works were written by Dalit writers in their own language. About their depressed life and the struggle faced by them in their community. The voices of pain and anguish of the Dalits is visible in their works. Their works serve as a tool to bring their real pain into the darker shades. It also motivates the young generation to build an identity equal to the other so called 'high caste people'.

Dalit literature is protest literature which faithfully reflects the grim realities of the Dalit situation, and it serves as a weapon to strengthen Dalit movement. Dalit people, who are suppressed in their society by high caste people, cried out for their identity and that was captured in Dalit literature. Dalit literature forms a vital and distinct part of Indian literature. Dalit literature started with many languages as Marathi language, and soon appeared in Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, Bangla and Tamil languages, through narratives such as poems, short stories, and, mostly, autobiographies, which stood out unique in style due to their grim portrayal of reality and the Dalit political scene. The themes of Dalit literature reflect the harsh and hard realities of their day to day life. Poems, short stories, novels and autobiographies written by Dalit writers provide useful insights on the question of Dalit identity and their struggle and sufferings. Dalit literature is deeply concerned with identity formation and its affirmation to recoup the

self-confidence of the marginalised sections in our society where they are longing for their identity. Most of their inventive imagination is structured around these premises. Dalit literature is translated in English from the writers' native language, and that available translation works poses a hurdle for most researchers. But looking at its enormous value in re-structuring and re-visioning identity, and providing specific sights to their self, that has battled cultural segregation and oppression, it is becoming mandatory to take up any issue raised by it and feed into the literary understanding that was brought forward by contemporary comparative literature.

I found the Clear survey that was taken on the Dalit community and the survey says that Dalits represent a community of 170 million in India, constituting 17% of the population. One out of every five to six Indians is Dalit, yet, due to their caste identity, Dalits regularly face problems of discrimination and violence, which prevent them from enjoying the basic human rights and dignity promised to all citizens of India.

The word 'Dalit' emerged from the Sanskrit language, which means divided, split, broken. The term 'Dalit' has become a political identity, similar to the way African Americans in the United States moved away from the use of the term 'Negro', to the use of 'Black' or 'African-American'.

Modern authors include Mahatma Phule and Dr. Bahasaheb Ambetkar in Maharastra, Bama and many others who focused on the issues of Dalits and their suffering through their works and writings. New trends began and many started to raise their voices through Dalit writing and inspired many Dalits to offer works in Marathi, Hindi, Tamil and Punjabi. There are novels, poems and even different plays on Dalit issues. Dalit literature works on both aesthetic and socio political identity. The valuable, and sometimes original insights, and syntheses of these Dalit writers in terms of their experience, pain and anguish may help to evolve new paradigms in society. Dalit literature aimed at examining the dynamic intersection on caste and society, and it can be seen in the works of Dalit writers.

I personally feel that these Dalit writers and their writings are studied to explore the readers' response to issues pertaining to the caste identity of Dalit community.

The Cursed Child Remains Cursed

Anju Jose Palatty

The surprising eighth installment of the Harry Potter series brought in mixed feelings from the die-hard fan base created by the original books of the series. 'Harry Potter and the Cursed Child' is a play that is based on an original new story by J. K. Rowling, Jack Thorne and John Tiffany. The script of the play was released as a book on 31 July 2016, Harry Potter's 36th birthday. But what makes the play different from the rest of the series? The fact that it is a more mature, more character-driven and less magical story - and this brings about a real disconnect between the play and the seven previous novels.

The completely different vibe given out by the book made me realise that there never should have been an eighth Harry Potter book at all. The seventh novel completed the arc of Harry's magical world in full. While a little melancholic at the end, it also brought a whole lot of satisfaction. However, going in with the mindset that I would finally be able to experience a little more of that magical world after all these years, led to a disappointing reading experience.

With visible plot holes throughout the story, all that was left were heartfelt conversations between the characters. The only feeling that was conjured in me was a sense of nostalgia for all the familiar faces mentioned in the book, which was unfortunately not enough to redeem itself in my eyes.

Other than one last event towards the end, there weren't any other exciting events in the play that brought back the magical nostalgia of the world of wizardry of Harry Potter. In fact, whatever events were mentioned, it threatened to distort my image of the reality attached to the previous novels.

How could Bellatrix Lestrange have had time to procreate and give birth to Delphi, if the space for that was never given in the novels? How did the sweet old trolley witch I've been seeing since the first book suddenly turn sinister and morph into the stuff of my nightmares? The character development in the post-Deathly Hallows installment seems like a feeble attempt to resurrect everyone's beloved characters, and ends up like poorly done fan-fiction.

The entire plot-line of the play comes off as haphazard and put together for the sake of story. Albus Potter goes out of his way to correct what he thinks is a mistake, quite simply because of an overheard conversation that he has absolutely no connection to. And all of it comes across as an unnecessary act of heroism.

One of the biggest grouses I have with the Cursed Child, however, is the portrayal of some of the strongest female characters as just plot devices rather than actual characters themselves. Hermione, the brightest witch of her age, is depicted as a hassled government leader who proceeds to make decisions based on what Harry feels, or thinks is right. Ginny, the feisty redhead from the previous novels, someone who is meant to be a hard-hitting journalist, comes off as a nagging wife. Minerva McGonagall's role as a headmistress is overshadowed by her portrayal of a character who simply wants to defy her former students.

There are more prominent plot holes which one just cannot ignore. The concept of a 'Time Turner' with a time limit is preposterous. If that was the case, how did Harry and Hermione travel for hours in the Prisoner of Azkaban? And transfiguring into a whole other person is also impossible, since that would have been Hermione's first line of protection when the trio were on the run. A married Bellatrix had an affair with Voldemort? It is beyond comprehension to realise that Voldemort had sexual relations with another person - the same Dark Lord who would not let anyone get close to him, no matter how disillusioned they were. Delphi's quest for revenge was never properly justified or elaborated upon, even though she was the villain and remained a poor representation of Voldemort.

Even with all this, there are certain parts of the play that have to be acknowledged for the closure they have managed to give, in terms of unanswered questions in the novels. Dumbledore apologising to Harry for putting him through all that he did, was a wonderfully sentimental conversation, and one that was definitely long overdue.

The potential that this book had was far more than what it actually delivered. As a part of the series, it is still a tough one to swallow. And even though it may have answered some burning questions, it left me with many more. And that is why the Cursed Child will always remain cursed for me.

"Poverty is the worst kind of violence." – Mahatma Gandhi

Ankura Nayak

I will be reflecting upon a subject that brings discomfort to most of humanity, a subject that most would rather put on hold, a subject involving numerous aspects of how humanity has successfully created and maintained today's version of civilisation.

It is a paradox that, as India climbs the ladder of economic growth to become the third largest economy of the world in Gross Domestic Product terms, nearly 30% of its population continues to be the victim of poverty. Amartya Sen and Jean Drieze call this the 'Uncertain Glory' of India. UNDP's 2014 Multidimensional Poverty Index holds 56% of India's population poor against education, health and standards of living indicators. There are ample studies, and the statistics go to prove that the so called 'Trickle-Down Theory' has failed to uplift India's poor masses and that India's growth story continues to be plagued by the malaise of poverty.

However, what I think is often ignored and what has impeded our mission against poverty is the true understanding of poverty, which goes beyond the simple 'bread and butter' issue. Poverty is not simply the absence of means to meet the basic subsistence needs, but a full blown assault on both the individual as well as society. It is an assault of the worst kind which renders both the individual and society immobile in ways well beyond any other kind of violence, be it caste or communal violence, or state-perpetuated or terrorism-induced violence. It attacks the individual and society at its very roots, making it impossible for both to achieve their full potential.

The individual is the primary victim of violence perpetrated by poverty. A poor person gets entangled in a vicious circle which renders him or her weak in multiple dimensions - physical, political, social, economic and psychological. The assault of poverty at the most basic level causes bodily harm to an individual. A person inflicted by poverty subsequently suffers from hunger and malnutrition. This impacts his or her health and shortens his or her lifespan.

At the social level, a poor person feels that he is excluded. This social exclusion is best manifested in the gated communities of the middle and rich classes. Access to places of social congregation, social participation and engagement, be it public parks or shopping malls, being hindered by 'gates' and 'security checks', makes poor people feel like their presence is unwanted and undesired. A social chasm has developed between the 'rich' and the 'poor', with the latter suffering from disenchantment with the society in general. Thus, poverty attacks an individual's social sensibility. This disenchantment might even take the form of resentment and induce social violence and crimes.

At the political level, violence perpetuated by poverty is of the gravest kinds. It disempowers an individual, stripping him of all the abilities to enjoy the rights and the liberties guaranteed to him or her by the constitution. At the psychological level, the assault of poverty is almost crippling. Since all the doors of developing one's capabilities and potential seem closed, an individual suffers from the feeling of utter worthlessness. An attack so vicious on the individual cannot but leave a deep imprint of destruction on society too, in its wake. Society is impacted by the perils of poverty so much that it can be seen almost as violence against society. At the social level, a society becomes dysfunctional due to the wide gulf that develops between the rich and the poor. The society loses out on social engagement and social cohesion, which hampers peace and harmony in society.

Economically, society loses out on a healthy workforce which can contribute to its growth story. Instead, the economy is burdened with millions being spent on poverty alleviation programmes and subsidies, which could have been utilised productively elsewhere had poverty not existed in the first place. Politically, democracy is weakened. Democracy has no meaning if a significance proportion of the population cannot participate in it meaningfully because of poverty. Thus, poverty strikes at the very root of democracy, and the empowerment it guarantees to a society practicing it. Psychologically, the society lacks mutual trust, cohesiveness and harmony. This weakens the bonds among people and hampers their unity.

Thus, poverty has indeed proved to be the worst sort of violence against the individual and the society. It injures the individual and society at so many levels that without its complete eradication, the nation cannot progress. Any growth or development without the eradication of poverty would always be weak and incomplete. Gandhi, who believed poverty to be the worst sort of violence, supported 'Sarvodaya,'

which means 'uplift for all'. He asserted that rather than 'mass production', one should have 'production of masses'.

Indeed, as the Gandhiji talisman suggests, without uplifting the masses out of poverty, nothing can be truly achieved. However, to tackle all forms of violence perpetrated by poverty, what I strongly believe in is the requirement of a change in approach. Rather than relying on a spirit of 'charity', one needs to go for a rights based approach. One needs to guarantee to the poor decent standards of life as entitlements, and only then can the social and psychological dimensions of poverty be eliminated. Recent schemes of the government such as the 'Right to Food' and the pending 'Right to Health' are in the right direction.

To conclude, I would like to add that the violence of poverty against the individual and society can indeed be eliminated by its shoot and root, if all the aspects which make poverty the worst sort of violence are understood. Only then can India come out of its paradoxes and achieve a 'Certain Glory'.

He Who Bears the Burden of the World

Annu Sabu

Why are there so many atrocities committed against women? What is the root cause of all this? I think the root cause is the family - the morals fed to a child by his or her caretaker, along with their baby food. The attitude of a child's parent in India varies according to the infant's gender. The moment a male child is born, everyone is happy, and this translates into a death-like scenario for a female child. Why is a girl a burden, while a boy is a blessing? Who is feeding the future generations with these lies? It is one's parents, and other members of the family. In the future, it's me who is going to spoil and bring up a human being who is dangerous.

Consider the scenario in a household where a boy is given the freedom to do anything, climb on anything and go anywhere, while a girl would be monitored the moment she can walk or talk. She is required to behave in a certain way. Parents hesitate to let their girls go out on a road trip, because there are dangerous men out there. Yes, it's true. There are dangerous men out there But why are they dangerous? Who created these dangerous monsters? Was he

born dangerous or was he moulded into this beast by someone? When a girl is given a curfew, a boy is relatively not. And when asked about this, the obvious answer is - "he is a boy and you are a girl". But who created this distinction? A boy who grows up in a household to believe that boys have the freedom to go anywhere and do anything they want, while girls have to be sheltered and protected, will automatically believe that a girl's place is inside the house. So, when he sees another girl being outside, beyond the society's curfew time, he feels that she is doing something wrong - that she is committing a sin. This is when he feels the burdensome duty of disciplining her who is deviant.

Men of our society bear the burden of disciplining their women, just like the white man's burden to civilise the rest of the world. I believe that the root cause of all our social problems is not teaching our children to just live their lives, and not bother much with other people's businesses. If I go home and walk on the roads past 8 pm, without any man walking beside me, everyone, both men and women start to stare. All the autos that go by slow down when they approach me, and give me a confused look when I do not board the auto. It's a man's world out here after it's dark, and they are apprehensive about letting a woman enter it.

The recent incident of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh activists beating up a couple in broad daylight in Kochi, Kerala, for walking together, has stirred the anger of the youth of the place. Why does the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh think that it is upon their shoulders to cleanse India of all its sins? How is walking with a guy even a sin? Men are taught from their families that women belong inside the four walls of a house, and has to be protected at all times, or else, she will lose the most important part of her life, her 'virginity'. Virginity is exaggerated to such an extent that, rather than being just a part of her, it becomes her. If a girl is raped, the whole world laments over her loss of this invisible purity. No one is angry about the fact that her personal freedom and choice was curtailed and robbed, everyone is concerned about that imaginary something that she has supposedly lost. The women are compelled to carry the burden of all the moralities of the culture. The society's and family's honour is situated at that unspeakable part of a woman. If she does something that is not expected of her, then the society believes that the whole system is going to crumble down. I am not the bearer of society's morality and culture. I want to be left

alone, away from the scrutinising eye of a monstrous society.

Syria:
Fleeing Terror, Finding Refuge - In Search of a Home Away from Home

Anureet Gill

War is the greatest catastrophe that brings death and destruction, merciless slaughter and butchery, disease and starvation, poverty and ruin, in its wake. A disturbing side of modern war is that they tend to have global implications. The psychological and economic impact of war on their belligerent societies is huge. Terrorism is driven by politics even when the justifications given for the killing of innocents and the recruiting tools of terrorist groups are cast in religious, ethnic, linguistic or moral terms. The war in Syria is a befitting example. I feel that the regimes should realise that there are other alternatives to violence, to gain what they want. The image of Aylan Kurdi, the small Syrian boy who washed up on a Turkish beach, was so heart wrenching that the European politicians, and the public, opened their arms and their hearts to these refugees.

The problem of refugee influx in Europe is not a new phenomenon, but in the summer of 2015, Europe experienced the highest influx of refugees since World War II, and Syria became the prime source of refugees. Before talking about the Syrian civil war, it is important to know what lead to the conflict in the first place. The Arab uprising of 2011 which saw the fall down of many proletarian regimes, gave rise to a revolt against the president Bashar al-Assad of Syria. Unwilling to step down from power, he used the army to crush the Syrian uprising .This resulted in unrest in the country, and the formation of the 'Free Syrian Army' on 29 July 2011 by officers who deflected from the Syrian Armed Forces with the goal to bring down the government of Bashar al-Assad. They were later joined by extremists like Kurds, resulting in a proxy war within the state. Iran sent officers to the ground military to combat the situation, whereas Arab states like Saudi Arabia and Jordan supported the militants, providing them with monetary support. Russia backed President Bashar-Al Asad, while the United States of America supported the rebel group to bring down the president. The war also saw the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, a militant group which did not fight Assad, but other rebel groups in Syria. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has not only conquered areas in Syria, calling it their Caliphate, but has also become the greatest security threat facing the world today. They not only reveal horrendous videos on social networking sites, but also kill innocent civilians, and those who oppose them. The women living in the areas controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria live in fear of forced marriage and rape by the fighters. The civilians are still trapped between the religious extremists, the regime and the rebel groups. Today Syria's conflict has devolved from peaceful protests against the government in 2011 to a violent insurgency that has drawn-in numerous other countries. It's partly a civil war of the government against the people, and partly a religious war, pitting Assad's minority Alawite sect - aligned with Shiite fighters from Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon against Sunni rebel groups; it has also increasingly become a proxy war featuring Russia and Iran against the United States and its allies. This war that began in March 2011, continues to ravage the country with no end in sight. Since the beginning of the Syrian war in 2011, many have fled the country and settled in the neighboring states, including Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt. Currently, there are 4 million Syrian refugees registered in the region. By mid-2015, the World Bank's estimated cost of the Syrian war for the Middle Eastern countries amounted to $35 billion. The sectarian nature of the conflict in Syria has become amplified with the regionalisation of the conflict, with Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah allied with the Syrian government, and the Sunni monarchical regimes allied with the opposition, including suggestions of arms transfers. Likewise, non-state actors including Islamist militia-fighters from neighboring Iraq, both Sunni and Shia - battle hardened from the sectarian battles in Iraq - have been reported crossing the border in Syria to join the battle on their respective sides. This 'regionalisation' of the struggle has had the effect of amplifying sectarian tension both within Syria as well as across the region generally, reinforcing the fears of Sunni regimes of Iranian regional influence.

In such perilous times, where the civilians are in a constant threat, neighboring countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt have provided valuable protection to Syrian refugees. They have allowed Syrians to access their territories and have dedicated significant financial resources and social services to help them. For example, Turkey, by the start of December 2014, had invested USD 4.5 billion in direct assistance to Syrian refugees in their coun-

try. As of mid-2014, Jordan and Lebanon had spent more than USD 1.2 billion and USD 1.6 billion, respectively. The central Iraqi government and regional Kurdistan government also contributed to the Syrian refugee response by providing core relief items, cash assistance, and essential services such as free access to health care. The burden placed on these countries is immense and has had adverse social and economic costs on the host communities. More than 80 percent of registered Syrian refugees in neighboring countries live in communities and cities rather than designated refugee camps. The influx of large numbers of refugees to urban settings has dramatically shifted the demographic composition in some areas and strained basic social services like water, sanitation, food, health care, housing, and electricity. A 2014 United Nations Development Program - UNDP - report described the refugee influx as a large-scale "de facto acceleration of urban growth", which has not been matched by increases in housing, service provision, infrastructure, and market capacity adequate to meet the requirements of the increased population. The main problem with Refugee Asylums is that different countries have different laws, systems and procedures for admitting the refugees. The European Union's Common European Asylum System - CEAS - intends to ensure to protect the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. It also lays down the minimum standards and procedures for processing and deciding asylum applications, and for the treatment of both asylum seekers and those who are recognised as refugees. For Syrian refugees in Lebanon, shelter is a serious concern due to the absence of formal refugee camps and the lack of affordable housing. More than 70 percent of these refugees live outside of government-run refugee camps, often in overcrowded rental houses. Though camp settings provide basic services, many Syrians outside of camps struggle to secure basic needs like housing, healthcare, and education, and some live in abject poverty, often in unsanitary, even dangerous housing conditions. Another concern is that of the safety of women. United Nation's Human Rights Council report of 2015 revealed the use of sexual violence against girls and women. The report says, "Women and girls were found to have been raped and sexually assaulted in government detention facilities, in particular in the investigation branches of the Military Intelligence Directorate and prisons administered by the General Security Directorate in Damascus."

The larger question that one should ask is whether talks on Syria serve any purpose. The talks in Geneva which aimed at ending the Syrian conflict were derailed by bombings in Homs. In spite of talks and a lot of work by non-governmental organisations like White Helmet, it is sad to see that countries have used the crisis as a proxy war for their own interest. The dropping of barrel bombs by the government shows the ruthless side of the government. The civil war has forced 11 million people - half the country's pre-crisis population - to flee their homes. About 7.6 million Syrians have been internally displaced within the country, and 4 million have fled Syria for other countries. Many people set dangerous voyages to the Mediterranean to somehow reach Europe. From the perspective of recent policy perspective, the majority of migrants who have arrived during the crisis, who are still awaiting confirmation of their refugee status, are not supposed to be integrating.

The expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is now a matter of concern for a lot of countries, as it is expanding to new areas, recruiting fighters and widening the reach of attacks in the region. Targeting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, President elect Donald Trump on 1st March said that he would not allow America to become a sanctuary for extremists and vowed to work with the allies to destroy the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. With the upcoming elections in September, German chancellor Angela Merkel is under a lot of pressure to keep up her promise to limit the number of immigrants that come to Germany, as, for many voters, her tenure is associated with a whopping 900,000 refugees that came in 2015, adding to the 280,000 that arrived this year. There are a lot of groups and outside countries involved in Syria's war but there are also a lot of contradictions within allies with regard to who to support so that there seems to be no immediate end to the war as of now.

Why I Believe

Ayushi Khajuria

It is possible to have faith and not be dogmatic. My objective is to show that questioning need not always lead to loss of faith.

For half my life, I lived without following religion, or being ritualistic in any way. I always used to question the existence of the supernatural, sitting there in my cocoon. This changed recently.

I never believed in one supreme entity, or any superhuman holding every man's actions accountable

and maintaining their repercussions. But now, I feel the total opposite of this, and this is not due to some sudden change. This happened because of a series of events that changed my perspective towards the religion that my family follows. Those events made me a stern believer in the religion that I follow.

I never believed in the structural construction of religion, and I don't follow that structural construct. I follow religion not in its purest form, but in its practical form. I don't associate religion with social institutions. Following a religion does not imply taking everything that it mandates without a pinch of salt. After I questioned everything, I could follow what I follow now. Yet, it remains inexplicable. The reason I choose not to explain my faith does not stem from my ignorance, but from the belief that faith is 'anything which can't be seen.'

Though no one could ever completely know the existence of one or many Gods, I have evidently seen the power of God. 'Faith in God' is what I follow, rather than following a regimented religion. I don't specifically follow one religion's ideologies, but a mix of what resonates within me. Whether it is good or evil, faith factors into our everyday functioning. I have evolved to believe. For me, religion has helped me make sense of the world, and has given me immense motivation.

People talk about losing faith when they start to question everything, but for me, I raised pertinent questions in my mind because there was no one to answer them – and faith was my answer. With faith in my life, there is hope, which is complementary to it. This leads to optimism in life even when everything is falling apart.

Unraveling The Satanic Myth

Ria Castelino

Satanism today has led to the formation of several ideologies that vastly differ from the mainstream doctrines of Christianity, and indicates an article of faith that has been escalating amongst individuals as it attains a widespread positive outlook. I view it as a counterculture that severely moves beyond the principles of the dominant culture and yet emerges as a decisive religiosity that provides a sense of positive freedom from the chained philosophies. It is Anton Lavey's 'The Satanic Bible', the authoritative text of

the Satanists, that brings forward several values that have emerged in complete contrast to Catholicism, but those which are in association with the practicality of today's times. Through Satanism, I believe a sense of positive freedom can be acquired by individuals and institutions to avoid the escape or the fear from freedom, though a negative connotation is attached to it due to our own personal ideologies on religion.

I realised that while understanding Satanism as a counterculture, a sense of prior knowledge transpires in our set frame of mind that is intact with the accustomed religious beliefs that one hold. What requires to be questioned is whether our immense knowledge of the existing mainstream religious beliefs in comparison to the development of Satanism as a revolting ideology will produce negative connotations or put forth a comparative analysis changing the prevailing paradigm. The existing stereotypical viewpoints on Satanism encourages a dismissive position on the entire understanding of this conception, and thus a tolerant comprehension is much required.

I noticed that the ideologies propagated by Satanism, in the present times, bring forth a pragmatic approach as compared to the mere idealistic approaches, and yields matter-of-fact indications that can be efficiently resorted to. It is not just suggestive of sheer recommendation, but also provides a sense of justification that is much more relevant. And in this way, it provides a positive ideological connotation. By this understanding, I also realised that Satanism is not just emerging as an institution that rose in conflict against the mainstream, but can also be viewed as an establishment that is indicative of the replacement of the existing societal values due to its ongoing rationality, and so a clear rationale of perceiving this religious notion as a counterculture can be adequately provided.

The emergence of Satanism as a religious movement by American occultist Anton Lavey brought forward a carnivalesque take on life by codifying its beliefs and practices in 'The Satanic Bible'. Although there was the existence of the 'Ophite Cultus Satanas' founded in Ohio in 1948, it was 'Laveyan' or the 'Atheistic Satanism' that initiated the public practice by propagating individualism. Through 'The Satanic Bible', Lavey laid down the foundations of contemporary Satanism and attained the scriptural status. It provided a naturalistic world view of the 'Laveyan Satanists' as opposed to the mainstream attributes of

the supernatural in Christianity.

While perceiving the nature of Satanism in popular culture, I found that in the article titled 'Devilish Consumption: Popular Culture in Satanic Socialiaation', Asbjørn Dyrendal talks about the significant role of popular culture in the construction of satanic identities. He initiates a study of the satanic socialisation and its consumption that has its roots in a cultural marketplace in which certain religious networks draw upon. He places importance on the development of social identities that require a certain scene in order to put forward the required disciplined way, claiming Satanism to acquire its associations during the primary socialisation. According to Dyrendal, the required scene for the development of contemporary Satanism is provided by the mass media. The construction of particular versions of identities thus depend on the perception of the emergence of these scenes. Here, I could hypothesise that individuals have been resorting to Satanism in order to avoid uncertainty that may have emerged while unseating the existing norms, to which there is a submission, as it prescribes a way to think and act. And thus, I discerned that Satanism becomes the scene that provides individuals with concrete grounds.

In addition to this, while further analysing 'The Satanic Bible' composed by Anton Lavey, I found that Satanism is inclusive of the creative element that is necessary for an individual to grow beyond the feeling of anguish or desperation that might accompany him or her due to the overthrowing of the existing authoritative order which in turn could lead into a destructive force. While the Christian doctrines are believed to be the article of faith engraved in the individuals, a more modern take on religion could stand by the fact that a sense of connectedness is a must for religion to rule over the mindsets of the individuals. This impression of immense practicality is brought forth by Satanism and thus there is a severe growth of the ideas put forward by this system. Today, the younger generations reason every thought and apply their personal argumentation, which leads to an individual development of identity. The celestial ideologies of Christianity are questioned, and if a logical reasoning cannot be provided, it leads to the freedom from that particular convention. This disconnection could be detrimental due to the feeling of melancholy that might strike the individual on the grounds that a lack of personal insurance is observed. And thus a need for replacement is recognised, which is provided by the scriptures in 'The Satanic Bible'.

Examples from 'The Satanic Bible' that completely contradict the ideologies put forth by 'The Holy Bible' can be noted especially when Lavey talks about The Nine Satanic Statements through which he lists down the most important claims of Satanism. For example, the first Satanic Statement claims that "Satan represents indulgence, instead of abstinence!" Here, there is a clear divergence from the prevalent belief in Catholicism, wherein abstinence is professed both physically as well as emotionally to help one stay away from the vices in order to attain salvation. Now, The Ten Commandments significantly state, "Do not covet your neighbor's wife or goods." Although a positive comprehension of the various domains of eternal salvation is brought forward by Catholicism, an intense thrust of practicality is put forth by Satanism, wherein a further study of 'The Satanic Bible' makes us realise that the above statement implies the abstinence to be indicative of the further aspirations that an individual must hold. It can be viewed that even as Satanism is believed to be in a philosophical conflict with Catholicism, establishing characteristics of any counterculture, it also provides to an individual a thorough authoritative religious text wherein a freedom from transcendental qualities and a freedom to decisiveness is observed.

A positive understanding of Satanism can thus be brought forward with respect to the freedom from the mainstream hypocritical virtues proclaimed, leading to a much greater sense of flexibility that one individual can hold. Even though this is viewed as problematic, 'Laveyan Satanism' as a counterculture, through its various conceptual propagandas, provides an enhanced naturalistic viewpoint. It presents a concrete replacement and thus has been most popular amongst the younger generations. Questioning stereotypes still remain fundamental.

How Much Am I Defined by Religion?

Eesha Saini

What am I? Who am I? Why am I? These are a few questions that I come across at various moments, simple or complex, and I often try and negotiate the definition of my own existence through every possible learning that I have procured in the 22 years of my life. One of the things that I feel sure about, something that does not define me, is my religion -

but I know that it does. This is the difference between what I know and what I feel. The rationale behind this piece of writing becomes a question of self-identity - how much am I defined by religion? How much am I governed by it?

The first memory that I have of any religious encounter was my first day at a convent school, when my father drove me inside the building, and our car stopped right in front of a wall, which had a prayer written on it. I did not know that it was a prayer until I asked my father about it. He said that those were the lines I would have to utter daily, every morning, with each new beginning of my day. But this was the scene at school, and I was a Hindu. It seems funny to me, as I recollect those times. I was born in a strict Hindu family, and I still belong to it - with a different perspective at present. The contrast between what I was at home, and what I was at my school, was largely determined by the religious gap that I faced. From saying 'good morning' to my teachers at school, to saying 'namaste' to my relatives at home, I spotted my first point of confusion. For my relatives, 'hello' was modern and lacked values, and for my teachers at school, 'namaste' did not feature anywhere. I remember that time when, as I was growing up, I heard my uncle criticising my way of talking and handling things, like the way I made a cross when I accidentally touched the book with my leg, instead of touching it to my forehead, as per Hindu traditions. In the process, amidst this confusion as to where I actually belong, and which religion I should ideally follow, I realised after many years that I belong nowhere. Being a girl, born and brought up in Rajasthan under the core values of responsibility, tradition and culture, I was made to realise how religion was the major factor in framing my identity. I almost evaded being a part of religious discussions, because at the end of every discussion, Hinduism always triumphed in my family, and Christianity in my school.

As I moved out of school, with all the conspiracies of the world, I entered a convent institution again. I was stopped by many people around me in the family, but I realised that I felt comfortable in such an environment. I read both the Gita and the Bible, I heard prayers and songs of both the religions, I listened to the words and lectures from gurus and priests - but I didn't know who I was, religiously. But then I asked myself - did I have to be a religious someone? I made the mistake of asking this question to my father, to which he gave me a diplomatic reply. I was told that if religion did not matter to me, how

would I tell others where I came from? How would I get married if I didn't know my religion? How would I respect anyone if I didn't know my religion? How would I make my children follow any ideal religion, if I myself refused to follow one? What would happen to my traditional past and traditional future, without religion? Which festival would I celebrate and what kind of marriage ceremony would I have? How would I name my relations? How would I be buried or cremated, if I had no religion? After a long chain of questions, I was left shocked. It was hard to believe that the name through which I was known to others, was itself a symbol of religion, and the surname was also an obvious religious identity. Not only had I started thinking in terms of religion since childhood, but unconsciously, I had acted accordingly. My space, my language, my behaviour and my personal attitude varied with the religious space I was around at that period of time.

Now, when I stay away from my home, away from my family and religion, but again study in a Christian institute, I still face the same dilemma. But this time, there is one more coordinate attached to my religious conflict. I share my room with Muslim and Bengali girls. And with each day, I am made aware of my religion, the way they are aware of theirs. My friends and I do not share similar cultural backgrounds, but call ourselves Indians, whenever the question is raised from outside. It makes me feel proud of this unanimity, but at the same time, I am aware of the fact that the moment I become part of a family, and a responsible adult, I will be bound by religion again, by all the answers of the questions that my father had asked me in the beginning.

So, when I enquire as to how much I am defined by my religion, the answer is not simple. I am stereotyped, I am deconstructed, I am elevated, I am suppressed, I am mocked and I am inspired. I am given a religion, I follow another, I respect another and I consider another. I become an amalgamation of what I was taught in school, forced to abide by at home, inspired to contemplate by books, impressed by songs to romanticise, and charmed to venerate by miracles.

But do I call it religion? Is it a concrete idea that I follow? Perhaps not, because if I am one religious identity, then I am not an identity at all. And I make sure that I am defined by what I have learnt, what I have experienced, and what I want to follow. There is no one religion, and there cannot be one.

A Melody which Melted the Mist

Elizabeth Lazar

It's a great thing that human beings are in the path of progress, as they now live in a cyber-age, where science and technology have spread its wings of change in every mind. But, at times, it's the truth, that this advancing technological pace has taken away the tranquility and serenity of our minds to a great extent. At this juncture, Nature gives us a divine invitation and inspiring model to introspect and appreciate the preciousness of our lives and the many good hearts that made our lives precious. It is an invitation to recognise and admire the significance of each and every tiny thing and person whom one considers insignificant at times. The attempt to reveal a divine order and a rational structure beneath the surface of nature can lead to the realisation that intuition and imagination are needed to comprehend the mysterious energies in nature, and acknowledge the individuality and diversity of every living organism, of species and of cultures. Thus, the growing awareness of the animate and vivacious quality in nature and society can lead to the awareness of the uniqueness of the individual and 'inner truth'. The singing pipe organ, the protagonist of my work of fiction, is the replication of each one of us. The existence of the singing pipe organ and its transforming life journey is an invitation for each one of us to recall our life journeys and struggles with a sense of gratitude and appreciation. It will lead to the transformation of the insignificant to the significant, and the trivial to the magnificent.

Can I consider anything in this world insignificant? I believe, the answer is a big 'no' from the learned significant lesson of my own life.

I opened my little eyes to see the enchanting world in that pleasant splendorous morning of spring. The surrounding beauty was astonishing. The tender sprouting Cedar leaves of mine stood as a sign of new hope in the eyes of all. The morning dew which came down from heaven made me glad. The splendid sun rays which made the dew glow like a diamond energised my soul with a radiating smile.

I was taken by the rhythm of the running stream which passes nearby. The gentle breeze which brought tidings of promise became an awesome companion of mine. The pretty coloured butterfly decorated my leaves with fabulous cuteness and a drop of nectar as she shared the story of rainbow.

Humming a rhythm of everlasting love, the cute nightingale of wood, came there. I was astonished to hear that euphonious melody and asked her, "would you please teach me to sing like you?" With wonder in eyes and splendour in her face, she told me, "Hey little Cedar, how is it possible for you to sing like me? Perhaps, I can sing for you since I liked the rhythm of your tender leaves and innocence." It became a golden assignation for us to become true friends of an auspicious covenant. As I grew wide, she stood close to me and found repose in the tranquillity of my presence.

Once, feeling sorry for my gloomy face, she enquired about my anguish. I complained to her, "With charming wings you see the beauty around you, while I am limited to see only the beauty of this little wood." Keeping a few feathers on my bark with a sudden smile, she said, "I know that giving my feathers may not help you. But, I can make you see all beauty through my melody." It became another agreement and she started to share the amazing stories of other woods which I was not able to reach out to.

One day, with an optimistic glow in her eyes she told me that she has a beautiful story of a singing Cedar which she heard from the village beyond the wood. With a beautiful melody on her lips, she told me that amusing fable.

"Long ago, a young man went out to hunt. After many hours, he sighted an elk. Skilled with his bow and arrows, he tried shooting it with the fine bow and the quiver full of straight, flint-tipped arrows. Yet the elk always managed to stay just out of range, leading him on and on. So intent was he on following his prey, that the young man hardly noticed where he went.

When night came, he found himself deep inside a thick forest. The tracks had disappeared along with the elk, and there was no moon. He realised that he was lost and that it was too dark to find his way out. Luckily, he came upon a stream with cool, clear water. After drinking, he rolled himself into his fur robe and tried to rest. But he couldn't sleep; the forest was full of strange noises: cries of night animals, hooting owls and the groaning of trees in the wind.

Suddenly, he heard an entirely new sound which nei-

ther he nor anyone else had ever heard. It made him so afraid that he drew his robe tightly and reached for his bow to make sure that it was properly strung. But slowly, he realised that it sounded like a song - sad but beautiful, full of love and yearning. Before he knew it clearly, he was asleep.

In his dream, there appeared a singing redheaded woodpecker telling him to follow it. When he awoke, the sun was already high, and on the branch of the tree against which he leaned, he saw a redheaded woodpecker. The bird flew away to another tree, and another, but never very far, all the time looking back at him as if to say, "Come on!"

Then, once more he heard that wonderful song, and his heart yearned to find the singer. Flying towards the sound, the bird flitted through the leaves, while its bright red top made him easy to follow. At last, it landed on a Cedar tree and began to strike on a branch, making the noise of a fast beating small drum. Suddenly, there was a gust of wind, and the hunter heard that beautiful sound again.

This made him discover the source of the sweet melody. He realised that the sound was made by the wind as it whistled through the drilled hole of the branch. He took that hollow piece which was filled with woodpecker holes about the length of his forearm, and walked back to his village, bringing no meat, but remaining happy all the same.

After reaching home, he tried to make the branch sing for him. He blew and waved it around, but, there was no song. Since he wished to hear that wonderful sound so much, it made him sad. He climbed to the top of a lonely hill and fasted without food and water for four days and nights, crying for a vision of a woodpecker to make the branch sing.

In the middle of the fourth night, the bright redtop woodpecker appeared again saying, "Watch this now!" And in his dream, the young man observed it very carefully.

When he awoke, he found a Cedar tree. He broke off a branch and worked on it for many hours, hollowing it with a bowstring drill, just as he had seen in his dream. He whittled the branch into the shape of a long open beak. He fingered the holes, blowing softly into mouthpiece. All at once, there was a ghost-like beautiful song, beyond words, drifting all the way to the village, which the people were astounded and

joyful to hear. Thus, with the help of the wind and the woodpecker, the young man brought the first flute into his village."

This folklore amazed me a lot as it unfolded a hinge of colour in my long awaited dream of singing like my nightingale companion. Indeed! This was the reason for the glow in her eyes as she narrated the tale. But, leaving a lot of enriching memories to recollect and cherish, the next day, my sweet companion left forever, as she swallowed a raw fruit accidentally!

And before I could empathise, a group of people came with a few instruments and uprooted me from my beautiful riverbank. Placing me safely inside a truck, they drove me away to places where I had not reached before, but those which had been in my imagination, from the description of my companion. I shed my leaves in excessive pain and anguish.

I greatly longed for my companion's company and consolation, as much as she wished to have mine. But, the great silence broke out without compassion for a long time.

The rays of hope peeped through a window pane when I remembered the sweet melody of my companion. It filled me with a new vigour.

There came Peter Gonacher of England, a man of great vision. With a smile on his lips, he patted me and told his colleagues: "Indeed, this beautiful wood will bring out the melody of my heart to the world." It wiped out the anxieties of my heart for a moment. Recalling the fading melody of my companion, I went through the painful process to become another sweet melody. Yes! My dream has come true. I have been majestically turned into a wooden organ and the wind came to me as God's breath into Adam.

As a crown, wind pipes took their place on me. A beautiful sweet melody came out of me with all its richness, and all looked at me with awe, and I felt myself to be an awesome wonder. The mastermind was extremely happy, but not satisfied and he instructed the colleagues to reform me with a pedal of sixteen Bourdon and couplers as synchrony of all the melody. And it raised my status to a great pipe organ.

Then, I travelled over the seas and came to a new country of rich heritage, to the land of the river Ganges where my companion couldn't reach with her tiny wings. On 3 May 1881, by the sacred missionar-

ies' hands, I was officially erected near the auspicious altar to sing the glory of God forever and people with rhythm in their hearts helped me sing God's glory loud and clear.

When I was weary and teary after one twenty-six years of service, I thought my melody was going to fade away like my companion's. But the task of restoration by the United Kingdom Middle Organ Company restored me in record time, adding some more features to help me sing more vigorously. And the melody of my heart still keeps on singing unceasingly to keep the melody of many lives everlasting as I proclaim the significance of everyone and everything around!

Nationalism Today

Gittu Merry John

Recent events revolving around the notion of nationalism have disturbed me profoundly. Therefore, I took this topic as I feel that nationalism in India has to be discussed, without any fear of getting beaten up. The right to dissent has been looked down upon and this is not something that has sprung up in the recent times. Choking a person's choice or opinion has been practiced since time immemorial, whether it is a woman, or someone who doesn't conform to the hetero-normative aspect of society. India has come far in the world, with respect to modernity, thought processes, and rights. The world has been changing for the good, no doubt, and the Indian mindset has been changing too, but unfortunately, for the worse.

In the light of the recent events, a person who dares to say 'free speech' encounters the tag of an anti-national. Whether it is a highly educated professor or a martyr's daughter, no matter who you are, if you dare disagree with the blind patriots of the country, you are an anti-national. Last February, India saw the events unfurl one by one, first starting with the suicide of Rohith Vermula, a dalit PhD. Scholar from Hyderabad University, who worked tirelessly against the 'gundagardi' of the upper-caste goons assimilated within the university. His suicide, especially his suicide letter which shows the face of the real India, which many of us ignore, stirred controversies and grief alike. The spotlight was on his particular case, which made people debate the side effects of having a government which was headed by a person linked with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and whose hands, I believe, are bloodied by the murders

of countless Muslims and Hindus. As if that controversy was not enough, they steered the spotlight onto a bunch of students from Jawaharlal Nehru University having a 'discussion', which I reckon is a very common thing at that university, and made an even bigger controversy that has tagged the students and anyone who supported them as 'anti-nationals', and tarnished the image of all the participants at the event.

Trust me when I say that I have been called that once, just because I asked someone to think about the situation again. Kanhaiya Kumar and Umar Khalid faced charges of sedition without a proper probe, and the nation saw how religion played out in the tagging of these students as well. Whereas Kumar, for his actions, was tagged a leftist, Khalid for the same action was termed a terrorist and stories then began to form - one even says that he went to Pakistan. However immature it may sound, the entire nation was in a frenzy, with some wanting these two to face time in jail, some proclaiming them to be innocents and the others struggling to find out what exactly was happening. The best thing that came out of this issue was that all of a sudden, many people became religious and nationalist because of what Khalid and Kumar did. It is funny how easily things can be aggravated to such a destructive level.

Religion has definitely become pathogenic. It used to be something that instilled humanity in the minds of the people - now, I believe religion is just spreading poison, especially in our country. It can be used for the good, but as a nation, the people are way past that line. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh bhakts have frequently been mixing religion and politics together to get a stronghold over the nation, but what do you get when you mix both of these? You get your hands dirty. And no doubt, their hands are dirty - to be accurate, they are bloodied by not just the murders of countless 'anti-nationalists', but the murder of the nation itself. Who knows how many false flag operations the people in power conducted to get the communal riots started? It is known by many that, indeed, India has carried out many such operations in the past. So, can you believe the government? Can you believe them when they call someone who stands up against them and question their actions as anti-nationals? I would rather not. The government has been invoking problems, especially those which are communal in nature, for a long time, whether it is Operation Blue-Star or the debate on whether Jawaharlal Nehru University is anti-national or not.

The goons controlled by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-tinged government are on a violent march across Delhi, beating up people. They call themselves nationalists, but what is funny is the fact that they forget that the nation they are so 'patriotic' about, that they 'love' so dearly that they can die for it, consists of the same people they are beating up. My problem is with this concept of nationalism, where on one hand you are calling yourself a nationalist, and on the other, you are beating up its people, spreading violence, polluting its environment, and killing its animals. How can you then call yourself a nationalist when you cannot even think about the downtrodden people of Bastar who are a part of this nation? These people who are busy calling others who question the acts of the government ant-nationalists, are nothing but a bunch of fascists, and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, they are fascists in the making.

Jawaharlal Nehru University is anti-national, as anti-national as Socrates was, and everyone knows what his 'nation' did to Socrates for asking questions. In India, if you want to be a nationalist, a patriot, you must not think, or even worse, question. There was a similar nation who went the way India is going today - the Third Reich - and history knows very well what happened when the fascists occupied powerful positions.

Tiers to Attire

Hansika Korivi

Eyes.
My eyes believe what I see.
See what I believe.

I believe that personal style is fundamentally democratic, as well as aristocratic. It assumes that every person has the potential to create a unique identity for themselves and express it through grooming and a set of few, well-chosen clothes. Yet, it sets apart those who have it, from those who dress merely utilitarian. It visually announces to the world that the wearer has assumed command of themselves.

What one wears is highly intriguing to my eye. I do not beg your pardon, it isn't a judgement. This vantage is essential to me in terms of personal aesthetics. I see beauty in what one wears, those intricate details; a ring, no earrings, a bindi, a nose stud, the collar of

a casual t-shirt buttoned until the top, the perfume, bare nails, painted nails, uncombed hair - my favourite - chapped lips, charred feet – it doesn't matter. The affectation is an afterglow of the person's state of mind. Waking up every morning and deciding what to wear is a problem that the entire world faces. Galloping around - there's no one to stop you - and finding that one attire that you decide to put on for that day.

It reflects one's personality. What I wear is a definition of who I am, or, of how I feel that day. It goes way beyond fashion. It's a unique fusion of one's spirit and substance that is created through a world of things. It is a manner of capturing one's aura, that makes a statement. How I dress is a part of my identity: self-awareness and self-knowledge. One's style is a reflection of articulation of the 'self.' It requires security that acts as shelter, of feeling at home in one's body. Personal style requires an on-going assessment that is both mental as well as physical. It includes one's spirit, attitude, verve, wit and inventiveness. It demands the desire and confidence to express whatever mood one dwells in.

People who truly believe in themselves also want to be seen as themselves. In this process, how they dress must reflect their real self – their character and personality; anything else appears to be a costume. It is possible to have an ocean of clothes and not an ounce of style, but it is also possible to have just a few clothes, with oodles of style. Minimal styling, I believe, is the finest foil for excursions into self-expression.

There's a reflection of optimism in an individual's attire, when they dress 'well.' It presumes that the individual is a person of interest and that the world is a place of interest, thereby implying that life is worth making the effort for. True style, in addition to being irrevocably social, is in fact even morally responsible.

No one must be penalised for not having style. But those who have it are distinctive and thus more memorable. As the world is speeding up, one needs quicker ways of transmitting information about ourselves without losing authenticity. One has little time to make their mark on another, but with style, like a perfectly fitting book jacket, it makes an authentic visual impression, a memorable mark of identity in a world that otherwise strips people off it. There was a time when style was a luxury. Today, it's a necessity.

Thou Shalt Not Discriminate

Ipshita Gogoi

My rationale for writing on racism basically springs from my experiences of racial discrimination, from all those times when people have casually asked me if I am a Nepali, or when they called me 'Chinki', and other such incidents narrated by people I personally know, as well as from events that make it to the public domain through news. I hope that my article will work as a catalyst in bringing about awareness for this issue, and oust discrimination faced by the people of north-east, merely because they are from a different geographical terrain. Cases like that of Dana Sangma and Nido Tania, among many others, should not occur. No innocent person should be subjected to cruelties on the basis of their race. Moreover, I also want people to realise, to sincerely understand that racial jokes are not as innocent as they might seem; these jokes often inflict a lot of damage to one's psyche, inadvertently perhaps, but they sure do.

"The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or who have slightly flatter noses than ourselves is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." - Joseph Conrad, 'Heart of Darkness'.

"What difference does it make? You guys look the same anyway." The words rang in my ears, stunning me.

As an Assamese, I have often heard about the manner in which people from mainland India treat people from North-East India. I, however, had never come across discrimination on the basis of my Mongoloid features in my one year of stay in Bengaluru. Until, a couple of weeks ago, a lady said those words to me, leaving me shell-shocked. Of course, she then passed it off as a joke.

I tried getting the incident out of my head, consoling myself that that person in all certainty probably did not even realise what she was saying. But one particular thought kept nagging me. Hasn't every case of racial discrimination started off as a joke, and festered into hatred? The 'niggas', 'Japs', and 'Paki' - were they not all innocent terms that later went on to become ticking bombs that threatened to blast the moment they were dabbled with?

People reprimand me for being unable to take a rac-

ist joke, and my point is, why should I? Why should I feel like an outsider in my own country? The issue of discrimination on the basis of my race was something that I had never faced at such close quarters. Of course, people often stared when I walked down the streets, but I attributed the staring and the gawking to the notion that if one was a girl walking down the road, people were going to stare anyway. And I had learnt to deal with it.

The United Nations defines racism as: "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."

Trouble ensues when people migrate to the mainland, allured by the prospect of better education and job opportunities. Both men and women are subject to various racial discriminatory stigmas on the basis of their facial features and the colour of their skin. However, challenges faced by women are manifold, such as sexual assault and racial or social profiling.

I am not making tall claims that everyone metes out the same treatment towards people from the North-East. However, how wrong would I be to say that most do? Women from the North-East are seen as 'loose women' and easy targets. People justify their behaviour for subjecting women to racial exploitation, by putting the blame on them for their vulnerability. The manner in which women from the North-East choose to dress, is often looked at as questionable. The eating habits of the population of the region is subjected to ridicule as well, especially due to dishes like 'bamboo shoot', 'akhuni' and 'dried fish'.

The culture in the North-East can be laid in stark contrast against the culture of the rest of the country, especially in the context of the treatment of women. Provided with equal, if not more, freedom as the men, the women of the region have always had greater access to mobility and visibility. In fact, the region is one of the very free parts of the country that have minimal dowry-deaths. It would not be too far-fetched to say that it is one of the few places in India that could be considered remotely egalitarian.

Saujanya Hosmani, in her article, says,"This is a very

psychological approach where once the opinion is formed upon one's appearances, culture and leveling the community as being inferior, now once the social profile of a community is formed one's social, economic or professional status does not matter at all and the community becomes the victim of discrimination." They consider women from the region to be "easy, party girls" that are morally unsound. I believe this arises from the outgoing, extrovert and friendly nature of the people.

Racism can only be eradicated from society when people start to not only recognise, but, also accept the differences and practice tolerance. Recognition and acceptance is tremendously vital for a society to grow and flourish. The message about diversity needs to be sent to the masses, to enlighten them with the knowledge that diversity is actually the 'spice of life'. An initiative that can be taken in this juncture would be to introduce more information about the region in schools and colleges. For instance, how many people actually know that the North-East remained the only region that could not be brought under the Mughal domain, despite seventeen unsuccessful attempts to occupy it?

What I want to say is that members from the North-Eastern terrain are not as different as people would like to think. I speak fluent Hindi, with a Northern accent, understand and speak bits and pieces of Punjabi and Haryanvi, knowledge procured from movies and songs, eat meals that are typical to the rest of the country, such as dal, chawal, roti, dosa, saag, and even 'paani puris' for that matter. So why am I referred to as 'momo' or 'chowmein'? Well, I could just as easily be called 'dal' or 'paani puri'.

Pottan Theyyam: Gods Dancing on Earth

Johna Rose

Theyyam is an art form of my native place, Kannur. When theyyam is performed, people from all over the village gather at a common place just to receive blessings from the act. It is an art form which takes away inequality, and this was the notion that primarily fascinated me as a child. I used to listen to the stories of theyyam, which brewed greater interest in me for the art form. I have always wanted to explore and know about the origins of theyyam, and through this article, I intend on bringing to the reader's attention the unique eccentricity that entails cultural artefact. Theyyam is a cultural art form mainly seen in the northern parts of Kerala, particularly in the districts of Kannur and Kasargod. Altogether, there are more than 450 theyyams. Theyyam is an embodiment of protest. The tradition of tree worship paved way for the 'kavu'. 'Paala', 'chembakam', 'plaavu', 'kaanjiram', 'elanji' and 'arayaal' were the trees that were worshipped in 'kavus'. 'Kavus' are sacred groves, and theyyam is usually performed here. There are numerous varieties of theyyam, of which the 'pottan theyyam' and 'pulimarinja theyyam' are directly related to social oppression. Theyyam is mostly performed by the Dalits, particularly the pulayas. They are vegetarians and survive on gruel. The theyyam was a protest against all the suppression that they suffered. The performance is symbolic of this protest. The most attractive part of the theyyam is the dance, performed by male members of the lower community. These are people who are considered to be untouchables, and consider the theyyam as the medium to speak against the social oppression imposed on them.

'Pottan theyyam' is known as the 'manthra murthi', or 'the God of people'. 'Pottan theyyam' starts with the 'thottam pattu', which is the ballad song sung before the night that the 'pottan theyyam' is performed. This particular theyyam recreates the life of the people who laid their life for a social cause. 'Pottan theyyam' is not an entertaining work of art to the spectators - it is treated like a deity by the people. This theyyam questions caste discrimination. The questions raised by the pottan makes one mull over the social norms and customs of society. 'Pottan theyyam' has a myth related to Sree Sankaracharya. It is believed that Lord Shiva appeared to Sree Sankarachaarya, along with Parvathy Devi, as Dalits who were considered to be untouchable at the time. Sankaracharya asked the 'pulapottan', Lord Shiva, and 'pulachamundi', Parvathy Devi, to move away from his sight as he did not want to get polluted by their presence. The Dalits refused to move out of his way. Lord Shiva engaged him in an argument, in which the former exposed the insignificance of the caste system which divided humanity into ridiculous bits. The Dalit, Lord Shiva, told Sree Sankaracharya that if there was a cut on the body, blood would come out, and the colour of the blood gushing out would be the same for all humans. So where did the difference lie? After being immersed into a set of questions, Shankaracharya then realised that it was Lord Shiva who was testing him, and realised that all humans were the same,

and had to live in unity. This teaching was the main message that Shiva offered to Shankaracharya. Even now, during the performance of this theyyam, the performer chants this event in the form of a ballad, just to spread the message of humanity. The ballad song is considered to be the first lyrical form in Malayalam that talks about the caste discrimination that prevailed in Kerala. Compared to other forms of the theyyam, the 'pottan theyyam' is different in its technique of storytelling.

The 'pottan theyyam' is an art form which is a prerogative of the Dalit community. I think that the 'pottan theyyam' claims that all individuals on earth are equal, and all are bound by the chain of brotherhood. Theyyam, in my opinion, is a protest against the violence that the Dalits undergo due to caste discrimination. This art form reflects the attitude of the pulayas towards their lives. The theyyam performers are seen as deities, because the word theyyam means 'God'. When the theyyam is performed, the performers are considered to be deities. At this time, the people from the upper castes also come to receive the blessings from the theyyam performer. Further, the people from the upper castes tell their problems to the performer, who gives them support. At times, conflicts among the people are also resolved, due to the involvement of the theyyam.

The theyyam is seen as a mere art form for the production of tourism. Theyyam performers struggle to make a living out of the performance. The performers have to work in other areas to make a living for their family, apart from the struggles they undergo during the performance. I feel that the divinity of the 'pottan theyyam' is lost, when the art form is seen a a mere tourism product. Apart from all the struggles undergone by the performers, they have to be experts in martial arts as well. The performer moves to rigorous drum beats, and blesses his devotees without any discrimination of caste and gender. People consider this as a platform to narrate all their problems to God, and want God to resolve all their conflicts. The artist conserves the art form with much care, dedication and devotion. No individual dares to question the rights and privileges of the theyyam performers. Even though the performers belong to the lower community, they attain a higher position in the community at the time of performance. People from all castes patronise the performance.

Many people were unaware of this particular art form, and it was not known even in south Kerala. It is through photography and presentation that people became aware of it. I consider the theyyam an important art form. There is the theyyam for the people of the upper caste as well, as they are performed in 'kavus' which are owned by a joint family or individual families. The performance is offered to deities, to fulfill the aspirations of the devotees. The performance requires a lot of preparation, such as isolated stay, fasting and a lot of prayers. In my opinion, the theyyam is not given any importance in Indian society. This kind of an art form needs a professional medium, into whose bodies the deities are welcomed. The narration involves the details of past heroic deeds, and also professes the protection and support that the deity would provide. The performances are dramatic and artistic.

Even though the 'pottan theyyam' is a prerogative of the Dalit community, I strongly think that the 'pottan theyyam' is the only art form which eliminates the suppression of the lower caste, when compared to other art forms. This elimination of suppression is proved when the people from the upper castes receive blessings from the performer, and asks the performer - then considered to be a deity - to solve the conflicts among the families. The suppression is also eliminated when people from the upper caste arrange a platform for the theyyam performance to take place. 'Pottan theyyam' is performed only by the lower castes of the society. I suppose this theyyam came into being when the lower caste people got too tired of the suppression they faced, and came out with the fact that all human beings are equal. There is no difference among human beings - all are the same. The narration of this theyyam focusses on the questions raised by the Dalits to Sree Sankarachaya, about this discrimination, which is of no worth. It also says that all humans are the same. It eradicates the suppression of the lower caste through its narration of the ballad.

The Mahabharata: Conflict Within and Without. Or is it?

K. Sajitha

The great epics like 'The Iliad', 'Beowulf' and 'The Odyssey' are the cornerstones of literature, and represent the legends of those times. They are remembered for the myths they represent and the grandeur that is incorporated in their style. India has

to its credit two such epics - the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata' - and both of them are revered greatly in India as holy texts. The 'Mahabharata' is the story of the conflict and the subsequent war between the cousins of a family, and talks of the great history of the country. The holy text of the Hindu religion, the 'Bhagvad Gita', is a part of the 'Mahabharata', and is about the basic tenets of the ideal human life. It also talks of how the Lord incarnates every time to restore justice when the world goes chaotic.

Surprisingly, the 'Mahabharata' is accorded a status that is shaky when it comes to its auspiciousness. It being the story of war within the family and distorted relationships, people often tend to associate it with the superstition that keeping the text at home will lead to conflicts in the family. I deliberately call it superstition because it seems to me a pointless statement that a text like the 'Mahabharata', with its stories woven like a complicated but meticulously well-designed web, so relevant to any time period, can be anything but a masterpiece to learn a lot from. Yes, it has stories about relationships never heard of, or those which cannot be approved of by anyone today - like Panchali having five husbands, Kunti being conceiving by six gods, et cetera - and has abundant examples of illegitimate relationships - like Vyasa being born out the union of a sage and a ferrying woman, and later, Vyasa being the biological father of Pandu, Dhritarashtra and Vidur. But the lessons that each story in it teaches, directly or indirectly, is intense, deep and relevant to any time that humankind has been through. I strongly feel that the epic does not directly lay out some ideal principles to lead an ideal life. Rather, it is a treasure trove of the accounts of experiences of men and women of those times because there is evidence that the epic was a real account of the times, which has been modified by many writers before it reached such a huge audience. The magical and unrealistic parts are the later additions. An example of this is the part which says that Draupadi - Panchali - and her brother Dhrishtadyumna were born out of fire when the king Drupad conducted a 'yajna' to have a son to avenge his lost honour. But it is also said that they were gifted to king Drupad by a tribe that worships fire to achieve his purpose, and that is how the story got modified thus.

The epic being a favourite read of people from around the world even today, stands the test of time and continues to impress people every time they read it. That is why there are so many versions of the epic now, like 'The Palace of Illusions' by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, 'Ajaya: The Roll of the Dice' by Anand Neelakanthan, 'Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata' by Devdutt Pattanaik, and so on.

Through this article, I would like to strongly suggest that before even understanding the truth behind something and before realising its value, it is wrong to judge its worth. The belief that keeping a text like the 'Mahabharata' at home is akin to welcoming conflicts in the family is illogical and should be done away with. People tend to find excuses for the mistakes they commit and the familial conflicts due to their own actions are comfortable blaming the text kept in the house, which is an irrational allegation to make. It may not be a text that presents all the ideal values of life directly like many other holy texts do. But to me, it is a text which, with all its accounts of history and experiences, presents for us the various situations and circumstances that people had to go through due to their karma. It does not teach but lays itself before the reader to choose between what is right and what is wrong. The ability to make the right decision is what the test of life is all about. But it is alright to make the wrong decision because they are the ones that teach a person the greatest lessons of life.

Identity in Christ

Kristy M John

At approximately 15:00, on the 10th day of the 2nd month of the year 1995, something amazing happened. My journey in this world was set into motion. On one wonted day in an unwonted way, something meaningful happened. I became certain of "who I am". Through my words, I shall let the world know as well that Happiness is to know the Savior.

"Who am I?", questions every human, and so I was no different. The difference ensued when I found the answer.

In classical Greek writings, the word 'eklego' referred to a person or a group of people who were selected for a specific purpose. For example, the word 'eklego' was used for the selection of men for military service. It was also used to denote soldiers who were chosen out of the entire military to go on a special mission or to do a special task. Finally, it was used for politicians who were elected by the general

public to hold a public position or to execute a special job on behalf of the community.

In every case where the word 'eklego' is used to portray the election or selection of individuals, it conveys the idea of the great privilege and honor of being chosen. It also strongly speaks of the responsibility placed on those who are chosen to walk, act, and live in a way that is honorable to their calling. Because of the great privilege of being elected to a higher position or selected to perform a special task, those who are 'chosen' bear a responsibility to walk and act in accordance with the calling that has been extended to them. They should look upon themselves as chosen, honored, esteemed, and respected - special representatives of the one who elected them!

Meditating on the word of God, I came across this verse which stats that everyone is a masterpiece of God.

The dictionary defines a 'masterpiece' as 'a person's greatest work of art', or a 'consummate example of skill or excellence'. Now, when God's Word describes you as 'His masterpiece', what comes into your mind? Do you accept His assessment, or do you think, "Well, He must be talking about someone else … if He really knew me, He wouldn't think that!" Let me tell you, the Bible teaches that long before you were ever conceived in your mothers' womb, God already knew you and was calling you to be His child with a special purpose. He knows you. He knows me and he tells me that I am His.

Everything I am, all my faith and hope, is deeply rooted in the fact that God chose me. And from therein comes my identity in Christ.

By writing this and contemplating about the great privilege and honor of being chosen, I try to apprehend God's Love. There is no ground for me being chosen beneath the all-wise and incomprehensible love of God. Oh, the vastness of the repercussions of this unfathomable truth!

Yes, I found the answer! I am a Christian, follower of Christ, and I am His.

Chosen.
 I am.
And that's what keeps me going.
Who am I?
I am His.
And that's what keeps me going.
Flipping through the pages of the Holy Book, just before the Psalm, one embarks on their walk with this man, Job.
What is that one thing in life that is of great worth?
The thing that matters the most?
Family? He lost them.
Love? He lost her.
Health? He lost it.
Wealth? He lost it.
Job lost everything, his everything.
He still kept on going.
He had God on his side.
And that's what kept him going.
Each day, each moment, what is it that keeps you going?

Fairytales and a Hopeful Realist

Rachel Priya Lewis

Animated films have a unique way of effectively entertaining its audience, while conveying a message at the same time. The analysis of gender roles and stereotypes that are portrayed are important, because the stereotypical way in which the feminine gender has been portrayed in these films can have consequences, such as young girls adopting these depictions as idealistic, and as role models for themselves.

As a girl, I used to relate to these movies right from a very young age. I would pretend that I was a princess, and that I was beautiful and graceful, and that everybody would love me for being me. Sadly, my perception of the world was broken, and all my dreams came crashing down. Gone were the days when I wanted to be a princess, waiting for my prince to come along and make my life beautiful. Somewhere along my teenage years I realised that no matter who you were or what you did, people always judged you. And the only reason you were judged was because you were a girl. And if, unfortunately, you were a tiny girl, with chubby cheeks and a questioning mind, like me, at most you'd get a condescending look that reminded you of your place in society - you were meant to be seen and not heard. It was only then that I began to hate the fairytales I once loved, because all they were, were illusions, giving me a false sense of hope that someday everything would be alright. And I knew by then that 'someday' would never come. After all, I was being given was a bunch of falsities that were supposed to make me feel better. And the more I read, the more I realised that this was a way in which I was being constrained by society. In a study conducted by Towbin et al, it was found that three

themes that are common in all animated films with female protagonists, are - a woman's appearance is more valuable than her intellect, women are helpless and in need of protection, and women are likely to marry.

In 2012, 'Brave' was released. As a young, cynical adult, I refused to consume yet another fairytale that sold me the same lie in a different package. However, this was one movie that changed my perception of fairytales for good. Feminism came to have new meaning for me. As a staunch feminist, I believed that I could do everything that a man could, and even more if I put my mind to it. But fairytales and princesses had perfect lives, and a Prince Charming. This was not happening in the real world. But this movie caused me to change, from a cynic to a hopeful realist. Maybe magic existed, maybe it didn't. But I believe that living everyday on my own terms is a victory in itself, that I win every day. And as a young adult, I identify with Merida more than any other Disney Princess.

At a young age, I was taught that there were distinctions in gender roles, and I must adhere to those roles. Theories such as the constructivist theory and the cultivation theory state that young children learn from visual media and internalise the gender roles that are portrayed in these films. For me, Merida stands as a role model for the young women of today's world. While previous Disney princesses have had the spotlight on men, 'Brave' focuses on the fact that women do not need men to save them - they are capable of holding their own. The problem that lies in most Disney movies is that women are depicted as having only one goal in life, that is, to find their 'Prince'. Or they might act as substitute men, that is, disguised as men, as was observed in 'Mulan'. While Merida is not the first princess to fight against the patriarchal system, I believe that 'Brave' is Disney's first big step towards the positive representation of women.

'Brave' revolves around the relationship between a mother and her daughter, and princess Merida's refusal to bow down to gender biased norms. Her acts of defiance set her apart from other docile and complying princesses who preceded her. Her bravery in challenging fate is seen at the end of the movie, when she states - "There are those who say fate is something beyond our command, that destiny is not our own. But I know better. Our fate lives within us. You only have to be brave enough to see it."

Truer words could not have been said. Even in her appearance, Merida does not conform to traditional norms - she has unruly bright orange curls and a more realistic figure, that is, a slight paunch and wider hips. She dislikes the restrictive clothes she's made to wear and prefers wearing more comfortable clothing. Along with her appearance, her personality also goes against the patriarchal idea of a submissive woman. Though not portrayed as a perfect woman, she is depicted as one who makes decisions, accepts her shortcomings and takes control of her own destiny. In an age where women are constantly shamed for their looks or are judged by it, Merida takes the firm decision of being who she truly is. While this might seem a bit idealistic, I stand by the concept that one should do whatever makes one happy in life. It is not my external attributes, but my internal qualities that make me who I am. A me that is rebellious and refuses to conform to someone else' ideas.

While Merida is depicted as a feminist, her parents and the society in general are shown to be having feminist characteristics. They respect the queen, and Merida is allowed to make her own decisions. Several other features in the film also breaks away from the traditional fairy-tale stereotypes - the mother-daughter relationship, the highlighting of family dynamics, the downplaying of romance, that is, there is no love interest at all in the film. Even the rescue scene involves only the women, clearly sending across the message that women can take care of themselves, and need no prince to come and save them. What I love about this is the fact that the movie presents a part of every girls' life in a way that is so relatable, that I feel that the emphasis on breaking stereotypes cannot be overstated.

I see the subordination of women in the character of Queen Elinor, who tells Merida how a princess must behave. As with other Disney movies, this movie too is narrated within the framework of a masculine narrative. The domestication of women is still a very prominent theme in the movie, and this is reflected in Henry Giroux's statement that Disney movies are creating a metaphor for traditional housewives in the making. Moreover, a princess must take care of her appearance. This unrealistic representation directly affects the audience's self-esteem because it portrays that a woman's appearance is more important than her intellect. If Queen Elinor is the symbol of a traditional Disney Princess, then Merida is the symbol of a reckless teenager - teenager that I can relate to. A teenager any girl could relate to. This is all the more

reason why a change in the portrayal of women was needed in animated films, and it has definitely come a long, long way.

Merida is the embodiment of the long awaited break from the traditional portrayal of princesses. Merida firmly believes in writing her own destiny, and she seeks it. She is no longer just another passive Disney Princess - she is a princess who every girl can relate to. She is rebellious, stubborn and impulsive. She can take care of herself, and she doesn't need to be protected by anyone. She is a testament of bravery because she defies traditional roles. Another point in her favor is that Merida does not have any love interest, and what's even more interesting is that she doesn't even want one. She is not concerned with finding true love or romance, but her own independence. Merida is better skilled than most of the men in her kingdom, even in the sport of archery. The stereotyping one would observe in these films would be that of overgeneralising the attitudes and behavior patterns of women.

This is exactly why I relate to Merida. She is just another girl fighting through society to make her mark as an individual. Was it easy? No. Was it worth it? Yes. And this struggle is what I, and many girls like me, face every day. So, does that mean that young women become cynical with no hope for a better future? I think that the entire purpose of the movie is to depict the realism that is present even in fairytales, that although I had a 'Once upon a time …' that was not so great, I can work and fight for my own 'Happily ever after …', and I, as a feminist, will be working and encouraging others to work towards a hopeful reality in the future, that is yet to come.

Why Haruki Murakami deserves a Nobel Prize

Lis Sanya

Haruki Murakami is a Japanese writer born on January 12, in the year 1949. His works have been considered masterpieces of literature, having been translated into more than 50 languages and having sold millions of copies across the globe. Murakami's fame is highly unusual because the style of writing he adapts and the way his words flow have a very 'art house' feel to them, and therefore, would easily dissuade readers. However, Murakami being the wordsmith he is, he still manages to capture the attention of even the most casual of readers. Now the question arises as to why this man, a man who has significantly changed the literary world with his words, has not been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature yet. In the year 2016, him and Bob Dylan were favourites for the prize, and ultimately it went to Dylan. This wasn't the first time Murakami was nominated and passed over; he has been nominated on multiple occasions, and has failed to achieve the goal. If one indulges in wry humour, they could almost draw a comparison between him and Leonardo Di Caprio winning the Oscar! Here are a few reasons why I believe the next Nobel prize for Literature should have Murakami's stamp on it.

Sensuality:

Murakami manages to capture the very threads of sensuality in his works. In an age where erotica is becoming an increasingly disturbing genre, Murakami manages to breathe life into this realm by creating characters whom the reader can identify with, giving them a whole new range of emotions like anger, jealousy and more, to express themselves with. If you look at 'South of the Border, West of the Sun', the adolescent love-making scene between the protagonist and his girlfriend is something most people would find sensorily approachable. This cognitive agreement is what makes Murakami's erotic scenes truly noteworthy.

Nostalgia:

Nostalgia is a key element in Murakami's stories. His melancholic characters often seem to reflect the mood of Japan, and the settings they are placed in define the traits of the protagonist. In works like 'Wind Up Bird Chronicle', 'IQ84' and even 'Kafka on the Shore', nostalgia and a love for the past is clearly defined. The author's love for Japan and its haunting beauty can be seen gushing through the pages.

The Setting:

The Renaissance gave us prodigies like Michael Angelo, Leonardo, Raphael and more. Their sculptures and paintings are a marvel to look at. In a similar fashion, Murakami's settings, for every story, are beautiful paintings wherein each element of the scene is firmly established in the mind of the reader. Take the example of Hajime's jazz club in 'South of the Border, West of the Sun', where each part of the club is so perfectly defined without going into overt

details.

Musical references:

One significant effect that Murakami has on his readers is that he helps them develop an affinity for Jazz. In most of his works, jazz music plays a huge role in describing the mood of the scene. A jazz fanatic himself, Murakami doesn't hesitate to show his love and knowledge about various other musicians as well. He once described Dylan's music by saying thus - "Listening to Bob Dylan sing is like standing at the window and looking out at the rain". In most cases, it is characters themselves who seem to have a profound knowledge of jazz and its various artists. I find it highly interesting how the conversation around the music is centered. They are usually smart, succinct and have a sharp wit attached to them.

Symbolism:

Many authors use symbolism in their stories, but symbolism in many of Murakami's works is the entire story itself, or in instances like 'The Wild Sheep Chase', a major character itself. Through symbolism, Murakami shows the mental façade of his characters, often symbolising problems into places like hotels to give the reader an understanding of each part of the issue and what the character does to deal with it.

Experimentation:

'Play to your own strengths' is the motto people love to stick with. Writers generally tend to stick to one genre and play in their comfort zone. I think that most writers today call themselves 'experimental' but the range of their experiments never exceeds beyond their comfort zone. Murakami, on the other hand, is an author who experiments with literally ever piece of his work. One could say that his entire career is an experiment in the world of literature. Characters like the Sheep-man, and even the strange world of 'Hard Boiled Wonderland' are testaments to this idea; each story offers a brand-new dose of crazy and weird, but with strings of poetry tethering them all together.

Unpredictability:

Predictability is something I have never found in Murakami's novels. No matter which book or even short story of his I have read, never have I felt like I was treading down a familiar path. Murakami loves to keep the reader guessing whilst accelerating the pace of the story till, at last, the reader is eager with anticipation to know what happens next, and that is where Murakami shows the master he is by giving an ending one could never see coming.

The Statements of Fashion

Namrata A. Bhadania

Fashion is a popular style or practice, especially in clothing, footwear, accessories, makeup, body, or furniture. Fashion is a distinctive and often constant trend in the style in which a person dresses. It is the prevailing styles in behaviour and the newest creations of textile designers. Because the more technical term 'costume' is regularly linked to the term 'fashion', the use of the former has been relegated to special senses like fancy dress or masquerade wear, while 'fashion' generally means clothing, including the study of it. Although aspects of fashion can be feminine or masculine, some trends are androgynous. Through this article, I intend on exploring the degree to which fashion decisions impact self-recognition in various individuals and the impact of progressive milestones for the fashion industry.

In my opinion, fashion trends are influenced by several factors, including political, economical, social and technological. Examining these factors is called a PEST analysis. Fashion forecasters can use this information to help determine growth or decline of a particular trend.

Political culture plays a critical role in the fashion industry. Political change is a reflection of today's fashion. Most of the political events and laws are affecting fashion in such a way that fashion trends are created. Considering the relationship between fashion and politics, one can see how fashion is not only a matter of aesthetic, but it involves politics as well. Within political references, one can see how fashion can change. Not only did political events make a huge impact on fashion trends, but political figures also played a critical role in forecasting the fashion trend, observes Amy Reynolds. For example, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy was a fashionable icon of the early 1960s who led the formal dressing trend. By wearing a Chanel suit, a structural Givenchy shift dress or a soft colour Cassini coat with huge buttons, it created her elegant look and led a delicate trend. I believe that sometimes people just follow some of the popular icons without even giving it a thought as to

why they are following those people and what fascinates them.

According to William Guenther, political revolution also made an impact on fashion trends. For example, during the 1960s, the economy had become wealthier, divorce rate was increasing and government approved the birth control pill. This revolution inspired younger generation to rebellion.

Moreover, political movements built an impressive relationship with fashion trends. For instance, during Vietnam war, the youth of America made a movement that affected the whole country. In the 1960s, the fashion trend was full of fluorescent colors, prints patterns, bell-bottom jeans, and fringed vests; skirts became a protest outfit of the 1960s. This trend was called 'Hippie' and it is still affecting current fashion trend.

Furthermore, technology plays a large role in most aspects of today's society. Technological influences are growing more apparent in the fashion industry. Advances and new developments are shaping and creating current and future trends.

Developments such as wearable technology has become an important trend in fashion and will continue with advances such as clothing constructed with solar panels that charge devices and smart fabrics that enhance wearer comfort by changing color or texture based on environmental changes.

The fashion industry is seeing how 3D printing technology has influenced designers such as Iris Van Herpen and Kimberly Ovitz. These designers have been heavily experimenting and developing 3D printed couture pieces. As the technology grows, the 3D printers will become more accessible to designers and eventually consumers, which could potentially shape the fashion industry entirely.

Fashion relates to social and cultural context of an environment. According to me, elements of popular culture become fused when a person's trend is associated with a preference for a genre of music, like music, news or literature, fashion has been fused into everyday lives. Fashion is not only seen as pure aesthetic values; fashion is also a medium for performers to create an overall atmosphere and express their opinions altogether through music videos. In the latest music video 'Formation' by Beyoncé, according to Carlos, the pop star pays homage to

her Creole root. Tracing the roots of the Louisiana cultural nerve center from the post-abolition era to the present day, Beyoncé catalogs the evolution of the city's vibrant style and its tumultuous history all at once. Atop a New Orleans police car in a red-and-white Gucci high-collar dress and combat boots, she sits among the ruins of Hurricane Katrina, immediately implanting herself in the biggest national debate on police brutality and race relations in modern day. Fashion is always attached to race and religion. Such is the view of Thomson Haykto.

As one undergoes a global economic downturn, the "spend now, think later" belief is getting less relevant in our society. Today's consumer tends to be more mindful about consumption, looking for just enough and better, more durable options. People have also become more conscious of the impact their everyday consumption has on the environment and society. They're looking for ways to mediate their material desires with an aim to do more good in the world. A linear economy is slowly shifting to a circular one.

Moving on, fashion becomes inextricably implicated in constructions and reconstructions of identity - how one represents the contradictions and oneself in one's everyday lives. Through appearance style - personal interpretations of, and resistances to, fashion - individuals announce who they are and who they hope to become. Moreover, they express who they do not want to be or become.

Appearance style is a metaphor for identity; it is a complex metaphor that includes physical features - for example, skin, bodily shape, hair texture - as well as clothing and grooming practices. Because the latter are especially susceptible to change, they are prone to fluctuating and fluid ways of understanding oneself in relation to others within the larger context of fashion change.

Expressing who one is, and is becoming, in words can be a challenge; appearance style seems to offer a way of articulating a statement that is difficult to put into words - that is, by emerging and intersecting identities. In fact, it is easier to put into words who one wants to avoid being or looking like - that is, not feminine, no longer a child - than it is to verbalise who one is. Moreover, one identity blurs or blends into another identity - for example, gender into sexuality. And, articulations of identity are often ambivalent. Identity ambivalences provide the 'fuel' or ongoing inspiration for fashion change. Fashion-sus-

ceptible ambivalences include the interplay between youth versus age, masculinity versus femininity, or high versus low status, among many other possibilities within and across identities.

However, sometimes I just feel that fashion is a waste of time. Fashion is just another waste of time, trying to make yourself look and feel better while putting others down. Fashion is all about yourself and is selfish. One should be focusing on real things in life like family, friends, religion et cetera. Everybody will die one day anyway, so, what one wears is not going to matter then. Would you rather have people remembering you as the one with a beautiful body, but no soul? Or would you rather have them know you as the kind girl who always had time to listen to your thoughts without putting on airs of beauty? Time is ticking people, your breaths are numbered, why waste them with silent bragging, when you could spend them in just being happy, making the world a better place for others and having fun?

Although, for centuries, clothing had been a principal means for identifying oneself - for example, by occupation, regional identity, religion, social class - in public spaces, the twentieth century witnessed a wider array of subcultural groupings that visually marked their difference from the dominant culture and their peers by utilising the props of material and commercial culture. Identity is an announced meaning of the self—one that is situated in and negotiated through social interactions. The appearance is fundamental to identification and differentiation in everyday life. The 'teenage phenomenon' of the 1950s and 1960s made this very apparent by fostering an awareness of age identity as it intersected with a variety of musical and personal preferences - all coded through appearance styles. The social movements - civil rights, feminist, gay and lesbian rights - of the late 1960s and early 1970s further accentuated stylistic means for constructing and transgressing racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities.

Yet, fashion is important. Lots of different things come to mind when most people hear the term 'fashion' - supermodels, money, fabric and so on. The quotes Coco before Chanel, or the movie 'Devil Wears Prada'. What you most likely don't think of is fashion as an art, career passion or even a lifestyle. Fashion can promote creativity, and that is very important in culture, society, and religion. It can make you look and feel more professional.
Most people may not think fashion is important. Lee

Blakemore is of the opinion that people should find another way to be creative, like joining an art class, or getting in to photography. Maybe, people think that the clothing choices aren't all that great, I agree for the most part. Fashion can make you more creative in everyday life.

Most people question how fashion could possibly improve someone's creativity. Every morning you get up and get dressed, you put some creative thought in what you wear. It doesn't matter if you're going out with friends, or to work. On a daily basis, you have to put thought into what you wear.

You can be creative in what you wear in so many different ways. Some celebrities' have a 'signature' look, like Kim Kardashian, Kylie Jenner, Taylor Swift, Miley Cyrus and Katy Perry. In addition, fashion is very important in religion. Fashion is important to religion, because they may have to dress a certain way or dress with more of their skin covered. For example, Muslim women cover there faces with head scarves. They could also be classified as a 'fashion statement' because it is taking away the way you dress for a purpose.

Fashion is very important in job interviews, as you need to dress to impress. If you are wearing mismatched clothes, chances are that you aren't going to get the job. If dressed professionally, with nice clothes on, you have a chance of winning the post. You are probably going to get the job by your looks. Also, lots of people snap judgment on how you look and dress. When you begin paying close attention to what you are wearing, you will begin to notice details in other areas of your life. This includes the quality of others' work and, most importantly, the quality of your own work. This new found focus can also be applied to your social life, such as bettering your ability to recall certain details about someone you recently met. Dressing well is an activity that will eventually result in you becoming more responsible due to you gaining a finer perception.

On the other hand, I also feel that fashion is not important. People should not judge you on how you look, they should judge you on how you act in a certain way . People, boys and girls, judge each other with phrases like "you're pretty" or "you're ugly". That is just not right, as nobody is perfect and since nobody ought to inflict such psychological harm on another person.

In a nut shell, one lives in a postmodern consumer society where everything it embodies is growing and changing at an exponential and unpredictable rate, unlike ever before. This has given rise to fierce competition in almost every aspect of life - gender, social and identity politics, and struggle for survival - and thus, the immense pressure for one to successfully find their place and voice in society. Fashion plays a vital, if not the most important role, in enabling individuals to construct, sculpt and express their identities, especially in larger metropolitan cities, where they mingle with crowds of strangers and have only fleeting moments to impress them.

I Am From

Navya Shet

When I came to Christ University, a common question that people asked me was - "Where are you from?". Every time I encountered this question, it puzzled me a lot. I didn't know what the answer to this question had to be. Should I have told them that I was from a particular place? Or should I have told them where I had studied earlier? Or should I have said whatever came into my mind? Therefore, this is a subtle answer to that question, reflecting what I actually felt towards such a question.

I am from,
My green blankey and,
Climbing out of my crib,
From playing mermaid in the bathtub.

I am from,
Walking my dog,
And the noise he made, when I stepped on his tail.

I am from,
My sheep nightlight,
And Blue's Clues and the Berenstain Bears.
I am from,
Pinning until,
I can't tell where I am, and
I see the world upside-down.

I am from,
Long days at school,
And hurrying home to watch Pokémon;
From chocolate-chip cookies at
Grandma's house.

I am from,
July days in the pool,
And running through the sprinklers;
From my imaginary friends, and
The games that were played, like
Doctor and patient and teacher and student.

I am from,
Trips to the grocery store,
And that time I fell out of the cart, onto the
Sticky linoleum floor.

I am from,
The tap tap tap,
Of my tap shoes, that one week,
I decided to be a dancer.
I am from trying new things.

I am from,
Rainy days,
And board games,
Saturday cartoons and Cheerios.

I am from,
Walks on the beach
And the sand on my feet,
And not wanting to go home after vacation.

I am from,
Barbies and Polly Pockets,
From playing with my sister,
The other half of me.

I am from,
Books and flashlights,
And pens and paper,
From silence to screaming.

I am from,
Tears on my pillow,
And unanswered cries;
From holding your hand,
And that look in your eyes.

I am from,
Past and present,
And dreams of the future.
I am from,
Hard work, and
Harder play,
And I am from,
Writing down my thoughts,
On a midsummer's day.

Is Parenthood to be Forced?

Nikhila Maria James

Human life is so predictable in that there are certain milestones that everyone is expected to cross and supposed to achieve before one goes to the grave. A baby is born, goes to school, completes college, lands on a job, gets married, have children and then this cycle goes on for the next generation. What interests me is how the role of becoming a parent is imposed upon young married couples. I am specifically referring to becoming biological parents to a child.

My personal belief is that one doesn't become a parent with the birth of a child. Simply giving birth to a child does not make one a parent. Parenthood is highly demanding, and is a full time responsibility. You no longer exist for yourself. You realise that another life depends on you. If one is not physically and emotionally prepared to handle the gift of being a parent, and if one is not ready to be altruistic and selfless, I would consider it a crime to give birth to a child and then leave it to its own fate. I say this from experience. My parents ceased to live for themselves with my birth, and that of my siblings. I have seen my parents letting go of their ambitions and professional dreams, so that they can be there for their children at all times. My father declined numerous offers of promotions. Although he knew of the respect and money that came with these promotions, he was aware of the responsibilities that would come along with it. He feared that taking on more responsibilities in his profession might require him to spend more time at the office and travel frequently for official purposes, which might result in him spending less time with his family. Hence, he declined all the offers and has been working in the same designation for the last 28 years, while people who joined the institution much after him now sit and command him from higher positions. It is a matter of great personal agony and frustration for my father. But he would rather be a family man than become a successful man in the eyes of society.

My mother is the ultimate altruistic person who has declined offers and opportunities to go abroad and make money. Her logic is that she would rather be with her children and work at a place near home, than go abroad and return with lots of money and luxury. She forewent her Ph.D. work because it required her to go around institutions taking surveys, traveling, meeting people and attending seminars

- which would take her away from her family. She would rather give up her professional life, than sacrifice her life as a mother. Hats off to both my parents! It takes selfless loving hearts to do what they did.

My point is that I am an ambitious person, and I get easily upset if I have to sacrifice my time for someone else. I am not selfish, but I need my personal space and time to do what I love. And right now, I am in no state of mind to take on the responsibility of another person in my life. It is not that I am going to get married tomorrow, but when I express my decision to have kids only two years after marriage, or when I feel ready, people look at me like I am a lunatic. Apparently, if you don't have kids by the time you are celebrating your first wedding anniversary, people assume that something is amiss in the relationship. I have seen couples who have kids within a year of marriage due to family pressure, and then fall into depression and frustration due to the inability to advance in their professional life. I would rather not be that kind of parent. I would like to have kids when I am in a state of mind where I could love my children completely and not half-heartedly. I often tell my parents that I would never be able to become as good a parent as they are to me. My argument is that families and society should not pressurise young couples to become parents. Let them decide when they are ready. Parenthood should be a choice and not a necessity.

The Business of Education: The International Schools in India

Nivethaa R

Recently, I accompanied my three year old nephew to his pre-school 'interview'. The school is a very famous international school in one of the metropolitan cities of Tamil Nadu. The infrastructure is brilliant, and it claims that it provides all the required facilities to the children. It was really funny when they said that they had three rounds of interview. The first round was to check if the child had basic knowledge of a few English words, the second round was to check if the parents were financially capable to get their child enrolled in the school. It was really shocking and funny when they told us that the third round was for the grandparents. When I raised my eyebrows, they explained that since the parents were working, it was the grandparents who taught the kids when they go back home, so they would also be

interviewed. So what does the school do? All these days I thought that it was the school that played a predominant role in teaching the kids, as they spent almost seven to eight hours in schools, and now these 'intenational' schools are going a step further to count on the knowledge of the grandparents to assist them in the teaching process.

If these schools had to interview the grandparents to check their knowledge, I wondered if parents got an opputunity to check the knowledge of the teachers, or if they even got to interact with them before the admission process. The answer is very obvious - no. These 'international' schools admit only brilliant and smart kids to begin with. They make sure that only the children who perform well in the interviews will be selected. Therefore, their job of teaching is made easy as almost seventy five percent of a class is filled with students who can perform well. So. I feel that all these 'international or global' schools are not schools in every sense of the term. They run businesses. All they care about is the financial stability of the parents.

The very essence of the term 'school' is lost here. What is a school? A school is an instituition to educate children. Education is an enlightening experience, and there comes the biggest irony of these 'international' schools. These schools, in the beginning of the academic year, warn us that if children don't peform well in exams or if they fail, they will not be given an admission the next year. This clearly proves the business of the school. They need children who perform well and can meet the standards of the instituition. If the child struggles to reach the set standards, the option to quit is always open for him or her.

So, where is the beauty of teaching the kids who need a little extra help and care? I know a lot of teachers in normal and government schools who stay back after class hours and sit with the children and talk to them to find their problems, and take additional classes for them to peform well in exams. According to me, teaching is a very noble profession and these 'international' schools don't look like schools at all to me, because all they care about is the reputation of the school. Also, these schools obviously do not admit children from econimically backward sections of the society. They cater only to the needs of the elite. At the end of the day, it is either profit or loss to these 'nternational' schools. Their fee structure is an examle of this. I was taken aback to learn that it

costs 1.3 lakhs for lower kindergarten. I didn't pay that much even for my Post Graduate degree. These schools are business units. 'Educating' a child and the process of education can hardly be traced here. All I was able to see was an instituition that cared for the financial stability of the parents and the knowledge of the grandparents.

Also, these schools are very goal oriented. They want their students to clear the competitive exams to get admitted in a 'reputed college or university'. They also flaunt the fact that they start their coaching for this from standard eight itself. So, the students are also under constant pressure to reach the set goals by the instituition. I was feeling suffocated inside the campus, as it did not have a lively ambience. These international schools don't engage in something noble like educating children from all walks of life, nor are they interested in helping the children in their school who struggle to cope with the set standards.

Education is a business and they run their business in a profitable way. That's the success.

Child Sexual Abuse

Sindhuja

I write this article to throw light on the heinous act of child sexual abuse and to spread awareness about the act, the law and the effect it has on children. Through this work, I seek to stress the need to talk about, and address the issue, openly.

I have been trying to read and discuss about Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) from a long time. Having worked with children and having attended presentations on this issue, I am deeply motivated to try and do my part by talking about this issue to as many people as possible and sensitise children about safe and unsafe touch.

One of the many problems I face while talking about CSA to people, especially parents, is the lack of understanding of the topic and the extreme ignorance parents have about this issue. What is CSA and why is it important to know about it? Firstly, one of the many destructive acts, and probably, the most scarring one, is child abuse. Child abuse robs a child of his or her biggest virtue, their innocence, furthermore causing a lifetime of trauma. As a child, an individual, he or she is endowed a basic set of rights;

that is, survival, protection, development and participation.

The term child sexual abuse defines the involvement of a child in a sexual activity that he or she doesn't comprehend, or is unable to give informed consent to. The child is not yet fully aware of the situation; that is, he or she is not developmentally prepared to understand the act, and hence, cannot give consent to any act that violates the laws or social taboos of the society.

According to me, children who are more prone to CSA are children who are neglected, children with special needs, children whose parents are away more often, given their jobs or other commitments. Poverty is also one of the causes for CSA. Children are compromised for the sake of earning an income for basic survival and children with psychological issues.

One of the main problems, I feel, that people have to overcome as a community is accepting that this can happen to anyone. Many parents feel that this can never happen to their child, and while talking about such an issue, adults become defensive. It is very important as a mentor or parent to teach your child the importance of safe and unsafe touch. If one continues to brush this issue under the carpet, sexual abuse would continue for years, going unnoticed.

Actually, one of the reasons victims get abused for many years is because of ignorance. More often, the victim thinks that it was instigated by them, and thus keeps calm about the abuse for fear of punishment. Awareness should be created among both parents and children about the issue, and thus, the chance of a safer environment is made.

One of the ways to safeguard children from this issue is by talking to them about the fact that the right to their body is theirs alone. Schools should teach every kid about safe and unsafe touching, parents should strive to make a compassionate environment for the child to open up, and parents should encourage children to not withhold any details of interactions with any person from them. Child Sexual Abuse - as much as one would like to sweep it quietly under the proverbial rug, exists, and exists rampantly. I strongly believe that there is a need to collect more data on the number of children who have suffered abuse to highlight the vastness of this heinous crime. Meanwhile, do sensitise your children and the children around you about safe and unsafe touch.

The Paucity of LGBT Literature

P. Neha

In education, parents fear that talk of homosexualty will promote its practice or recruit young people, although I have never met anyone who was recruited into the ranks of the queer. Conversely, I have never heard anyone explain why all the talk about heterosexuality has not made everyone heterosexual.

Teachers feel uncomfortable discussing sexual preference, students are often embarrassed when the topic is raised, and administrators feel that the legislators, alumni, or the press will object and blow the subject out of proportion. Through this article, I intend on bringing this issue to focus, trying to delineate the psycho-social mechanism that allows for the prevailing state of society.

Historically, lesbian, gay, transgender or bisexual characters did not exist on pages to be read and discussed about in classrooms. One of the fundamental reasons for evading homosexuality in classrooms could have been the censorship that followed the introduction of these texts. Michael Willhoite's 'Daddy's Roommate' and 'Heather has Two Mommies' by Leslea Newman were published in 1990 and were the most challenged books during the early 1990s. Although censorship is avid with LGBT literature, they did not appear in the top ten banned or censored books as recent as a decade earlier.

The classroom that fails or limits its discussion on LGBT issues can crop negative effects in students, and prejudices against homosexuality may arise. I personally believe that inclusion of LGBT literature in the curriculum will dispel prejudices and strengthen positive identities of homosexual students. Although many educational organisations have realised the importance of the inclusion of LGBT literature, many of the curriculums have not typically focused to incorporate the ideas and techniques to eliminate prejudices among students.

In many children and adolescent literature, fiction or non-fiction, there is hardly any exposure given to homosexuality. Just because this type of literature is not being included in classrooms does not mean that it is nonexistent. It is not necessary to label texts as 'LGBT texts' to see the particular themes present within them; when these issues are avoided and not discussed in a classroom setting, heteronormativity

begins, and students will be under the impression that gay and lesbian students do not exist. The homosexual experience will thus remain invisible and nonexistent.

There exists a huge gap between texts and sexual identity, and it is literature's job to be the bridge between the texts and that identification process, while offering pedagogical methods for teachers on how to initiate discussions and make it interactive for students with the help of texts. With certain measures, heteronormativity can be avoided to an extent. This literature is not limited to heterosexual readers to understand homosexuality; the texts should act as a mirror for gays and lesbians to see their own experiences in the reading. In this manner, LGBT serves for both heterosexuals and homosexuals in the society. I think it is time for a change and homosexuality should not be hidden or marginalised from the texts of academics.

American Library Association's Stonewall Book Award committee began to select books for awards in the 1970s, with a small lot to choose from. In 1995, the committee had over 800 titles to select from. The award was first given to LGBT books, and is the longest record of selection in comparison to other associations that award LGBT books. This award was presented to a book that spoke about lesbian, gay, and bisexual experiences, and this was later included in a new category in 2010 under Children and Young Adult literature. Usually, the books are read and analyzed twice, both fiction and non-fiction, but books with themes of homosexuality are read more than twice and are continually analyzed.

Homophobia is a recurring theme that can be found both in fiction and in reality all over the world. Details of homophobia can be traced back to the Victorian Era. The book 'Vast Fields of Ordinary' by Nick Burd consistently deals with negative remarks about homosexuality. When Dade invited his boyfriend to dinner, his dad leaves the table stating that he cannot tolerate having dinner with his son's boyfriend. The acceptance of one's sexuality by family members and peers is important to avoid negative consequences.

The mental turmoil and torture a homosexual goes through in a heteronormative society should be considered, and incorporating LGBT texts into pedagogic practices that can be adopted for classroom discussions would help in combating heteronormativity.

Am I a Nationalist?

Steji Johnson

The basis for picking this particular subject is to try and understand the extent to which, today, people have misunderstood the notion of nationalism, and the credibility of the numerous offenses that are practiced in its name. I simply needed to point out how the contemporary world comprehends nationalism in a completely different manner, often letting the notion take the form of a damaging agent, instead of letting it be of assistance towards the development of society.

Individuals call themselves a 'nationalist' without having complete knowedge about the word. In India, in numerous periods, the expression of 'nationalism' has been misconstrued. In reality, the term 'nationalism' in itself is filled with complexity. People commonly understand nationalism as patriotism, or having an altruistic view for the country.

I, for one, trust that 'nationalism' is an ideology or an emotion that has the power to either construct a nation or completely destruct a nation. For example, Swadeshi Movement was a movement in which the Indian National Congress decided to boycott British goods from 1905 to 1908, and only use Indian-made goods. At that point of time, nationalism was the pride of our country, in which ethnic groups wanted their political boundaries to match their ethnic boundaries, meaning that they wanted control of their own country. Nationalism in this circumstance functioned as a main impetus - it developed solidarity among the general population and everybody worked only towards India's freedom from the British Raj. Therefore, one can see how nationalism becomes a constructive force to bring people together.

However, in today's situation, nationalism has turned into a weapon or device that annihilates a nation gradually. To put it in simple words, it works like slow poison. I personally believe that nationalistic feelings in its extreme form has led to the emergence of terrorist groups throughout the nation. At the same time, the contradicting anti-nationalist sentiments have given rise to Maoist and Naxalite groups.

Also, in India, nationalistic feelings are often imposed upon the people. A noteworthy situation is the long and dubious civil argument on whether the National Anthem ought to be played in theaters or

not, which came to an end with the Supreme Court stating that the National Anthem should be played in every theatre, a law put in effect from January 2017. I view this as a state wherein I am imbibing nationalistic feeling due to a strong authoritative force. I go to the movie hall and watch movies with a pure motive of entertainment. At a personal level, the playing of the National Anthem, for a few minutes, does not arouse any kind of nationalistic feeling in me.

Another instance where I felt the bitterness of nationalism or patriotism was when I visited Wagah Border, Punjab. The evening parade by Indian soldiers is considered to be an event not to be missed. That day, as I was walking towards the border, there was a sense of pride and happiness all around me thinking about my nation. Photographs of the 'fathers of nations', that is, Mahatma Gandhi and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and two gates were the only elements that kept India separated from Pakistan, and Pakistan from India. It was a mesmerising sight to see soldiers on both the sides well dressed up and respecting national flags. But the only thing that disappointed me was the attitude each individual carried there. In the name of patriotism and nationalism, what I saw was a competition among two nations, an attitude to prove that one nation is better than the other. Crowds gathered on both the sides were abusing each other. The feeling of nationalism was propagated by creating hatred, and this, for me, was disheartening.

According to me, nationalism at its core is pure and defines one's love towards his or her nation, but it causes trouble when it is at its extremities. Nationalism can either be inventive or dangerous. It can muster both the essence of reliability and that of cultural sharpness. It can advance the sentiment of autonomy, as evident from the freedom struggle of India against the British Raj, while, in the meantime, also paving way for clashes and war, occurring as a result of the yearn for an isolated territory for every ideology propagated within the country, as evident from the case of the conflict between India and Pakistan.

On one side, it promotes cultural growth, developing India as a secular state, and on the other side, it promotes instability, sowing the seeds for communal conflicts. Therefore, I strongly believe that my sentiment regarding this issue can be summarised in the words of H. G. Wells - "Our true nationality is mankind."

Is There Life on Mars?

Pratiksha Mangalekar

I, Miss Pratiksha Mangalekar, a global citizen and a rational being, look forward to writing this brief piece out of sheer passion and strong belief in the existence of life beyond Earth. I expect the readers to keep an open mind while reading this, and enjoy the sensation of being on a roller coaster that this will entail, because this is a ride through galaxies. Let us be highly imaginative and curious because, as someone once rightly said, "Curiosity is the mother of invention".

Extraterrestrial life is also understood as alien life which did not originate on planet Earth. I have always been curious about life beyond the stars, and this curiosity was aroused in me through some mediums of popular culture like books, films, television and paintings, and, of course, by David Bowie's lines "Is there life on Mars?".

I have always wondered about what they look like and how it would be like to meet them. All of this is my curiosity, but did you know that the cream of the scientific community have been researching and looking for evidences for the potential existence of aliens?

Charles Bolden, who is National Aeronautics and Space Administration's administrator, also, like me, believes in the existence of aliens. He said that he believes that the human race "will someday find other forms of life or a form of life, if not in our solar system then in some of the other solar systems — the billions of solar systems in the universe". Scientists have discovered, not thousands, but millions of other planets whose characteristics are similar to Earth. Most of these planets have factors that can support life. Then why can't there be life elsewhere in the universe?

There are several scientific theories and hypothesis that help scientists understand the universe in a better way. One of them is the Zoo Hypothesis, which states that it is the aliens who have been preventing us from contacting them, so that they do not interrupt our natural development. According to which Earth is a 'zoo' for the aliens and they have been watching us grow.

Stephan Hawking, who is one of the world's leading

minds on science, strongly believes that there should be some contact between us and the aliens. This could also be dangerous, but then it's the only way to know for sure if they exist. The alien civilisations could either be more evolved or less evolved than the human civilisation on planet Earth. Discovering that humans aren't alone in the universe would be a monumental step for advancing science. If these beings are more advanced than human civilisation, they could share their cosmic knowledge with us, teach us innumerable things and show us ways in which one can connect to other beings from space.

People have their suppositions, their scenarios. Carl Sagan, the late astronomer estimated that there are several technological civilisations in our galaxy alone. Frank Drake, his colleague, offers the number 10,000. A pioneering comet researcher, John Oro, calculates that the Milky Way is sprinkled with about a hundred civilisations. All the estimates are highly hypothetical. The fact is that there is no conclusive evidence of any life beyond Earth. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, as several pundits have wisely noted. But still, one doesn't have any firm knowledge about a single alien microbe.

What would be the human reaction when, one fine day, our race realises that the loneliness of the human race in time and space will be over, and that our race is no longer alone in this universe?

An important recent discovery that can help in this quest of finding alien life is the discovery of seven Earth-like planets encircling a nearby star. This was declared by an international team of astronomers on 22 February 2017. The name of the star is Trappist-1, which is a tiny, cool star, and it is 39 light years away from Earth. Three of its planets are in the star's habitable zone, where there is a possibility of finding water bodies like lakes, rivers and oceans. And hence, if there is right temperature and atmospheric pressure, the chances of life existing on these planets are high. Sara Seager, a planetary scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said that, with this discovery, the human race has "made a giant, accelerated leap forward in the search for habitable worlds, and life on other worlds, potentially speaking". The planets bearing water bodies is like a promising candidate to host life and living creatures. Further, astronauts are looking for signs of life like ozone, methane, oxygen, et cetera on these planets.

This is a science infused with optimism. One now knows that the universe may be filled with planets. Since 1995, astronomers have discovered at least 22 planets orbiting other stars. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration aspires to build a telescope called the Terrestrial Planet Finder to search for planets like Earth, examining them for the atmospheric signatures of a living world. In the past decade, organisms have been found thriving on our own planet in bizarre, hostile environments. If microbes can live in the pores of rock deep beneath the earth, or at the rim of a scalding Yellowstone spring, then they might find a place like Mars not so shabby.

Who Am I?

Rekha Johnson

I live without any fixed destination or aim. There are no plans made regarding what I want to do in life. Everyday, I go with the flow, and let the day surprise me as it unfolds before me. Amidst this seemingly chaotic dissonance, my parents offer me that station of repose to calm me down and to help me focus once again, instilling in me the desire to live fully and vibrantly. My article is an expression of that sentiment, and of what drives me emotionally.

Even though I have been practicing it since childhood, I've not perfected the act of avoiding the confusion and irritation that dawns upon me early in the morning while I tie that blue school tie. Then and there, the teen in me takes notice of her. She gives a familiar glare that annoys me. Lately, I've never let the attitude down while confronting her, leading to a sleepy glare from my end while adjusting my tie. Unfortunately or fortunately, 'sweet seventeen' is just a tag to my age, and not to my character anymore. While staring at her, I'm thinking within about another hectic day I'll have to get through. Her glare slowly turns into a comforting smile as if she knows what I am thinking about.

But, I don't have time for a question and answer session as I'm in a hurry, arranging my books into my bag. When I glare at her again without returning the smile, I can see her looking around my room with disgust. It's just a result of me being awake and my blanket, pillows and bed sheet are still in my sleeping position, books overflowing to floor from my bookshelf and study table, the coffee spills and old magazines on the computer table, with a computer that I always forget to shut down before sleeping, the

balcony door open as usual due to that unknown moment to which my body captured me to sleep. When she was about to open my cupboard, I wanted to stop her, but I couldn't move. The pile of clothes fell down from there. As usual, there began the session of convincing her that it's just messy, not dirty. Even during talking, I don't have time to look at her because I'm in search for my watch from my so called absolutely wrecked room which I know, as a matter of fact, looks like a domestic battleground.

The question of how am I going to survive the lectures without knowing when the bell will ring drives me crazy. With a lost expression, I look at her when she narrows her eyes and points towards the watch that was kept at the edge of my computer table, right beside the speakers. She never fails to surprise me. I wonder how she finds all the lost objects and expressions of mine. As I wear my watch and look in the mirror, she is busy keeping my tiffin and water bottle.

The mirror is the only clean object in my bedroom as it's both an attraction and distraction. She is right in asking me to hurry and have the breakfast. But I can only notice my reflection and hers in the mirror, and admire it even more. But her scream, all of a sudden, break my moment of admiration and I'm on my feet again. While I'm looking through the books, she feeds me and complains about the eleventh hour attitude of mine. But I don't have time for any of it, which leads me to run to the toilet for brushing without having her 'last bite'.

After the brushing activity, I run to the drawing room to check the time. There he is with his morning tea and newspaper. He gives me the most pleasant smile any man could ever give and wishes me a nice day. Wishing him the same with a smile and informing him the time to drop me for tuitions in the evening, I head to the shoe rack where the polished shoes are placed, all ready to be worn. While wearing them and opening the door to leave at the same time, I turn around to see her with a glass of water, which I drink without complaining.

Run is the keyword within me every morning to catch my school bus. As I run through the stairs without slipping and run to get to the end of the lane where the bus is waiting, I see everyone looking at me through the window with an expression that says, "She is late, again." Panting so hard, I keep my legs on the opened doorstep of my bus, only to turn around with a huge smile and wave at her whom I'm sure

will be by now looking at me in awe from the balcony. She waves back with her heavenly smile, one that gives me strength to go ahead hoping for a joyous day, a bright future.

Today, I don't have to wear a tie, nobody is looking for me, I'm not in a hurry, my room is rather clean, with nobody to remind me to have breakfast or to wish me a nice day, and nobody to wave at me with a smile rich with hope. But those pleasant memories are the reason I'm surviving away from them, in a new city, in a college, in a dorm with new dreamy faces.

It's my fourth year in the garden city of India, alone. Yet today, again, just like my first day while getting ready in my dorm, I wish that my Amma was here, standing behind and admiring me. I yearn to ask her before leaving whether I look fine or not. I yearn to get a bite of her tasty food, I yearn to hear her scream and complain, I yearn to mess up my room, for I know that she will be there to clean it, I yearn to see her big round eyes stare at me - an endearing family trait - I yearn to tell her all the stories of the day, I yearn to massage her head. I yearn to tell my Acha that, here also, due to their support, I'm a princess, but a princess without her kingdom. The train of thought of wishes and yearnings are endless while getting ready in the morning, and looking at the small mirror with my roommate in my dorm.

There hasn't been a single day until now where he hasn't wished me a nice day, and she never forgets to build up my confidence by talking for hours and wishing good luck before exams. All thanks to technology. I've come a long way, and I know that there is a long journey to go. But at the end of the way, I'm sure to take my favorite route home and feel complete with you both.

My mother always used to say that "who are you?" was the question that I often asked people, many of whom I actually knew, when I was small. Growing up made me understand that "who are you?" is easy to answer with a name, but "whom am I?" is always a question that creates conflict within. They say that living through and experiencing life is the only manner in which I can find the answer to it, and to even know whether the answer was worthy of all those struggles to survive by keeping the conflict within. According to me, the slideshow of memories within me is always worth living life for, with added vigour.

Although I'm not sure about 'what I would be' or 'who am I' so much, I'm sure that whatever the circumstance will be, I'll forever be my mother's hope and my father's joy. In that case, the entire struggle is worth it. So, bring it on!

The Collective 'I' as an Abnormal State

Richy Maria Jacob

I believe that individual states of existence have been rendered passive for the sake of the collective good or consciousness. However, the very altruistic model that is perpetuated does not cater to the community, but only to certain individuals who market it. This false pretense is far rooted in society, to such an extent that one believes that it is true and gratifying. I believe that this issue needs to be addressed, for there is a current trend of uprisings that furthers collective consciousness in the name of individual betterment and happiness.

A high functioning individual within the society, who is a product of all the norms and conventions of the societal setup, is abnormal. If a person has to let go of everything that is instinctive within him to bend his physical and mental self to the constrictions of society, and yet call himself a happy man, the state of his mental health is highly questionable. I believe this is because this is an era where nothing is really a product of our desires and dreams. Even desires and dreams are culturally manufactured for the larger collective good of society. Nobody is sure about what exactly this collective good is, or who exactly it benefits. It just becomes an assumption less challenged, which creeps into society and becomes as rigid as a lego - strong but highly questionable.

This cultured form of habits which one believes in and holds on to, is a construct that defeats the individual, and which gives rise to the collective notion of 'I'. This becomes a problem, because an individual who wants to attain self-actualisation is then drawn back in the loop of collective consciousness. It is true that to function in any society, one has to be part of a 'collectivised' group. For instance, to learn a subject, an individual has to sanction and be part of a classroom. One cannot really disconnect from the many 'isms' that one is a part of. For instance, an individual by birth is a collective entity of the family, then slowly of an educational institution, a political affiliation,

and so on. If I have to call myself my own person and ascribe every action as my very own, then I am not too far from Individualism, which then renders me passive to another 'ism', truly reducing my scope to escape from the collective calling.

The very concept of normal, then, is a myth wherein a certain idea by a certain individual garners popularity based on convenience, and selective inclusion and exclusion of matters. Since birth, there is a repression of one's natural instincts for the cultivation of categorical human beings. This state of development is resemblant to plants that are taken out of their natural environment and cultivated in greenhouses for consumption. Therefore, throughout centuries, one has only deviated from natural normalcy to a constructed abnormal state of normalcy. If a student within an educational institution believes that his true purpose in life is to only study a set of subjects as something that will grant him success, which will subsequently lead to happiness, then there is something truly abnormal about it. However, this is a form of optimum truth in many societies. The realisation of 'I' is powerful. There is also the societal construction of the 'I', which provides an illusion of the self but is just the domination of another person's beliefs on to the self. This distinction is sharp but is often a muddled state of affairs for many. This is also why everyone today is a product of an intriguing form of cultured madness.

Taking Philosophy to Indian High Schools

Riya Mehta

Students today are learning to accept knowledge and understand concepts. They willingly do what is required of them to gain the degree necessary to proceed in life. In this process though, a lot of them lose sight of where they wish to proceed, and more importantly, why. Philosophy does not teach them, but it reminds them to think - to question their very existence and hence, savour it. It only asks a student to trust his or her own common sense, of which they are so unmindful, but that which is so paramount.

I hope to make people pause in their thoughts, in their idea of education, and try to wonder at the change such a concept could bring about, because the more people wonder, the more they will seek to know, and that is all one needs - that spark of curiosi-

ty reignited in humanity.

Every Education Board in India has unanimously excluded Philosophy as a subject to be taught in high schools. It is deemed a niche course that can be opted for by students at the university level.

Why is this so?

There are a lot of cultural and background differences between the eastern and western educational purposes. In India, it is important to take up such subjects that have future 'market-value' or 'scope.' What the term 'scope' means here is the ability to learn some skill or have a certain guarantee of getting jobs at the end of your degree. This began due to the history of poverty in the nation, where survival through skill and means of earning money were considered highly important. This trend has been changing gradually, but taking up philosophy, even at the university level, where it is offered, is still frowned upon, as a course for 'weak' students. In the West though, the concept of 'liberal' education has been instilled more strongly, and thus, a lot of high schools do teach philosophy to their kids. In fact, those who take it up in their higher education are also highly respected in countries like Europe.

Margaret Chatterjee, in her article, 'The Teaching of Philosophy in India', writes - "Employment opportunities for the philosophy graduate in U.K. now extend far beyond that of teaching and the civil service. Industrial bodies, welfare agencies, public utilities and local government concerns all offer him."

Another reason being that most of the philosophy taught across the globe today is in English, which is not the mother tongue of most of these students. One also needs to understand that the system or structure of education in high schools is very different in India. They do not have electives or a cafeteria system at school levels until the age of 16, after which it is labelled 'junior college' in most states. This makes it impossible for students to dabble in various areas of discourse and choose those subjects that they find an interest in.

But why should philosophy be taught to adolescents?

Introducing this subject to students that are younger, in a system where it has never been taught, may become a challenge to the teachers who themselves have not had any formal training on the subject. But

around the time of adolescence, students absorb and understand knowledge better; their grasping powers and adapting capabilities are also fairly good. One uses critical thinking in all aspects of one's life, as one should. Man is a thinking being and he needs to teach his kids to retain their power to question and think, instead of accepting knowledge as it comes. Also, critical thinking is not exactly a language unto itself. One uses it in every subject that is taught. One requires it in history to be able to understand and critique both sides of the history taught, like logic in mathematics, and structure in language. If one looks further back, philosophy and science were considered synonymous. It is the very aspect of questioning that brought an individual from believing that the earth was a flat surface, to where they are now. Also, at that particular age, teenagers have a lot of doubts, questions and thoughts that they cannot fully comprehend and may not have the space to discuss about. This allows them the freedom to talk about various issues that otherwise stay hushed up.

A research article by Douglas N. Morgan and Charner Perry on 'The Teaching of Philosophy in American High Schools' reads - "It is rather the sometimes staggering discovery that there really are many different, defensible answers to many different, important, intelligible questions; that the world in which he lives is not a simple, one-dimensional object, toward which one simple-minded, clean-cut, and culturally ordained attitude alone is appropriate."

What I believe students have in India are classes in moral education, in most cases. This is made compulsory, given the reason that it results in a holistic development of students. In the case of holistic education, discussions on ethics, morals, qualities of being a good citizen and a good human being are held. But this is a far cry from critical thinking, because students here are merely made to understand the difference between right and wrong, and not question that difference.

I think people need to realise that students who take up any amount of philosophy in college have very little idea of what they are getting into, having had no exposure before this, unlike a student who is taking economics or science. Therefore, maybe including certain books and essays by philosophers as part of their curriculum and giving them the opportunity to discuss these ideas and their opinions on them, without any pre-empted right or wrong answer, would be a new concept to them. Also, allowing room for fur-

ther discussions brought by the students themselves to the class would give them a safe environment to be better equipped to handle their own emotional balance as well.

Students and teachers alike who have had courses in philosophy in high school in the West are usually in favour of it. The adolescent mind is inquisitive, curious and confused, and this is a good time for them to learn anything. If taught well, critical thinking can become a life skill that extends to all areas of their lives as they learn to analyse, question and think outside the box.

Diasporic writings and Amitav Ghosh's 'The Shadow Lines'

Rose Mary George

Diaspora is a condition in which people do not completely belong to one land, or community. They are stuck in between lands, without an identity of their own. Diasporic literature is the best way to understand the concept of diaspora. Diasporic literature is a very vast concept, and an umbrella term that includes all literary works written by authors outside their native country. However, these works are associated with their native cultures and backgrounds. In this context, the writers who can be regarded as diasporic writers are those who write from outside their country, but those who remain related to their homeland through their works.

Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of migration. Generally, diasporic literature deals with themes of alienation, displacement, rootlessness, nostalgia, and a quest for identity. It also addresses issues related to the amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes from the immigrant settlement.

The movement of people to and from India, from ancient times to the contemporary period, is an interesting story of cultural exchanges that the people of India have with the rest of the world. The classical texts of India speak of the long journeys that the saints and monks undertook for spreading knowledge, peace and love. The spread of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs across geographical boundaries of India during the early medieval period saw the emergence of Hindu and Buddhist Kingdoms in several places.

The scholars and academics who came out from the universities of independent India migrated to Western countries for higher advanced studies, and this resulted in the beginning of diaspora in the modern period. The migration of Indians as professionals, traders and labourers to other countries, is a continuing process of Indian diaspora.

The term 'Diaspora' was derived from the Greek word 'diasperien' where 'dia' means 'across' and 'sperien' means 'to sow or scatter seeds'. But historically, diaspora refers to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration or exile. This term was first used to describe the Jews who were living in exile from the homeland, Palestine. Diaspora suggests a displacement from the homeland or the transfer of one or more nation states, territories or foreign countries.

The notion of diaspora is linked to geographical entities such as nation states, and it is thus important to consider the role of nation formation during the post World War era. Th migration of a huge number of people, the multiple waves of political refugees seeking protection in other countries, the configuration of nation states, and the concept of nationhood precipitated the movement of people. Diaspora has been also associated with other terms like trans-nationalism, but diaspora is not the same as trans-nationalism. Trans-nationalism can be defined as the course of citizens, thoughts, possessions and capital across nationalised territories. There is a slight difference between diaspora and trans-nationalism. Diaspora refers specifically to the forced or voluntary movement of people from one or more nation states to another, whereas trans-nationalism speaks to larger and more impersonal forces. Diaspora does not, however, transcend differences of race, class, gender and sexuality, nor can diaspora stand alone as an epistemological and historical category of analysis, separate and distinct from interrelated categories.

Later, diasporic studies have emerged as an important field of study. Many Indian writers have contributed to the rich tradition of English literary studies. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan were the ones who made Indian English literature recognised globally, and all were subject to the British rule in India. Salman Rushdie, V.S Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth have all made their names while residing abroad. These non-resident Indian writers have

tried to articulate the feelings of displacement in all their literary works. In one of his interviews, Amitav Ghosh said - "I don't think migration signifies one thing. There are so many reasons why migrations take place - it could be economic, social, political or even related to education". He is one of the well known Indian English writers. His works deal with various themes that are set against historical backdrops. Some of his novels are: 'The Circle of Reason' (1986), 'The Shadow Lines' (1988), 'The Culcutta Chromosome' (1995), 'The Glass Palace' (2000), 'The Hungry Tide' (2005) and 'Sea of Poppies' (2008).

'The Circle of Reason' is special, with a theme that is different from the traditional concerns of Indian English fiction. Traditionally, the main character Alu should have gone from 'darkness' to 'purity'. He describes one incident, and then links that to past events.   Here, Ghosh mixes a chain of thoughts. He mixes the past, present and future in his work. The novel describes the troubled times, through which all are living. Also, unlike typical endings, this novel ends without giving a solution.

Alu moves from Lalpukur in India, to Al-Ghazira in Egypt, and then to the Algerian Sahara. The first part of this work contains many instances of migration. Through this novel, the people understood the situation of people who were thrown miles away because of the civil war that led to the emergence of Bangladesh. The characters in this novel stand for rootlessness. Sometimes, I also wonder about the idea of rootlessness. There also comes the sense of loneliness and vacuum, with individual migration, or migration of smaller groups. In the real sense, everyone is away from their roots. There is nothing in this novel that can ordinarily be called a "home". Through this novel, Ghosh portrays his diasporic feelings of loss of a homeland, and rootlessness.

The novels echo an arbitration of identity that shifts between acculturation and in-betweenness, which is a characteristic feature of all his literary works. Ghosh's background itself made him diasporic, and is the quintessence of diasporic identity. He travelled a lot and came across different cultures. Thus, consequently, his novels narrates the story of those individuals encountering different cultures, and indulges in the negotiation of a diasporic cultural identity.

Body Shaming

Saachi Saraogi

For a very long time, whenever I heard the word 'body', the image of a perfectly shaped woman used to come to my mind - a girl with thin hands and legs, a small waist and long, wavy hair. Over the years, such an image had been reinforced into my mind by my family, the society around me and, most prominently, by the influence of media, in terms of television, movies, music videos and magazines. At fourteen years of age, I was 'fat'. Not by my own definition, but by society's definition - I was fat and unhealthy, the complete opposite of how a girl should have been, according to them. I was told by everyone to lose weight, because only then would I be considered 'pretty'. At school, I was bullied because of my failed attempts at dieting and exercising, which I had no interest in. It got worse in college where everyone wanted to stand out and be popular. At that time, I had no idea that all this culminated into what one today calls 'body shaming'.

Body shaming is the act of humiliating or criticising someone by making mocking comments about their body shape or size. It can have extreme physiological effects, and can also make a person suicidal. When I was struggling with my weight, I tried everything, from crash diets to starving myself to hitting the gym for prolonged periods of time - but there was no effect on my body. All it did was frustrate me. Most women and girls attach their self confidence to the number on the weighing scale, and I have always wondered where this frame of mind comes from. Whenever I pick up a fashion magazine, I see pictures of all the models who have impeccably perfect bodies. There is no cellulite anywhere, and they have absolutely no bodily aberrations. When I look at the actresses in the country, almost all of them work extremely hard on their bodies, because they have a certain image to project. A woman with curves would be termed as 'fat', and she would not be on the cover page of these big fashion magazines.

These projections of seemingly perfect women create an impression on the minds of young women, who suddenly feel very uncomfortable in their own body shapes and sizes. I've heard girls talk about having pear-shaped or apple-shaped bodies, and speculate on which one would be better to look at. I've seen women hit gyms in ginormous numbers before their weddings, so that they can look more appealing for

their prospective grooms. While on the one hand, it is absolutely justified to work on one's body for health purposes, on the other hand, health is rarely a concern, as is the definition of 'beauty' today. I think that no one should be judged based on their body shape, size and colour, because over the years, it is going to fade away. Trying to fit in with an ideology, and within a cult, drives women to put their bodies through immense torture in the form of excessive workouts and anorexic diets, which leads to mental illnesses as well.

The women on the pages of these glossy magazines, and on celluloid, are not perfect themselves. Editing and photoshop are rampant in the fashion industry and people fail to realise that those images are illusions, not reality. If there is anything I think one needs today, it is acceptance - of our one's body, and one's own self.

Me: An Introduction

Salona Mishra

Mid-life crisis is a thing. Yes. But when you are twenty-something, existential crisis hits a whole new level. The reason I put these words down as an introduction to myself as a person, is to unravel this tapestry of experiences and epiphanies, and thus, deconstruct the definition of my being. If not provide one with a sense of definiteness or exactness, I am sure that this article will serve as a sense of relation to everyone who has no clue who they are, or where they are heading. It will provide the realisation that even though it all feels chaotic, everyone else is grappling with the chaos too - some way or the other.

The person I am is a result of the constant process of a number of 'tion's and 'ties's -modification, subjection, realisation, maturity; one may put as many verbs and adjectives as one wants - of a number of identities and congruence - experiences, events, evaluation, achievements, failures, chaos - for the last twenty one years, hundred and twenty days, fifteen hours, and twelve minutes. I invite you to check the accuracy.

For me, my identity can be traced back to my parents, who gave me life more than birth; my institutions, that gave me recognition more than results; my mates, who gave me memories more than moments. But the question of 'the person I am' is something

that is still pondered over in my mind, and the gambit part of the 'about me' profile is still left blank or plagiarised.

More than what others conceive of you, you are what you think of yourself. For me, at times, this assumption has been peremptory when I find my friends making me realise, and giving me better reflections of my character. Many times, in solitude, I have found myself involved in an intra-personal conversation, substantiating the events of the day, with a billion things crossing my mind.

Today, as I unfold myself as a culmination of exaggeration, carelessness, confusion - I wonder if I am being too vitriolic - ambition, thrift and sensibility, I discover a girl who might not give her life for her friends, but one who certainly won't give away her word for them. My brother might disclose me off as a complete show off, a girl who gets rave results without reviving effort, a girl filled with false promises, in whom repentance comes after mistakes, and seriousness creeps in after failure. My brother has his own assumptions and grudges. My friends, the close ones, might describe me as hail-fellow-well-met -an extrovert - with a decent sense of humour; some might ornament my character with titles like Grammar Nazi, or sincere methodical sucker. And what guys opine of me still remains on the other side of the black hole, a mystery I could dedicate a whole paragraph to for sincere investigation. I might not be the girl next door, I might not be a girl's girl, I might never be a guy's Miss Perfect, but I'll tell you what, friends - with some honest time of yours given to me, I will bring in the best moments of your life, or shall try to.

The final lines of this contemplation - the person I am - the discovery of the self within - can only be completed during the last days of my life, because "picture abhi baki hai mere dost."

Introversion: Unaccepted Behaviour in the Contemporary World

Samridhi Belwal

I seek to bring to notice how contemporary society is biased against introverts, and my objective in writing this article is to acknowledge and honour introversion as a worthy personality trait.

Introversion is a personality type that is often mis-

understood, as it is not tangible to many people. I grew up in a household where there was no place for introverts. Holding a proper conversation with the guests was the only accepted behaviour. My inability to do so demarcated me as 'the rude girl'. Nothing would be more dreadful for me than being asked to go up to the guests and talk to them. I hated it when I had visitors at home, to such an extent that I started absconding whenever I heard the conspicuous sound of the front gate opening. I have faced dire consequences for hiding or running away whenever there were visitors at home. What was this dread that I felt every time I had to meet someone new? Why did I feel nauseated and suffocated whenever I was surrounded by many people?

Extroversion is the only accepted behaviour in society, and everyone has naturalised it to such an extent that anyone deviating from it is not considered normal. I was guilt-ridden throughout my childhood, and always wanted to be more like the kids who could converse with anyone, and who were the center pieces of every social gathering, while I hid at some obscure corner. It was only much later that I realised that there was nothing wrong with me. It was an intrinsic quality that I was born with, and I could not change it. Now, I would not want to change it, for it defines me. The contemporary world is an extrovert's paradise, and the introverts are the marginalised. The functionality of the modern world revolves around how well any individual can socialise, or how confident you are in a gathering of people. While the charming extrovert, who is the center of any social gathering, is the star of the event, the introvert - sitting with a book, away from everyone - is deemed a loser.

In schools and colleges, it is required of every student to be collaborative and interactive. An individual is required to be highly social, coherent and extremely confident in almost every profession. Even intellect, knowledge or creativity are cast aside if gregariousness is present. Every sphere of daily life requires an individual to be extremely eloquent, which is why practices like interviews are still the deciding factor of any profession or admission process. The first conversation with a stranger becomes the deciding factor of one's future. Introverts are cast aside simply because they do not conform to the norms of the society. In a world where the norm is to be sociable, introverts find no place for themselves. They are hidden in dark corners, or behind their words. In a classroom, they are either completely invisible or considered 'dumb' by their classmates and teachers. An introvert's voice might not be loud enough to silence a crowd or make them awestruck, but that doesn't mean it won't be thought provoking, or worthwhile. The modern world is a masquerade where everyone hides beneath the mask of sociability or intellectuality.

There is no space for introverts in colleges or universities. The curriculum of any university is built around activities which would either involve group collaboration, or performance under public scrutiny. There is very little space for individual creativity, as much more focus is given to group work. The objective of these universities is to prepare its students for the unforgiving professional work, which is yet another field with no space for introverts. I believe that expecting forceful participation from all individuals on a public platform, irrespective of their personalities, does not benefit those who are unwilling to participate.

A major fault in our education system lies in the fact that it does not take personality traits of individuals into perspective. On the contrary, all students of any university are standardised, which goes against all the ideas of personal liberty, growth and individuality, and these are the ideas on which any institution should be built upon. Introverts are not allowed to grow in their own space and in their own way - instead, the idea of a perfect student is imposed upon everyone. It is extremely important that space for every kind of personality is given in all institutions. It is extremely cruel to categorise all individuals under one umbrella personality type, and it is time that there is more awareness of it.

Child Labour: A Mask for Child Abuse

Sandra Maria Kuriakose

I think there is a need to give a huge importance to the problems faced during childhood, and the issue of child labour, because, in a country like India, child labour and child abuse are the prevailing social evils of the present generation. In high-tech cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Kochi, and Bengaluru, there is a vast increase in the number of child labour and child abuse cases. So, I think it is time to bring this social evil in front of society for the betterment of the future of today's children, who are also the citizens of tomorrow. It is important for me to raise my con-

science towards this issue in order to hinder such a social evil that is harmful to children mentally as well as physically.

Child labour is a practice that makes children engage in economic activities, on a full time or part time basis. This practice is very prominent in the Indian society. Child labour actually results in the deprivation of children of their childhood. This practice harmfully affects the children mentally as well as physically. The main causes of child labour in India are poverty, lack of good elementary school education for the children, and rapid growth of informal business-economies. According to records in India, children who have engaged in child labour belong to the age category of ten to fifteen years old. There are almost 1.26 million children working illegally in the Indian society. There are children even from the age of five, who engage in child labour in many parts of India. This problem of child labour is not only in India but also in all the nations across the world. Most of the child laborers are working as full time laborers. Across the whole world, there are almost 217 million children working illegally.

According to Indian law, it is said that there are around 64 industries which are hazardous, and child labour in these hazardous industries are deemed a criminal offense. Unfortunately, the records show that more than one lakh children are working in such hazardous industries in India. Also, the Constitution of India prohibits child labour in hazardous industries, and not in non-hazardous industries, as a Fundamental Right under Article 24. According to the UNICEF estimates, India has the largest number of children working who are under the age of 14. In India, and many other countries, goods which are produced by child labour has been identified and taken into account in the manufacturing sector. In addition to the constitutional prohibition of hazardous child labour, various laws in India, such as the Juvenile Justice - care and protection - of Children Act - 2000, and the Child Labour - prohibition and abolition - Act-1986 provide a basis in law to identify, prosecute and stop child labour in India.

The term 'child labour' can be defined as work that deprives the children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and is harmful mentally as well as physically. It is a practice that is actually mentally, physically and socially harmful to children. It deprives them of the right of schooling and education. These hazardous works interfere in the regular schooling schedule, and affects their healthy childhood in many ways. UNICEF defines child labour differently. UNICEF, in another report, suggests, "Children's work needs to be seen as happening along a continuum, with destructive or exploitative work at one end and beneficial work promoting or enhancing children's development without interfering with their schooling, recreation and rest at the other. And between these two poles are vast areas of work that need not negatively affect a child's development."

According to me, any child who is below the age of 17, and working in the economic sector of the country, with or without wages is considered a child labourer. All children who are not enrolled in schools are hidden labourers, in fact. Their work includes part-time help or unpaid work on the farm, family enterprise or in any other economic activity such as cultivation and milk production for sale or domestic consumption. UNICEF, however, points out that India faces major shortages of schools, classrooms and teachers particularly in rural areas, in order to keep the children, who are hidden workers in different sectors, in access with education.

After its independence from colonial rule, India has passed a number of constitutional protections and laws on child labour. The Constitution of India in the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy prohibits child labour below the age of 14 years in any factory or mine or castle, or engaged in any other hazardous employment - Article 24. Besides these laws and policies, my opinion is that the government has to effectively implement these laws by making schooling and education compulsory, providing them with the infrastructure and resources for free education, for the children below the age of 17.

India formulated a National Policy on Child Labour in 1987. This Policy seeks to adopt a gradual and sequential approach, with a focus on rehabilitation of children working in hazardous occupations. It envisioned strict enforcement of Indian laws on child labour combined with development programs to address the root causes of child labour such as poverty. I think that the effective way of abolishing the crime of child labour is to find out its root causes. By finding out the real reasons behind the situation which forces children to become workers, and dealing with these problems to find out a remedy, eradication of the problem of child labour is possible. I think that there are many root causes lying behind child labour, like poverty, lack of good and free education facili-

ties, family backgrounds, gender aspects and rapid growth of informal and illegal economic and business sectors in a country like India.

It seems that child labour is a crime not only in terms of employment by children below the age of 15, but also in terms of exploitation of children. In the name of 'employment', children are exploited sexually and physically. The reduction of the number of child workers will happen only with proper measures for the upliftment of children from low economic backgrounds. This aspect comes under the issue of poverty faced by the children. Another aspect that causes child labour is food and nutrition. Human beings are struggling for their survival with basic needs like food, safety, education, et cetera. If these basic needs are provided to children from all different categories and classes, this change will be helpful to eradicate the issue of child labour, and create awareness.

Even though child labour is supplemented by the insufficiency of food and money, other combinations of factors are also there. In every term, it is a practice which hinders the growth and development of children mentally as well as physically. Any kind of support for the practice of child labour actually deprives the children of their future, and life, in their childhood itself. Instead of providing them with good living situations, they are appreciated when they own a tag like 'employer' for household management. It is increasingly being recognised that a large number of children are out of the school system largely because they are involved in some kind of work within the household. Thus, the poverty and the forceful situation of the family are other combinations of factors that causes child labour in a wide spread manner across the country.

The next major cause for the increase in child labour is the growth of informal economy. The next critical factor behind child labour is child abuse, and its recognition is an effective move towards the eradication of child labour as well child abuse. Also, the concern for the gender aspect as a pressing factor - like poverty - that leads to child labour, must be brought to social consciousness.

In order to get a solution for the threat of child labour and child abuse, I think that it will be helpful to use various literatures like empirical literature, economic surveys, and so on for a better understanding of the situation and background of the children, which force them to be employed.

What Does it Mean to be 'You'?

Santhiya S

I am often intrigued by the conceptual fluidity that revolves around the notion of an individual. Although I see tangible individual presences, it is rarely that I come across people who have truly lived up to the moral and ethical ideals that entail from one being a true individualist. I find myself lost in the pursuit of the most original germination of an individual identity, of the most authentic of forms, with minimal allusion to another being. It is this elusive philosophical entity that I intend on exploring through my article, bringing forth the contentions raised in vehement defense against the loss of the individual to the collective.

Do not, for a second, let yourself think that your thoughts, your actions, and your choices are your own. That they can define you. The choice, that is believed to protest the visible collective force, the society, the script to state your individuality, is again not your own. There is an entity above these known forces. This entity, this structure, this presence is invisible and they predetermine all the choices, actions, and thoughts from which one picks and acts upon. The choice that one makes to refuse to prove the notion of individual identity is again a choice that pre-exists for one, sanctioned by this entity. You colour your hair repelling your parent's consent, because that is who you are and that's what you want to do. But is this choice of yours, your own? The choice existed and you just picked it up to suit yourself.

This genuine fantasy of an individual identity is so satisfying because it lets us think of ourselves as fighting all norms, customs, and models, and setting up a new trend, something of one's own. This idea of independence and self-reliance is desired for, and this seemingly liberal feeling manipulates us not to think or question the authenticity of our individuality. Basically, Individualism is often misunderstood to be a creation of an identity. More than this, it is misconceived to be the separation of the self from the society as a means of establishing an individual identity. This assumption fails to understand that this identity is established in relation to the other identities. The reality of this collective identity and existence cannot be denied in the case of human beings because they are social beings. It must also be understood that Individualism is not entirely a myth. Free-will and free thinking exists in the choice

of these choices. Plainly, one is independent enough to choose from one script to another. An individual denies or rejects one script, one system, to choose another. All the identities are programmed and pre-determined in the grand scheme, in the grand narrative. I choose to be something out of these and that is all being me means.

For a planet, its inhabitants are too crowded and too connected, for inspiration simply cannot be kept away. With this ebb and flow, it is just not possible to claim that anybody is free from this force and its influence.

I never got to be me. My individuality eventually will get stolen, and I stole somebody's individuality to frame my own in the first place. One can exist as an individual only when there is absolute independence, which is slightly impossible as humans are conventionally programmed to be social, not necessarily in terms of duties and responsibilities to other members of the society, but with regard to helping and fulfilling each other's needs. Basically, a barter system. These instilled social forces cannot be neglected or contained. It is rather convincing to conform to this reality, than to force the illusion of individualism upon oneself, that which exists and does not at the same time. All that can be done is to know the balance between the individual being and the social being, to understand it and accept it.

Redefining Faith

Satvika Ohri

I have often found myself wondering why I was so different from my family. You see, in a family of religious people, I was the black sheep who asked questions. It was only much later that I found that I was not alone in my incredulity towards religion. However, I was the only one who was not silent about my disbelief. It was not that I did not believe in God or some divine entity somewhere. I did. I simply did not believe in religion - religion as I saw both inside and outside my house. Even as a curious child, I could not fathom why giving away fifty rupees in a 'daan' box - charity box - in a temple could possibly be better than giving the same fifty rupees to a street vendor outside, who was visibly in dire need of money, or better yet, spending that money to give them food. I could not fathom how spending three hundred rupees to get a 'VIP darshan' - unfortunately a com-

mon practice for rich people who fish out money to escape long hours of waiting in long lines to get into the temple - was the right thing to do, whereas their other not so privileged counterparts would wait for hours in the heat and sun. And because I was a child who called out things as I saw them, I was termed as a 'bad kid'. I found myself in a boarding school at the age of eight, albeit it being my own decision to go, and it was there that I was introduced to a new faith, one different from the one I was born into, but one which similarly confounded me. Soon enough, I found that many adults were not willing to entertain my curiosity and interrogation.

When I finally met adults who were willing to answer the extraordinary amount of questions I posed to them, I often got answers that did not satisfy me, until I stumbled onto an answer that struck me - "this is not my religion". On questioning my own peers, I realised that many of them were similarly disillusioned with their 'religion', which was imposed on them by virtue of their birth into a particular faith, while many others simply followed the faith they were born into and saw no problems with it. And I realised that what I saw as blind faith was practiced by many in myriad ways. It was in the following years that I was introduced to the word 'irreligion', which itself was a word that was as difficult to describe as the word 'religion' because it encompassed a hoard of different views, ranging from atheism to agnosticism, from indifference to religion to hostility towards it.

Growing up, I often came across news of horrors caused by religion - religious fundamentalism to be more appropriate - and my aversion to it only grew. Besides this, I saw my own peers who, despite their education, were so blinded by their own faith, that in following their faith, they forgot to become decent human beings who were accepting of others views. It took me a few years to realise that being vehemently against religion and propagating it, even in the most dilute form, could be dogma too. It was a slow process, but I came to realise that faith gave its followers hope and courage.

Therefore, it became increasingly important for me to redefine and lay down clear terms as to why I was against religion. I was not an atheist, but just against organised religion. For, it was organised religion that blinded people, that instilled fear in people as a tactic to sustain itself, that did not allow for any form of free thinking. I realise now that I can define and design my own faith, one of irreligion, one that de-

cries all or any form of organised religion, and simply believe in being kind, in equity, and in not causing any obstruction to anyone's free will.

I Decide My Caste

Shambhavi Tiwari

Caste has always been an issue in India and has engaged me whenever there has been any discussion on this topic. It was glamorised by my elders and I had no opinion of my own. So, I thought of writing something about this sensitive issue and letting people know what it feels like when your opinion is not even considered by your family. Writing is the only power I have to let my voice come out strongly to everyone out there.

The day I came into this world, I was tagged as a Brahmin girl child. Many years passed, but never did I understand the pride of being called a Brahmin. Whenever I asked my parents or grandparents, they used to say that I was fortunate to be born into a Brahmin family. What made me different from others was never specifically told to me. I had this chain of thoughts but there was no conclusion to it. The deeper I went into this thought process, the more entangled I found myself. When I joined school and made friends, I found them, in no way, different from me. I ate the same food, had the same toys and wore the same clothes as they did. Why was caste an issue then, when everybody looked equal to me?

In my eighth standard, I was introduced to history and the caste system in India. I was quite inquisitive to know when and why it started. The system which divides Hindus into rigid hierarchical groups based on their karma -work - and dharma - the Hindi word for religion, but here it means duty - is generally accepted to be more than 3,000 years old. The caste system categorises Hindus into four main groups - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras. Many believe that the groups came into existence from Brahma, the Hindu God of creation. At the top of the hierarchy were the Brahmins who were mainly teachers and intellectuals and are said to have come from Brahma's head. Then came the Kshatriyas, or the warriors and rulers, supposedly from his arms. The third category was of the Vaishyas, or the traders, who were created from his thighs. At the bottom of the heap were the Shudras, who came from Brahma's feet and did all the menial jobs.

But it did not solve my query and confused me further. How was I a Brahmin when I did not even read the Vedas? By just being born to a Brahmin family, how did I become a Brahmin? If Brahmins were mainly teachers and intellectuals, then aren't all teachers Brahmins? This was something which was not acceptable to me and I never got my answers until I read more and more about the origins of caste and where it went wrong. While doing my research, I got to know that the Vedas do not contain any word that can be considered a synonym for 'caste'. The two words which are considered to mean 'caste' are 'Jaati' and 'Varna'. However, all three words mean very different things. Caste is a European innovation having no semblance in Vedic culture.

Initially, everybody was not quite free to choose their profession, since their profession used to be their caste. With time, more and more people started accepting their father's profession as an advantage. Even the families of higher stature started favoring their own children to construct their society, for other favorable outcomes. This became resemblant to how the kings, in older days, gave their thrones only to their own son, irrespective of whether he was capable or not. This went to the extent that people blindly started believing - and most of us still believe this - that one's caste is what one's family's caste is, which they inherit at the time of birth. This created a big divide in society and led to the inhuman treatment of lower caste people.

My idea of caste differs in many ways. Until and unless I learn all the Vedic literatures and become an intellectual, I cannot accept that I am a Brahmin. Just because I was born to one, it does not make me one. I make my status by my own deeds, not by any socially constructed idea of a caste system. In fact, in Vedic culture, everyone is considered to be born a Shudra. Shudras are known to be hardworking people, and I, as a human, was born to do good deeds and hard work. Based on one's education and skill-set, one becomes a Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya. This completion of education is considered to be a second birth. Hence, these three 'Varnas' are called 'Dwija' or twice-born. But those who remain uneducated for whatever reasons are not discarded from society. They continue as Shudra and contribute however they can in the society.

According to me, the idea of caste is socially ingrained in India and it is very difficult to take a stand against it. In retrospect, before giving myself to a

caste, I would first earn it rather than fall prey to this socially constructed idea. For now, I belong to no one, and to no caste. I am an individual, who has lots to contribute to this world and is yet to decide her caste.

Women, Body and Anime: The Representation of Male Gaze and Sexuality in Anime

Shilpa Saju

I have been watching anime from the age of 10. I loved the portrayal of the world in these cartoons, and this world where I saw the ideal men and women with perfect bodies and great personalities became fascinating. I started watching it every day and gradually became addicted to this realm of magical beings and kawaii - cute - characters. With every passing day, I realised that this perfect utopia of mine is a space to disregard women and objectify them, and this was not perfect anymore. I couldn't stop watching anime altogether, but then I tried shifting and sticking to specific genres. One thing that I completely stopped watching was anime that belonged to the 'ecchi' genre, which focuses on mild nudity or sometimes extreme nudity and complete objectification of women.

I have seen many anime and if I want to explain the kind of objectification I am talking about, then one such anime is 'Kore Wa Zombie Desu Ka?' or 'Is This a Zombie?'

When it comes to positive characters in this anime, all the three main characters and all the negative characters are given extraordinary physical features, like big breasts, cute faces and so on, which fulfill the purpose of pleasing the lustful male gaze. In this anime, being the villain is not about how cruel or powerful she is, but the entire concentration is on how she is presented in the anime series. That is, she is a character of interest because of her body. The society I live in has a major impact on defining the boundaries of various bodies, where the body in itself is constructed through biological, cultural and societal phenomena. I think that the representation of women in anime is the result of the societal construction of the body, which is more of a patriarchal and male dominated process. Where women's bodies become the point of attraction for the vast male audience who are into watching anime, the body turns to an object to lure a male audience into watching anime and this is done through either naked women or weird sexual fantasies which again is fulfilled through presenting women with a focus on their body. In this sense, women in anime are portrayed in a particular way to fit the male gaze.

The portrayal of women in 'Kore Wa Zombie Desu Ka?' is exactly how women are represented in most of the other anime that I have watched. Countless examples can be given to show this huge difference between the portrayal of men and women in anime. In the anime 'Shuffle', where all the characters with big breasts are admired, this one girl is termed as "flat chested" and is usually mocked, and is shown as someone without any men to date. In other words, men don't want to go out with her because of her body.

If I want to talk about men, then again, I would say that their position is no better. Men are presented with weak and thin bodies with ability beyond limits - throughout all the episodes in one anime, the main character is always shown as weak or fragile. I cannot actually come to terms with the display of the main character as a very weak person. This representation of men goes on until a point where a fight starts, and this man, who was shown as someone who cannot lift a stone, would be seen beating up the entire set of villains. All this is done to maintain the role of men as dominant and strong compared to women, and this actually puts pressure on men to be the protector always. Men are required to be a certain way, and through anime one can actually see what happens in normal life as well.

When I went through most anime and saw how these men and women are represented, I understood how our body is not in our control. Every notion of the body succumbs to outward pressures and limits of the society. If the society requires men to be protectors and saviors, then they are forced to be portrayed like that in all these shows and series, thus forcing the men watching it to be like the main hero shown in the anime or other series they watch. Similarly, for women, this pressure of the society is shown in the outrageous representations of their bodies, which is just an item of sexual satisfaction and objectification for the audience that is watching it. This portrayal of women's bodies either sets goals for women outside to be like them; that is, slim and thin with the perfect waist size, or this gives men the idea of how a perfect woman should be.

I strongly believe that the portrayal of women in anime is done in order to please the male audience, with a major focus on their bodies. And I do think that anime focuses on the stereotypes regarding the role of a woman to be that of a caregiver and home-maker, and further connects all this into the existing power structure which focuses on male dominance and female subordination. I would like to bring into focus the idea that, compared to men, women are presented in a more degrading way, keeping in mind the male lustful gaze and patriarchal notions. Women are presented such that they are either supposed to follow all the traditional roles of being a mother, child bearer and homemaker, or they are objectified, using their body as the main focus of attraction. In all these aspects, their qualities and powers are negated.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I don't dream of accomplishing anything by writing this article, but I believe that every opinion holds the power to change at least one thing in this society and I have seen the world of anime changing to an extent, such that there are many genres that bring in the concept of women empowerment and female upliftment. In that sense, if my article can provoke someone to change their way of viewing anime, then that's all I want. I can be the change and the thought to change.

Will Curiosity Kill the Cat?

Shivani Sharma

The rationale behind writing a work of fiction titled 'Will Curiosity Kill the Cat?' was to start an internal dialogue regarding the kind of choices life throws at us, and how one is in a constant tussle to go after what one's heart wants, and what society demands of one. Towards the end, I have tried to rationalise my choice of the road not taken, and how it will help me inadvertently follow my passion.

On an unusually calm night, while I was strolling on the deserted lanes of a British styled complex, I felt a certain discomfort as I passed by a billboard that read 'Hotel Fifty Five'. I usually don't pay heed to stoic landmarks when I am walking with my introspective alter ego, but that moment was different. That eerie yet magnetic feeling of exploring the forbidden territory made me take the plunge.

A balmy spirit engulfed me as I entered the prem-

ises, and a sudden amnesia ran a paralytic feeling through my body - I wasn't sure about my existence anymore, neither was I sure of the place I had been transported to. I just knew one thing at that moment, that something terrible or terrific was going to happen to me. The reception desk reeked of an oriental setting, with woods of oak and chinar moulded into enigmatic furnishings. As I glanced around with my inquisitive eyes, I could scale portraits of a majestic hill top mansion resting peacefully on a lush green landscape. The tinkering yellow lights inside the house had a mystic gleam, and I could feel a sense of time travel ushering me inside as I wished to enter that house and see what lay inside. There was a latent story in each of those portraits, something that the artist wanted to convey, or maybe something that the artist wanted me to experience. I could willfully feel myself getting drawn towards that pristine landscape, walking barefoot on the feather-like grass touched by dew drops. My wishful thinking was put to a halt with a certain overwhelming presence of a man, who groaned, "How may I help you?"

I suddenly turned to figure out the face behind that voice which sent a chill down my spine. All I saw was a young rugged man with a full grown stubble standing tall in front of me. At once, I was taken aback by his overpowering posture, but then the sudden twinkle in his eyes and his sheepish grin managed to put me off guard.

I realised he had been staring at me for way too long, awaiting my response to his question. I tried to gather some words and fumbled in the process, "I ... I wanted to book a room for tonight."

Suddenly, this voice in my head started reprimanding me for spilling out something so non-sensical. I had been living in the city for years. Why did I say that I wanted to stay in the hotel that night?

He trespassed my thought bubble and his husky tone directed that he could immediately rent me one as soon as I paid half the amount towards advance payment. Without much consideration, I followed what he said and soon, I could see my sanity go for a walk, doubtful of a specific return date.

I had a lot of questions buzzing over my head while I was walking behind him in the dingy corridors, looking for room number 104. His footsteps stomped over my heart and I felt shamelessly attracted towards his nonchalant demeanor. Just when I decided to

strike a conversation with this mystic man, he turned and grabbed my wrist. Instead of resisting and trying to set myself free, I stared into his pruning eyes in an attempt to find some answers. For a moment, I felt that my verbal prowess had abandoned me for good. Gathering all my strength, I demanded, in a meek tone, "What are you trying to do?"

Suddenly, I felt a sense of rage spreading over his well-structured face. "Come on! Don't act like you don't know anything. I knew you would come. I was waiting for you all this while." Without listening to my response any further, he took me into an endless corridor where I could only see a flickering yellow light somewhere. Unsure about the person or the place, I felt as if I was being taken to the inside of the mansion I had seen in the portrait earlier. That feeling was exciting, yet comforting. The man who I had never seen before was suddenly forcing me to follow him with his hand firmly holding mine. His presence was stern but there was something very familiar about that touch - in the way he held my hand and took me along, and in the way he pressed his dominance over my resistance. There was something very homely about him! And so, I held the pleat of my skirt with my hand, and walked briskly in the confines of the maze as he held my other hand gently with a sense of authority. Who was he? I still had to figure that out. But he was someone who had captivated me in a familial bond of which I had been unaware of all my life. There had been this occasional calling where I would have the urge to follow the mystic presence of an entity who felt like home, and in that moment, I felt as if I was present at the right place with the right person.

But, what next? Did I cross the forbidden threshold? Did I become modern day Eve, giving in to Satan's temptation by pursuing something that clearly alarmed me? I was yet to know. The fear of the unknown, as some would say - is that fear real? These were some questions that continuously haunted me as I glided past the hallways. I had this sudden urge to unleash the mystery of the man and the hotel - like there were some forgone connections with the place, and the stranger inhabiting it. Nevertheless, as he crossed me, I followed him into the darkness, and then like a will-o'-wisp, he vanished into thin air, waking me up from a dream that symbolised more than just mystery. It was my dream to take a leap of faith and follow my passions. Strange are the ways of life, when you waver about your decisions - however abstract they may be. Your will creeps into your sub-

conscious mind in the form of moving images and places, to push you to do things that your conscious mind - or in Freudian terms, your 'ego' - wouldn't permit. So, your 'Id' or baser instincts would subtly tell you to take that chance and achieve the thing you ought to. In my case, it was my desire to do my research on the Satanist cult!

Story of Single Screens

Shrishti Abrol

Timeless trails of stories that have widened across corridors at bedtime, swishing to the single screens, have a diminishing presence competing with the prolific past. In attempting to immortalise the story of single screens, there is an intention to explore its presence in cities, as well as in the lives of its inhabitants. Beyond those concrete walls, how those single screens were the character in the matinee of time, unfolds the very reason why they continue to breathe through my words here, and why they will do so in the future.

Single screen theaters foretell their own history - a history of the community that they are integrated into, with their screens welcoming the collective presence, weaving them in like a regional ritual. They signify an old charm, with the larger-than-life cut outs of limelight stealers on glossed cardboards, amalgamating the conflicting spectrums of the dreamy cinematic industry and the groundling classes under one roof. With the sprouting of single screens emerged the culture of celebrity worship, thus procreating an assorted community that have bonded along cinematic lines. The metaphorical curtains unveil to the spectators the world unfamiliar - while they are knitting in their mundane lives - and the much longed happily ever-afters. Brushing away troubles and tribulations on the welcome carpet, the audience steps into the cocoon of familiarity that they cherish with their stars, and similarity that they share with the co-fans. The pomp and glory of multiplexes might sketch out the growth graphs of profit earned, but the walls of single theaters resound with the history of cinema and its audience. The relationship the spectators share with the virtual portrayal of the cinematic world dictates their life activities and preferences.

Friday frenzy, especially for the first day, first show, connects all the busy lives. Loyal fans, bordering fanatics and movie buffs await the Friday fever to

indulge in the experience called the 'movie', thus discarding their routinely work in the name of fake illnesses. The coinciding of the worlds thus began with the single screen theaters, which has evolved into colossal multiplexes. The devotion that the single screen theaters has propagated and witnessed ranges, from garlanding the cut-outs of artists and coconuts smashing, amidst crackling crackers. The placards with the portraits of the lead actors adorning the entry gates are ceremonially garlanded and decked with surrounding streamers and abstract decorations. Thus, the greasy walls and resounding roofs have borne the birth and fame of not only the actors, directors, musicians and other technicians, but have also witnessed the beginning of para-social relationships that the audience shares with the screen fillers. While superlatives slip out endlessly when reacting to the movie and the actors in it, the mesmerised audience celebrates their happy two hours, thus celebrating the advent of single screens in their lives.

Queues in pockets of the city have wormed out in front of the ticket counters, causing heavy jams, transforming the space into meeting junctures. Single screen theaters demarcated the film industry into princes and paupers, altering the spaces of power. Standalone cinema theaters, with movies as their singular bait - unlike the multiplexes that house multiple utilities, ranging from attires, food courts, game zones and the like - share deeply rooted interdependencies with the film industry, engaging in symbiotic relations. Single screen theaters have foregrounded the metamorphosis of the cinematic world from being common nouns to proper nouns, and then nouns to adjectives. The seats at single screen theaters have beheld the gradual progression of people to celebrities. The single screen theaters have acted as spaces where the illusion of collapsing horizons is created, with larger than life characters affecting lives largely.

The screen, though single, caters to people from multiple age groups, societal standings and economical backgrounds. The theaters of mono-portrayal, with singular movies being screened for numerous hours, attracts people from different walks of life for a collective experience of entertainment. Single screens, which have procreated and spread the culture of combined viewership, have moved to the endangered list, amidst the blooming multiplexes that adorn cities across borders in the contemporary world.

The spontaneity that dictates the activity of watching movies in the current scenario, even now with the

multiplexes, was absent in the era when the single screen theaters ruled. Watching a movie was a welcome occasion which people looked forward to, when single screen theaters were flourishing in the cities. The single screen cinema halls, in their prominent times, were known more by their localities, and the localities by them. Since the halls catered to the entertainment needs of the surrounding communities, they were usually remembered in accordance with their locality, rather than their names. Thus, the single screen cinema halls transcended spatial boundaries to become an integral part of people's lives. The same cannot be said about the multiplexes that have been commercial whirlpools, focusing primarily on hoarding profits. The era when movies ruled the cinemas for consecutive months have now turned into a rarity. Multiplexes and multiple screening halls honour the movies creating box office records with utmost reverence, but they fail to integrate it in the lives of people. The movies screened on the single screen were not just mere processes operating in thin air, but rather extensions of experiences which remained rooted in temporal frames, and revived in fond memories. The huge hoardings advertising the upcoming and on-going films at the entrances of single screen theaters were prominent landmarks for road mapping, thus elucidating the role such theaters played in society. Tracing their roots from road mapping, they even occupied positions in the mind mapping of the prevailing social environment. The single screen theaters were spaces of intersection, where the haves and have-nots interacted with a collective response, as the halls were pocket friendly.

Possible Solution to an Ever-Existing Problem

Shruthi S

Increase in pollution in an urban space like Bangalore has to be well addressed. In spite of all the possible solutions employed till date to curb pollution, there does not seem to be much of a difference. The ever increasing rates of population adds to this problem. It leads to many health issues and I have been a victim of this for quite some time now.

After the implementation of demonetisation, I realised that money matters the most, and that one would go to any extent to see to it that it is treasured

up. This made me come up with a feasible solution to pollution via money, using it as a means to accomplish a cleaner end.

Increase in population and increase in pollution are directly proportional to each other in any city. Let me take the case of Bangalore, for instance. From the past few years, there has been an unexpected increase in both population and pollution. Bangalore, being the information technology capital of India, attracts many people who are looking to set their career in this industry. Many youngsters have started to settle here from their graduating days. Bangalore attracts many others from other fields too, like law, science, arts, fine arts, and management, and is not just confined to the information technology realm.

Population explosion has been an existing issue for many years, and any solution falls short of tackling it. Along with the existing native crowd, there are immigrants who settle in this city, and this contribute towards the immense increase in the number of people residing in an area. The urban area of Bangalore is 709 square kilometers, and the population is 11.5 million - so the population density is very high. Population density is a measurement of population per unit area. Though there is an ever expansion of the area of the city, there is not much decrease in the population density. This stands as a proof to the increase in population.

As the population increases, so do other issues like pollution, unemployment, and the lack of basic facilities. The main focus here, however, is on the increase in pollution, and increase in the number of vehicles on roads, and how industries are the reason behind it. Industries let the waste out to water resources and pollute them, and the best example to allude to is the case of Varthur Lake. Along with industries, increase in the number of vehicles is another reason behind air pollution. There should be strict rules to check and control the emission from the vehicles. The current emission tests are not regulated strictly, so the credibility of it goes in vain. Well, the number of vehicles on the road needs to be reduced; the recent trend of car pooling seems to be gaining popularity, but this does not help in solving the pressing concern of increase in pollution.

I would like to bring in the role of money in helping control pollution in the city. I wonder what it would be like if there existed a system where bank accounts of vehicle owners are linked to their driving licenses. If their vehicles have higher levels of emission, money automatically gets deducted from their account. This will definitely have an impact, a huge one at that. Why limit this system only to emission checks? I would prefer using this for keeping track of traffic too, where every vehicle must be attached with devices which can be sensed via sensors at every traffic signal junction. The one who jumps a signal or violates any traffic rule will be charged a penalty and the amount will get deducted from the bank account. If there is no sufficient balance, then, he pays an extra fine. if the person doesn't bother to adhere to these rules, then his license will be confiscated. When the system is this strict, then there will be a decrease in the number of vehicles on the street, and so, there will be decrease in the pollution caused by vehicles.

I have always had this opinion that human beings can be bent only by enforcing strict rules; they are not a self-moderating race. Developed nations stand as a testimony to this statement.

Voila! Problem seems to be solved, theoretically!

The Individualist and the Feminist : The Metaphysical Dialogues of the Philosophies

Shruti Menon

I am an Individualist. I strongly uphold my opinion, my philosophy, and my 'I'.

I do not identify as a Feminist.

I write this now because I did identify as a feminist, for quite a substantial period of time. Every rational human being lives by a code - a set of values they uphold and live by, rooted in their philosophy of life. For this reason, I believe it is supremely important to understand the significance of one's code, and the philosophy that guides it. Feminism and Individualism are two different codes, and uphold two different ideals. I seek to study the dialectic of these codes, their dialogues with one another, and their inter-textual metaphysics.

Individualism is a philosophy that posits that the individual is the centre of his own existence, determines his own course of life, and places, or should place, his own interests and ideals above those of the community. In essence, this ideology views every hu-

man being as an individual in his own right, and not as a member, or part of a collective. As Craig Biddle wrote, in 'The Objectivist Standard' - "Individualism is the idea that the individual's life belongs to him and that he has an inalienable right to live it as he sees fit, to act on his own judgment, to keep and use the product of his effort, and to pursue the values of his choosing. It's the idea that the individual is sovereign, an end in himself, and the fundamental unit of moral concern".

The individual is an end in himself, and basic syllogism would decree that any mode of collectivism that rules or dictates the life of the individual, is unacceptable and immoral. A society of such complete individuals would implicate the glorious and definitive synergy of the best within each individual, such that no one becomes a mere 'drop in the ocean', like certain identity-vaporising philosophies kindly dictate. Individualism champions the individual. Individualism dismisses the collective, in any form and manifestation.

Feminism, essentially, is the physical and ideological battle of a certain group of individuals - mostly women - against a male dominated collective that dictates their lives. It is the philosophical discourse that studies gender equality, and gendered social roles. While the first two waves of feminism dealt with addressing a basic violation of rights - namely, the gaining of voting rights for women, and equal wages and job opportunities for women - both of which were withheld by men - the third wave of the 21 century is a little more complex. Third wave feminism deals actively with gender equality, and social roles and expectations, particularly in the realms of expression and sexuality, celebrating it as empowerment. Most feminists today are third wave feminists.

What sets the third wave apart from the first two is its pre-occupation with societal roles and expectations of women, and also men. Feminism of the third wave has come to be a triumphant celebration of the Woman, who seeks to dismiss the expectations of the patriarchy and do exactly as she pleases with her life, and her body.

To begin with, third wave feminism, then, functions like a very fractionate version of Individualism - here, the 'individual' in question, is the Woman, and the 'collective' that she seeks to dismiss is the patriarchy.

However, the fundamental ideal of Individualism - and this is where it makes its mark against third wave feminism - is that "the individual is sovereign, an end in himself, and the fundamental unit of moral concern". The individual, therefore, does not consider the dictations of the collective, does not seek the validation of the collective for his own worth, and certainly does not attempt to change the views of the collective, such that they may look more kindly upon him. Indeed, the third wave feminist seeks to dismiss the patriarchy, a male dominated collective, but in this attempt, pays far too much importance to the views of the patriarchy. It is in the perilous position of becoming a movement of competition, and of rebellion - where every feminist stance is verily a position against the patriarchy first, and an individual stance second. The patriarchy has become a point of reference against which one rebels, rather than a redundant, pathetic ideology which is of no consequence today. Further, the movement itself is becoming a clamorous cult, as opposed to a liberating philosophy. Thus, the Woman who dismisses the values of the patriarchy, as far as her sexual expression is concerned, is designated a Feminist and initiated into the frenzied cult of third wave feminism, although her dismissal was not in opposition to patriarchy, but to collectivism, of which patriarchy is only a part. Feminism is verily becoming the movement of a collective, against a collective.

I must assert here that third wave feminism certainly has been functional in tackling the issues of sexual assault and rape culture in society, by attempting to shift the collective line of vision to the transgressors, rather than the victims. A feminist works like a social worker for the individuals who need help empowering themselves against a patriarchal collective. I support the work of the feminists who have done so, and enabled change in societies where individuals are not quite able to empower themselves.

The metaphysics of Individualism decree that the individual is self-sufficient and empowered. The metaphysics of Feminism decree that the individual is empowered in the face of a patriarchy. Individualism, as a philosophy, is rooted solely in the individual. Being an individualist does not imply that one is a member of a group of individualists. It implies that one believes firmly in the precedence of oneself, over a collective, and manifests this philosophy by living by it.

I am an Individualist.

Why The Student Snaps.

Shubham

Social media is on fire with people wanting to help the depressed. Everyday, I come across people on campus who seem forlorn. These are the ones lost in the crowd. The nobodies. The sad thing is that, these nobodies never get noticed until it's too late. Through this article, I seek to put forward the issue of depression in a student's life: how it plays a role in moulding the decisions made by the student and how, if not dealt with proper care, it can go horribly wrong.

My Facebook newsfeed is flooded with the same status copied and pasted by the Good Samaritans. "Talk to me" or "Tell me your concerns", it reads. This trend was recently sparked because of the hike in the rate of suicides committed by students. Suicide is the second leading cause of death of college students. Motor-vehicle accidents are the first, in case you are wondering. Suicide is the person's final remedy for depression and anxiety. The person sees it beneath himself to talk about the issues to a therapist or to get it treated. Suicide becomes the only way out.

There are factors which build this path. Negative vibes are common on any college campus. Young adults, out of the house for the first time, brimming with expectations for a better life with the taste of freedom. Then, reality kicks in. The pressure of the course, competitiveness, loneliness, the feeling of not belonging anywhere and the fear that this feeling might never leave. Negativity sets in. This plants the seeds of depression in the student's brain, which only grows from this point onward until properly treated.

What strikes me the most about this issue is that anxiety and depression exist here and now, but everyone seems to take it ever so lightly. "What is this 'pressure in a student's life' that you talk about? You have one job," was the reaction of my neighbor when I had a conversation with him regarding the suicide of a depressed kid in the neighborhood. "Kids should toughen-up," he suggested. This is the prevailing condition, the mindset of our society on this matter. Suicide is the coward's way out, they say. Taking a jibe at someone who is already down is what our society excels at.

Instead of mocking the act, one should look deeper into this matter. No parent should undermine it and consider it a 'phase'. No acquaintance should see it as "just the way he or she is". No friend should suggest that "this is how life is, so, move on". When one catches a disease, he or she gets it treated. They go to the doctor, get treatment for the affected organ. They do not just "move on".

Depression is a disease. It affects the brain. One simply cannot talk their way out of it. It needs treatment. When not paid attention to, it may turn into a reason for suicide. If the gun laws in India were not as tight as they are, that might even have been the leading cause of homicide too. America is one country that faces this problem. Maybe it is an inspiration to all the countries out there to have strict gun laws. Every once in a while, I come across the news of a high-school shooting in America. Someone, mostly a student, feels out of place, gets depressed, gets his or her hand on a gun and opens fire on fellow students. While the world 'condemns the incident', no one bothers to look into the matter, as to what incites such an incident, what level of pressure is levied on a student that leads him/her to snap and take as drastic a measure as this.

Depression is a sad reality of life. It is very noble of people to think that they will take out the time from their busy lives and hear the troubles of others but, no amount of talking has cured a disease. I have heard enough sad stories and I have lost enough friends to depression for a lifetime.

Domestic Violence and Children

Simran Sahoo

The concern over the issue of domestic violence has always looked into the plight of women, and more recently, at that of men as well, but the children go unnoticed. My understanding of the problems that the children in this country face compels me to write about an issue I believe one ought to gravely be alert about - that of violence against children. I consider the act heinous and a rebarbative evidence of the thriving irrationality of humans. Children are collateral victims without a voice of their own, born into spaces that deem their very existence a burden. So, it is this absence of articulation from their end that I intend on amplifying through my article, as an act of raising the voice on their behalf to delineate the injustices they are ruthlessly subject to.

The voices are so loud that they won't leave you even

if you sit there balled up with your hands covering your ears and your eyes squeezed shut. The sound of something crashing suddenly startles you. Loud voices follow that, along with the sound of flesh striking hard against flesh. The tears that you were trying to hold back for so long start to flow freely. How do you go to your happy place that mom told you about with sounds like this constantly bringing you back to the harrowing reality? Is this how it happens in all homes? Why can't everyone be happy all the time? And more importantly, is it your fault? Is it because of something you did that all of this is happening? Maybe it is. These are the questions that keep you up at night.

Domestic violence, unfortunately, is extremely common in a society like India, and what's more, it is very conveniently overlooked as 'personal matters' and not dealt with as it should be. It's extremely difficult to estimate the amount of psychological and physical trauma that a woman might be undergoing, who is a victim of domestic violence. But most of the times, amongst all this, the little tormented soul hiding in a corner somewhere, is very conveniently ignored. Children become the bigger victim here, because being subjected to such incidents during their growing period, takes a toll on their overall well-being. The children belonging to families where domestic violence is a common issue, grow up to be introverted or violent creatures. They have stunted growth and often complain of headaches, stomach aches and sore throats. Bed-wetting is also a common trait found amongst children exposed to domestic violence. But the most concerning issue about such children is the psychological toll that it takes on them. And this, in the long run, affects their future, making them reclusive, suicidal individuals who develop anti-social characteristic traits.

In my opinion, there should be strict laws against this. Besides that, individual steps should also be taken to avoid such a situation. Domestic violence is not just limited to the rural or uneducated class of the society. Instances of it are also heard from the houses of the educated and urban mass. In that scenario, the couple can wait and figure out the dynamics of their relationship and then plan for a baby. In India, where arranged marriage is a common practice, this would be extremely helpful. The couple should first check out how they get along and how compatible they are together, before planning for a baby, rather than fulfilling the family's expectations which demands from them a child, as soon as possible. In many cases, the

violence also gets branched out towards the child, which should be avoided at any cost. Further, there should be helplines for the affected children, which would reach out to them immediately with the requisite help. Reaching out to the rural mass with an issue like this would be a lot more difficult. But 'nuked-nataks' and skits could be organised for them to make them aware about this pressing issue. If the mass can be swayed to care for their children by accepting western medication, I believe that they could also be convinced to think about their children's future well-being as well. There should be a division in the police stations in the villages solely dedicated to such issues, which would cater to the affected children.

Children are considered to be the future of a nation, and a nation can hardly expect to develop with its future growing into reclusive, anti-social adults. Hence, they should be taken proper care of. The Bobo Doll Experiment proves that children learn aggressive behavior from the examples that surround them, and a child growing up observing such violence in his or her own home could hardly be expected not to adopt such behavior. One will never know what this aggression might culminate in, when the child becomes an adult. And a group of aggressive, emotionally unstable adults is not what is required in a growing country. Hence, I believe that rather than turning a blind eye towards this issue, people should be made more aware of it and necessary steps should be taken by the government as well the individual to tackle the situation.

The Strings that Never Sing

Sonia Mary Alex

I have attempted to address the issue of abortion through 'The Strings that Never Sing', and have tried to build a case against this immoral act. The reason why I chose this particular topic is because I respect human dignity. When I look around, I see that human lives are not given the importance it deserves in this consumerist society. I am born to this world without my consent. The status of my life as a human being also is not my choice. There was a chance for me to be any creature other than a human being. When I understand this truth, how can I destroy the life of others? I feel that 'abortion' is the most grievous act of all human actions - that of the killing of a helpless, voiceless individual. I really want people to think on this issue seriously and take mature, healthy

decision and stand for pro-life.

Human life is the greatest gift given by God. My life is not my choice, rather it is God's mercy and concern towards me. So, I am ever grateful to Him, the Author of me. However, it is very painful for me to see that human lives are not secure in this modern era, unlike ancient times. In other words, selfishness of certain people is not allowing a life to be born into this world. If I can enjoy the beauty of this world lavishly, then how can I even think about denying the same right to my fellow beings?

Here, I would like to speak about the increasing number of abortions in the world, especially in India. 17 January, 2017 - a headline in all newspapers struck those who are humane. The Supreme Court permitted an Indian woman to kill her child of six months in the womb, under the assumption that the child could be unhealthy. Nobody protested regarding the issue. In the court, no lawyer argued for the unborn child. It is not sure whether the state lawyer has done his duty. The lawyer of the woman argued for his party and won the case. I believe it is devilish. It is painful for those who love and respect human life. In India, the law even prohibits the killing of animals in a few states.

I feel that human life is not even given the value of an animal that destroys human life. In this particular case, the people and organisations that support the notion of pro-life did not get a chance to voice their opinion. According to this verdict of the Supreme Court, many are fighting for the abortion of a six-month-old child. The court and law, which had taken oaths to protect life, are becoming the destroyers of life. There are a few philosophical altercations in the legislature. The split between morality and individual interest is prime among them. The individual concern is given prime importance over morality. Morality makes law possible. Nowadays, morality is separated from law. So, many countries legalised abortion, mercy killing, and homosexual marriage. Another important point is the customisation of sin. This generation does not have repentance over sin.

Abortion was considered as the greatest evil and crime till 1960. Today, the law is easily violated everywhere. Individual rights are more respected than the common good. The worst thing is that people interpret badly, and misuse the law, for their own convenience. Parents kill children through abortion, and at the same time, children kill parents through mercy killing. Likewise, an individual gets the right to commit suicide. The rights are taken through a false interpretation of the law. It is high time to rise pro-life advocates. The clause 312 – 316 of the Indian penal code, in the year 1860, was set apart for the protection of life in the womb during earlier times. People were severely punished for the crime.
In the 1971 law of Medical Termination of Pregnancy, abortion of a five-month child became legalised.

In India, more than 35,000 children are killed in the womb every day. Many of them are done only for simple reasons. In the above law session, 2 Ex (2) allows the abortion of a child born due to the failure of contraceptives. The foetus in a mother's womb is not merely a mass of flesh. Since it is human life from the time of fertilisation, he/she should be given all human rights. The life science conference held in Washington declared that the difference between a foetus and an individual on earth is just a change of existing supporting system. Abortion is the cruelest act because the person is helpless in their mother's womb. How does the protector turn into a murderer?

Human life is not an abstract idea. It is a reality that every human being experiences. Every life is a unique journey to reach a particular destination. Every life is a beautiful melody that sings rhythmically. Every person is a mystery that science cannot prove the essence of, through empirical means. The journey begins in the first moment of conception, and it proceeds. I demand dignity for my life. Why can't I give the same to another individual without looking for status, position, gender, wealth and age? A foetus is the youngest human being in the world. The right to live is the fundamental right of the foetus. Nobody can overrule this right. Just introspect and understand the truth that every one of us was an embryo at one point in life. So, please don't neglect the reality. Be respectable by giving respect even to the least thriving ones in society. No technology can replace the human resource. Every human is fighting for individual freedom and rights. That right should also be given to the person in the mother's womb. No person should be treated as mere objects.

I hope that the strings of life will not be broken, and that it will play its sweet melody eternally. So, I sincerely want to support human life at every stage and at any cost, especially life that is inside the womb.

Vipassana: The Art of Seeing Clearly

Sreemoyee Basu

My objective for writing this article is to delineate how Vipassana became my modus operandi for life. Through this work, I seek to reflect on why I took to this method.

It was fourteen years ago, when I was traveling with my family in USA, that I first heard of Vipassana. A co-passenger from Iceland noticed that I was reading a book by Eckhart Tolle and seemed highly amused. She asked me where I was from and could not contain herself when I said 'India'. She then went on to divulge her reason for the amusement – why should an Indian turn to an American to learn how to be in the moment, when she had solutions much closer home? She told me about the Buddhist form of meditation, Vipassana, and I listened, intrigued about the rigors of what seemed to me a very austere practice, while simultaneously developing an admiration for a woman who had dedicated her life to it. However, within weeks of the incident, the information had receded to the back of my mind and lay dormant.

Before I go on to speak of what brought it back to the foreground again, I will address the obvious question – why was a teenager reading spiritual self-help books in the first place? This is both a difficult and an easy question to answer. I could say that I had devoured my mother's collection of Dr. Brian Wiess books and was intrigued by the possibility of life after death, but it would not explain the urgency with which I was seeking to learn about the spiritual - I refrain from using the word supernatural - at the time. The real reason was that, through a period in my childhood, I could involuntarily go into a state of astral projection. All I knew at the time was that there were times when I would simply step up and watch myself from the outside. It took me a while to realise that this did not happen to everyone. When I did, it is safe to say that it did more than pique my curiosity.

However, it was not until 2011, eight years after the chance encounter with the Buddhist Icelander, that I thought of Vipassana again. A lot had changed in those eight years. I had gone from being spiritually inquisitive to agnostic. I no longer had 'out of the body' experiences and only had sketchy memories of the time when I used to. It was a curious time to turn to meditation, as it would seem to be at odds with

who I was then. The one thing that propelled me to it was knowing that there is no going back to having faith again, in the way that I used to when I was younger. This made me feel like I was drifting without an anchor, and that I did not really have a fixed vantage point from which I was viewing life.

Did Vipassana give me that vantage point and grounding? It did not. And yet it was the greatest thing that could have happened to me. It taught me to stop looking for stability outside and turn inward. It showed me how little I knew about myself and the motivations behind my choices. It made me more self-aware than I knew it was possible to be. It helped me to do what it claims in the name itself – to see clearly.

Later, I found out about the many ways in which this form of meditation had been applied in life. I learned that Kiran Bedi had started the practice for inmates of Tihar jail and even the most hardened criminals were rehabilitated because of it. I learned of how its practice had healed people of many endemic diseases and cured addictions. I also learned that there is a research unit in Igatpuri, Maharashtra that is investigating how and why this form of meditation is so effective.

However, these were not the reasons that I had turned towards it – I did not want to be healed or rehabilitated, or be part of a movement. I wanted to know how best to be myself. Not only did I start the process of doing just that when I turned to Vipassana, but I also learned something else. This is best expressed in the insightful words of Anais Nin – "If you intensify and complete your subjective emotions, visions, you see their relation to others' emotions."

A Beautiful Scar

Sumona Mukherjee

I intend to write an article about scars to change the way in which people perceive them. Trying to make the readers see them as something that is not always a negative thing is the main objective, since they can have both good and bad experiences attached to them. But people only see them as blemishes to their overall image, and nothing else.

What would you name a gift that has been knighted? Sir Prize! What would you call a breaking friendship?

Rustin Bond. If one was to give a flower to April, would one say that April got 'phooled'? These may not be the questions that the world is interested in, but they are the ones I ask, because speaking like this is a part of who I am. Likewise, scars are a part of me, and all of us, and should be embraced, not hidden. They are not marks that people should be ashamed of.

Scars. Marks. Imperfections. They become a part of your body, and having them makes you think that your body isn't worth as much as it was before you got it. You scorn its existence. You do everything in your power to erase it. You apply creams and ointments and concoct all sorts of home remedies. But the scars remain - no matter how light or dark, they always stay.

A scar is a beautiful thing. Looking at the scars, and thinking about how I got them, is always a pleasure. Each of them takes me back to the incident when I got them, inspiring recollections which never fail to make me feel sombre. Every scar has a story to tell. I believe that they are like permanent tattoos, ones that are directly related to the lives that have them and originate from experiences that will never vanish.

A mark behind the palm of my right hand comes from a wound that I got when I was in the third grade. It was a small injury at first and had a crumply, thin and crunchy layer of scab being formed over it. I went for a bucket bath when it was in this stage of the healing process. My face was blinded by the shampoo all over my face. I grabbed the mug from the rim rather than the handle, resulting in the latter somehow peeling open the scab. After this, the handle tore into the skin, not only disrupting the upper layers and widening the area of damaged tissue, but digging into my skin and making its way to the deeper layers.

The pain was numbed at the moment because of the tranquilising effect of the steaming hot bath water. It was when I dried myself that I realised the excruciating pain I was truly in. This recollection may not be the happiest one of all, but at least now I have a seemingly irrelevant story to tell about my childhood, which I would otherwise have forgotten. The happier ones, like the ones which I got while wrestling with my best friend, or the ones which my pet dog gave me as he was growing up, are also wonderful memories which I will never lose because of the scars they left behind. All in all, being scarred for life is not necessarily a bad thing.

Travel Writing

Sakina Thanawala

Sometimes, I ponder about becoming the next Paul Theroux, and sometimes, I just wish to be my own self. But, before I scribble my viewpoint on travel writing, I desire to say that I chose to write on travel writing because I feel that it is important to shed light on travel writing as a choice of career as it is a field which, according to me, many do not wish to seek as a profession. Through this opinionated write-up, I choose to encourage people to perceive and take travel writing as a career without any agitation. In this modern day and age, I reckon that travel writing has more benefits than drawbacks. To support my argument, I bring forward the advantages of being a travel writer. I think that the first and foremost merit of working as a travel writer is to explore the world on the expenses of the publishing company because they want you to travel, and write about it. And the best part is, one gets paid for it.

According to me, travel writing is not a strenuous job, though it requires deadlines to be met, but one can be psychologically relaxed as he does not have to follow a nine-to-five work life. If I were to be a travel writer, I would organise my dates as to when to travel, and when to write about it. I believe that travel writing also involves meeting other travel writers on the way, and one can not only know more about foreign countries through them, but also take some tips and inspiration from other travel writers. In my opinion, travel writing is not limited to visiting only popular places of a destination, but it also initiates the travel writer into the world of unexplored locations which most people would not have heard about, and by writing about it, people can be introduced to those unexplored locations. I strongly think that meeting locals, staying a night or two with them, and knowing their culture is the real experience of a place which the travel writer can also write about. In the same context, the cuisines of the place can also be experienced and interestingly written about.

In my opinion, travel writing is for the courageous and adventurous, because, to undertake a job as a travel writer, one needs to perform various challenging activities like sky-diving and bungee-jumping, all depending upon the place which requires the writer to experience these activities in order to write about it. I fancy that if a travel writer explores the unexplored, he ought to be far off from the material-

istic world, and can experience and write about the feeling of sitting near the cool blue sea rather than standing on the ground watching concrete skyscrapers. Travel writing to me is more a needed experience than a profession. I anticipate that writing about the places you travel to drives you to know more about your own self clearly. It is a job which has the capability of changing a person's perspective towards life and I think that that is what is urgently needed to be revived in this world.

The Meaning of Meaninglessness: Interpreting the Absurd

Tia Johny

The rationale behind this article is to portray how Absurdism, as a philosophy, explores the fundamental nature of the absurd, and how individuals, upon becoming conscious of the absurd, should respond to it.

From the beginning of time, there existed the assumption that everything in this world must have a purpose, or in philosophical terms, a higher reason for existence. Along with this assumption existed the question, "What is the reason for this purpose, where each new height is supposed to be validated by another one? "

For centuries, many philosophers have continued to propagate the conviction that there is no intrinsic meaning to the universe or to anything which exists in it, and that humanity must live in a world which is, and will forever be, hostile or indifferent towards them. In response to this idea which discarded any reason for being alive, people began to create stories and beliefs which, in their minds, transcended reality to bestow meaning upon existence. They also maintained that though the purpose of life is not apparent, no one has been able to prove that it doesn't exist.

Out of this confrontation between the human obstinacy for meaning, and the unreasonable silence of the world, developed the philosophy which encompasses all meaninglessness – the philosophy of Absurdism. Albert Camus, in his work, 'The Myth of Sisyphus', described that suicide, though not a very rewarding or worthwhile reaction, is the most appropriate and rational solution to the Absurd. But most of the time, human beings learn to live with the Absurd – through coping or through revolt, and the

knowledge of the very lack of purpose presents them with true freedom.

Camus' view of Absurdism can be considered as the most pragmatic response to it, as he maintains practicality without abandoning intellectual integrity, depicting the convergence of acceptance and rebellion in a radical reaction. To dismiss the complete consumption of truth as impossible is to surrender oneself to intellectual laziness, emotional weakness or some combination thereof. Absurdism constructs a system to provide a reprieve from the absence of intrinsic meaning while simultaneously accepting the meaninglessness of the system, which is an artificial scaffolding. The philosophy of Absurdism is rooted in the belief that the impossibility of complete certainty can be attributed to the vast realms of the known and unknown.

What does the Absurd tell me? It tells me that I can just as well do one thing as the other, in this space where I cannot act, and yet, that which is the very space where I have to act. And since reflection has closed the door, I take one of the possibilities, realising the impossibility of doing anything otherwise, being brought to a standstill by the powers of reflection, which in all immediate recognisability is pre-Socratic paganism.

The 19th century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard explains with a sense of complex simplicity, "The absurd is not the absurd or absurdities without any distinction. It is a category, the negative criterion, of the divine or of the relationship to the divine." In faith, the absurd is not the absurd; faith transforms it – faith is the only thing which masters the absurd – for the absurd terminates negatively before the sphere of faith, which is a sphere by itself.

Exploring the forms of despair, one could identify the three major traits of the Absurd man – a rejection from the suicidal act of escaping existence, a rejection of help from a higher power, and the recognition or acceptance of the Absurd. While suicide is the immediate termination of the self and its place in the universe, faith in a higher power is philosophical suicide, one that rejects physical suicide and defers to abstraction over personal experience. In conclusion, it could be said that, of the three, Recognition is the only defensible option, as there are specific human experiences evoking the notion of Absurdity. In any case, it is a philosophical move to define absolutes and universals subjectively, rather than objectively,

establishing the freedom for the individual to define an exclusive purpose or meaning. The individual thus characterises an entire universe in its own right, drawing from the revelation of the Absurd three consequences – my revolt, my freedom and my passion. By this acknowledgement of consciousness, I transform into a rule of life what was once an invitation to death; I refuse suicide.

In the words of Nikos Kazantzakis' epitaph - "I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. I am free."

Yet, Man continues his attempts to defeat the Absurdity of the world. I believe that he should, because that is Morality. That is Religion. That is Culture. That is Art. That is Life.

Of Choices and Traditions

Zainab Wahid

I firmly believe that a major part of my identity is defined by the hijab that I wear. At various levels and instances, the choice to wear the hijab has received a mixed response from the circle of people that I'm surrounded by. Although the act of performing purdah doesn't seem to be a serious subject to focus on, to me, as an individual, this choice has made a difference to my perception of how I assimilate with the other people I interact with. The writeup is based on my personal experience and hence holds the potential to be questioned or contested by the reader. The experiences written about are not pointers to religion, or to prove what is 'right'. However, the hijab or purdah has been analysed by locating it as a cultural trope.

Purdah is the act of a woman covering herself from the gaze of men, with an exception to the blood related male relatives. It is a major practice grounded in a strong belief system in the religion of Islam. Quite naturally, this practice has been encouraged amongst the followers of Islam, and it has become, and continues to be, projected as a way of oppressing the Muslim women. However, not all Muslim women follow the purdah in various parts of the world and each of them hold their rationale for it.

Taking my personal example, I come from a working middle-class Muslim family, and mostly find myself in a dilemma between the two worlds that I belong to. Yes, two separate worlds that I feel answerable to,

that happen to have conflicting ideologies and principles. Wearing a hijab had been a personal choice, but I can't deny that being a part of a community required me to conform to the larger accepted norm that idealises a woman who practises purdah, so as to become an acceptable Muslim. At the end of the day, all our religious practices seem to be our display of obedience and commitment to the religious community one belongs to. Although many intricate dynamics are at play in this world of mine, deciding on this has never required much of a thought. It might seem hypocritical of me, but honestly there are some spaces where I feel the need to wear the hijab, and a few where I don't. So, it would be safe to say that my choice of hijab is pretty situational. The second world that I belong to is the outside one, majorly the educational institutes I have been to, or even the workspace. Gladly, I have interacted with a crowd that is quite diverse and thoughtful, each of them coming from heterogenous backgrounds. This world, again, has helped me learn so much about the things I would have never explored by myself or in my immediate groups, and this is also the space where I can voice my opinion and try to locate myself. But the problem occurs when I happen to come across discussions about the hijab, more so as a symbol of oppressing women in Islam. Personally, the hijab has never made me feel so, but other people have expressed much sympathy and far more hatred towards the religion. I do agree that making opinions about a particular religion is a personal choice. However, I do have a problem with people who make judgements about a practice based on prejudices. I have come across many such individuals who claim to know everything about a religion merely based on their engagement with cinema, which may not reveal the truth in its entirety. Personally, if I had to state my opinion on any religion or ideology, I shouldn't be doing so without having the entire knowledge about that religion. Also, they do not hesitate to draw parallels with the hijab and illiteracy, which again leaves me amused. A Muslim woman who doesn't follow purdah or even wear a hijab is openly understood as a 'modern, educated and empowered woman', but on the other hand, the hijab clad woman is regressive in her status and symbolises ignorance.

Again, to reaffirm what was stated earlier, everyone has their right to express their thoughts, but only after having the entire knowledge of the matter at hand. Just like one believes in the freedom of speech, the freedom to conduct oneself, if it doesn't harm anyone, it must be given equal consideration.

Cyber Culture

Zuha Aleem Ghori

As individuals living in the 21st century, cyber culture has become an essential part of our identity. Cyber culture has impacted every facet of our life, it has changed the way one perceives the world around them. All of us have become consumers and promoters of this culture, hence it becomes very important to look at this culture closely. The purpose for writing this piece is to sensitise readers about cyber culture. While there are many advantages of this massive phenomenon, one has to look at it from a critical eye, as cyber culture is glitter yet dust.

Cyber culture seeks to study various social phenomenon associated with the internet. It is a community that is mediated through information communication technology and through computer screens. Hence, it places importance on virtual reality; it is a 'social and cognitive culture' and not necessarily a geographical one.

Cyber space has given rise to a culture that has both advantages and disadvantages. It is a new, dynamic and multi-folded culture. Interactions, exchange of information and opinions is possible, thanks to the internet and the cyber space. Social media has helped fuel many movements across the globe. In the case of Arab Spring, social media helped the protestors and activists organise, debate, plan, and broadcast at a level of coordination that was unavailable, and indeed unimaginable.

I think that with the advent of globalisation and rise in cyber culture, the entire world has become a smaller and tangible space. Cyber culture has changed the entire dynamics of Diaspora. Virtual reality has made the world a smaller place. Diasporic communities do not feel displaced or fragmented as they are connected to their friends and family through WhatsApp, Facebook or Skype at all points of time. When migrants shift to a new country, they do not experience a lot of discomfort as they have all the information they need about the country on the internet. They are aware about the food habits, transport facilities and weather conditions of the new country even before they migrate.

Exchange of information is much faster today; any piece of information can be disseminated to a large audience in a matter of minutes. Today, everyone is using the internet to spread information. As a result, it has given rise to a culture where politicians and celebrities share information about them or the developments that surround them through a tweet, a Facebook post, or by blogging. This has proved to be faster and effective.

Cyber culture poses threats and problems of its own. I believe that cyber culture comes in the way of building a stable and concrete identity. People often present themselves in a manner that doesn't match reality. This can then lead to a lot of psychological problems like depression, low self-esteem and self-worth. In an attempt to create an illusion of happiness, perfection and an ideal self, people across the globe suffer from a crisis of identity. Individuals feel that they are incompetent and suffer from low self-esteem and confidence.

According to me, social media sets very high standards of beauty, intelligence and popularity. It has exacerbated the issue of body shaming. Men and women feel incompetent if they are not able to maintain a particular body image, which is promoted and appreciated by social media.

Cyber culture has also given rise to a number of crimes. People have been harassed, ridiculed and bullied on the internet. They have been defamed and have been portrayed in the wrong light. Their privacy has been taken for granted. A lot of information leaks and false rumours have been spreading. I believe that cyber culture has, over the years, become a problematic space because of these factors.

There is a constant need to stay active on the internet today. As a member of society, individuals are expected to be active on different social media outlets like Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat. Through the introduction of WhatsApp, Snapchat and Instagram stories, social media has invaded personal space. It has taken control of our lives to such an extent that every aspect of our life is being documented, judged and analysed. Life has become unthinkable without the internet.

I feel that the internet is a very important and vital resource in our life. This medium ought to be used with caution. Cyber culture offers endless opportunities for growth and learning, and this opportunity must be used wisely. One should not get carried away by the bling that this culture offers. At the end of the day, cyber culture is nothing but pseudo-reality.