

September, 2021

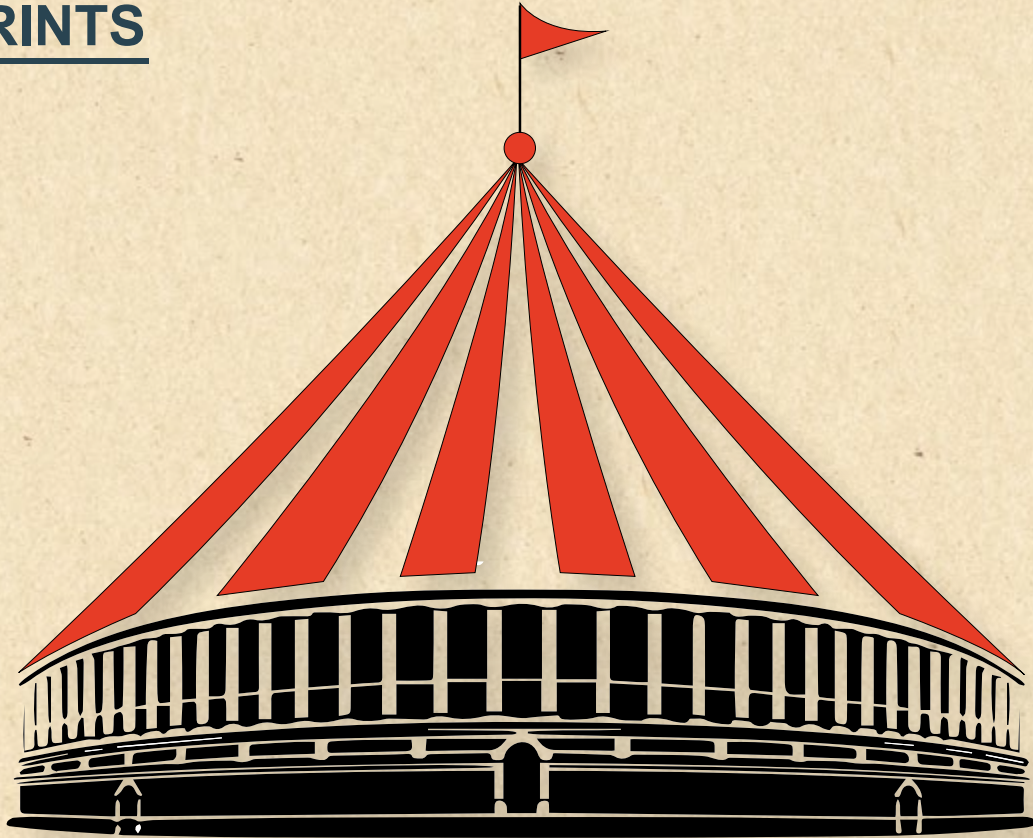
# JIVAN

NEWS AND VIEWS OF JESUITS IN INDIA

## Educating for Depth Discerning for a Hope-Filled Future







## Murder in the Temple (of Democracy)

The Temple of Democracy is the new arena  
It's holy book devoured by the hyena  
Torn to pieces by today's beasts  
Flung at each other in a new battlefield  
  
To be heard one needs to stand on a table  
Voices of millions are not able  
To be heard in a cacophony of the din  
The elected members laugh with a grin  
  
Bills are passed like bill counting machine  
There is no voice to intervene  
They all have forgotten their purpose  
Behaving like Jesters in a circus  
  
This hallowed hall has heard angel voices  
Men and women making the right choices  
Today this great nation has fallen low  
The mockers have one agenda to be narrow.

**Kinley Tshering, SJ**

The author is the in-charge of Bhutan Jesuit  
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## Were I to be elected

Were I to be elected  
And neta would become  
Would I be very different  
From those I hold as scum  
Would I put simple citizens  
On par with wealthy ones  
And care for nature's frailty  
Against commercial huns  
Would I hold firm to common good  
And stand against the tide  
When mobs demand their pound of flesh  
Would justice be my guide  
Many many dreamers  
Make plans that seem so wise  
But only when I pay the price  
A newer world will rise.

**Godfrey D'Lima, SJ**

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# JIVAN

NEWS AND VIEWS OF JESUITS IN INDIA

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As a service of information for the South Asian Jesuit Conference, JIVAN is sent to Jesuits and their colleagues, collaborators and friends. Articles appearing in JIVAN express the views of the authors and not of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia. All material sent for publication may be edited for reasons of space, clarity or policy. Readers are requested to donate generously towards Jesuit ministries.

## Is Death an END?

I am delighted to note that JIVAN has dedicated the month of August 2021 to the great martyr of justice, Fr. Stanislaus Lourduswamy. Almost all the articles in this issue are centred on the person of Fr. Stan and his work. After the arrest of Fr. Stan on 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, there were protests all over the country and even in different parts of the world to release him. Now, after the death of Fr. Stan, are we not going to fight for the other social activists who are unjustly put behind bars? Is his death the end? If this is so, then what is the tribute we are giving to Fr. Stan?

Saul Abhishek, SJ | Thiruvananthapuram

## Our democracy is dragged into the mire

It was an enriching experience for me when I read the article "The pandemic and the big challenges. Are we ready to face it?" in the issue of June-July 2021. It illustrates the challenges faced by the people because of COVID-19. The author has enunciated the responses of the government, Jesuits and others in combating the pandemic. He appeals to emphasize self-evaluation, proper functioning of disaster management units and promotion of spirituality that takes science seriously. We need to forge ahead in challenging the fanaticism and despotism of the government. Our democracy is

dragged into the mire. Let us partake in the democratic protests and fight for the restoration of democracy in our country.

I congratulate Anthony Dias, SJ for the profound and challenging article.

Anson Alex, SJ | Thiruvananthapuram

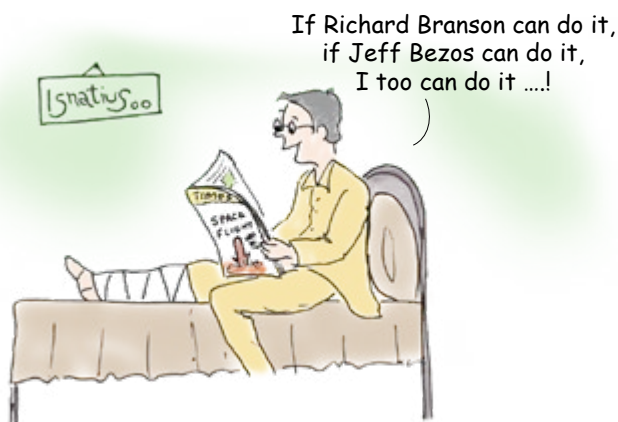
## The eye-catching cover of Stan Swamy issue

My sincere and heartfelt appreciation to the entire JIVAN team for bringing up such a wonderful issue "Johar Stan" in the August (2021) issue. The cover page drew my special attention, the fallen sipper, the bird with musical notes, the counting of days on the wall... everything portrayed the life of Fr. Stan in the jail. The whole issue was dedicated to Fr. Stan and democracy in India. I like JIVAN because it reveals the facts. All the articles touched various dimensions of Fr. Stan's life. Fr. Stan has lit the fire within us and showed us the way. Reading the articles I was reflecting upon how the 84 years-old man survived in the jail, how he might have gone to bed in hunger, how he might have felt alone. Let us keep up the spirit of Fr. Stan and continue to fight on behalf of the weak and the vulnerable. As Fr. Stan said, "Paying the price is part of the game".

Wilson Thumma, SJ | Thiruvananthapuram

## JESWITS

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I love this online manifestation of conscience  
- keeps safe distance from the provincial!!!







## POSA Speaks

STANY D'SOUZA, SJ

### Dare to be on the move

The 12<sup>th</sup> century poet-saint of Karnataka, Basavanna, in his popular Kannada poem says: “The rich will make temples for Siva. What shall I, a poor man, do? My legs are pillars, the body the shrine, the head a cupola of gold. Listen, O Lord of the meeting rivers, things standing shall fall, but the moving ever shall stay.”

The resourceful rich indeed want to construct temples, both to please God and to flaunt their wealth. But the deprived poor can only strive to become the living temples. The great spiritual then goes even further to aver that anything static, human or even a temple, is prone to eventually falling into ruin, but the moving, the wandering monk will attain immortality.

This emphasis on movement, dynamism and creativity is very much Ignatian. It resonates with the call for detachment and apostolic availability that Ignatius the pilgrim has proposed, and is well represented in a famous statue of St Ignatius, with ‘one leg in the air’, indicating the pilgrim’s readiness to move at a moment’s notice. Even the Society of Jesus he founded, was originally a group of mobile men. The professed fathers made an explicit vow to the Pope to go wherever His Holiness would order. However, the contextual discernment and the consequent choice of education as one of the ministries brought a certain stability to the Society. Stability can be dangerous. Hence, Fr General, in this Ignatian Year, has invited the Society to go through a process of conversion by re-discovering, re-interpreting and re-living our original charism.

In fact, mobility has also been the regular refrain of Pope Francis. While addressing the major superiors of religious congregations, he said: “You must truly be witnesses of a different way of doing and of acting... Radicalism is expected of all Christians but the religious are called to follow the Lord in a special manner... Consecrated life is a prophecy. God asks us to leave the nest that holds us and to go out to the frontiers of the world...”

This radicalism of the Gospel and of the Ignatian charism was so clearly exemplified by Fr Stan Swamy who even paid the ultimate price for it. Stan was critical of anything institutional. Even when he was bound to an institution like ISI Bengaluru, he went to work for the bonded labourers of Bengaluru, and Dalits of Tamil Nadu. But when he completed his long tenure of training social activists at ISI, Bengaluru, he went straight to the place which he was advocating to his trainees, the place of the tribals. He lived with them and developed a movement model. Stan dared to be on the move.

‘Moving’ is a grace. It is Ignatian. Therefore, when we initiate a process of conversion within and around, and discern to continue the legacy of Stan these days, we need to be aware of our tendencies to be static. Hence let us fervently pray for it and consciously make efforts to grow in it, so that we will always be Jesuits, after the heart of Ignatius.



## Editor's Desk

VINAYAK JADAV, SJ

### Will we allow our Democracy to collapse?

In January this year the United States Capitol was attacked and vandalized by supporters of the outgoing President, who claimed that the election was “being stolen” from him.

In India’s Parliament, its temple of democracy, unruly scenes ensued when the government refused to discuss the Pegasus spyware it was using to snoop upon its own people. No account was taken of the enormous time and money wasted in such in-fighting between parties.

These are not isolated instances. The common people are largely at the receiving end in democracies, which ironically are supposed to be the “rule of the demos, the people.”

The old saying puts it well: “When two elephants fight, it’s the grass beneath which gets crushed.”

September 15<sup>th</sup> is the International Day of Democracy. An occasion for us all to take serious note of the democratic environment around us, and see how the space for the common people to express their views has drastically shrunk.

Look also at the various arbitrary actions taken by governments without consultation or parliamentary permission – random military strikes, hiking fuel prices, raising taxes, increasing unemployment, auctioning off roads, airports and railways to their cronies. As always, the common people suffer the most.

So whether it’s the lockdowns of Corona or the burning of Amazon forests, the ultimate brunt is borne by the masses, especially by the poor and the voiceless, that is, dalits, adivasis and women. The countless refugees and migrants are a fallout of the messing up of our democracy. The mega projects of development make a mockery of the poor.

This is because money is the ringmaster in the circus, as democracies slowly turn into oligarchies, or plutocracies, firmly under corporate control. It’s the oil companies and the arms manufacturers who connive with the lawmakers to make the important decisions.

Even worse, the upsurge of populism has become the latest threat to democracy. Look, for example, at the rise of populist leaders, dictatorial strongmen, who in the words of Daniel Ziblatt, American scholar, “come to power on behalf of the people, but remain in power, oppressing those very people who voted them in.”

At one time, Gandhian concepts like ‘antyodaya’ (welfare of the least) and ‘sarvodaya’ (welfare of all) were the left and the right lungs of a healthy and sustainable democracy. But who talks of them today?

We are called to move from a representative democracy to one which seeks the largest participation, like panchayati raj, or the “right to information”. But notice how both are being sabotaged.

But not just in the nation, in the Church as well, where Pope Francis has stressed the need for “synodality”. His express wish is to involve as many people as possible in the processes of decision-making. Just see how he’s is being ridiculed and opposed.

We are left with a final question: what can we, the people, do about our threatened democratic environment?

Stan Swamy refused to be a mere silent spectator, and paid the price. But just see the numerous people he has inspired. What about us? Where do we stand?



# EDUCATING FOR DEPTH

## DISCERNING FOR A HOPE-FILLED FUTURE



Photo Courtesy: Fr. Don Doll, SJ/Mr. Kyle D'Souza

### The Context of Superficiality

Every context provides a text for life. Today's context of education prescribes a text of life based on superficiality and obsession with material comfort. In the world of superficiality, learning is seen as knowledge transfer, from books to memory, from teacher to student. Assessment of learning measures the quantity of retention of memory. Cut-and-paste by googling, makes any information

distanced from any influence in the learner's life and behaviour. Most of the times, it has come to stay that you go to school to get a degree, and with that degree, get a job. This job orientation of learning makes every person a money-maker, an ATM machine. Only earners, not real learners.

Learners remain knowledge banks, only to be sold in the market. More sharply, Rabindranath Tagore, the great



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Indian poet and Nobel Laureate, said that the moral man, the complete man, is giving way to make a commercial man, the man of limited purpose. That has resulted in the loss of man's moral balance, obscuring the human side of a student under the shadow of soulless organization. He says that education trains to pursue the possessions that protect, please, and comfort us—what he called our material “covering.” Education produces mediocre and superficial men and women who are only employees for commerce. The Indian system of education is programmed to produce only employees who remain subservient to masters who focus on profit. It is a residue of the colonial system that wanted slaves to the colonisers. Students are raw materials that are shaped to serve a particular need, human beings are objectified and the subject-hood is diminished greatly. As a result, the soul of the human being is lost. We need a system and an approach to educate for depth.

## The Need for Deep Learning

There are two types of knowledge: *Declarative knowledge and Procedural Knowledge*. The declarative knowledge is a knowledge of facts and concepts that can be stated or explained. It is about “knowing what.” You have the ability to name the parts of the human body, describe the characteristics of the social structure of a group. The procedural knowledge, involves not only knowing how, but also knowing when to apply various procedures, methods, theories, styles, or approaches. The ability to calculate integrals, draw with 3-D perspectives, and calibrate lab equipment. It is also the knowledge of when these skills are and are not applicable. The students in the system we have now, gives students who can often perform tasks without being able to articulate a clear understanding of what they are doing or why. More importantly, the students do not have the real understanding of their self-identity and the context they live in. They are alienated from themselves and their society they live in. These students will work in IT companies in North America, but that work would in no way be related to who they are and what are their real aspirations. Their work involve only their cerebral skills and capabilities.

Learning must move from superficiality to deep learning. Deep learning promotes complex understanding and meaning rather than focusing on the learning of superficial knowledge, gleaned through search engines. It prepares them to be curious, continuous, independent learners as well as thoughtful, productive, active citizens in a democratic society. Deep Learning requires material to be digested in the search for meaning. Surface Learning employs the least amount of effort to engage with materials and to attain the learning goals. Achievement learning focuses on activities that will yield the highest grade.

Deep Learning develops qualities of working collaboratively and communicating effectively; having an academic mindset, and being empowered through self-directed learning. The depth gained by deep learning lies in cultivating moral capabilities by students in Jesuit

schools and colleges to discern choices in the lives that make just, happy, and peaceful societies. For life hinges upon the choices we make, and the decisions we take.

I argue a case for an approach to education that produces moral agents of change who make the right choices. That I call educating for depth. These agents go out into the world to make a difference in the lives of people. To do this, what a student becomes after years of learning must be the question, not what a student knows in terms of knowledge and information. By learning, a student should uncover innate capabilities and cultivate other capabilities.

## Capabilities for Depth

Educating for depth involves attempts to cultivate three capabilities: *a) rational capabilities (thinking critically), b) emotional capabilities (emotional maturity), c) moral capabilities (making proper choices)*. Learning to become a moral agent involves three capabilities, rational, emotional and moral. The present system of education addresses only the rational capabilities that focus only on knowledge and information. The outcome is production of students who are intellectually giants and emotionally pygmies. A student should develop emotional capabilities. A student by deep learning becomes aware of her emotions and must know how to handle them, and learn to understand other emotions, which we call emotional intelligence. The intellectual depth and emotional maturity should lead a student to be morally competent to make a proper choice in life, choosing the good when the good and evil are placed in front of her. This choice makes a better society.

The depth in learning makes a student intellectually sharp, emotionally mature and morally sound. The educating for depth fundamentally lies in the third capability: moral capability. A learned person is measured by her moral capability by which she is able to make a discerned choice that demonstrates the cardinal virtues of goodness, truth, and beauty. God puts in front of us every day a choice between life and death, and good and evil. A student in her education through unfettered inquiry and debate, should become capable of learning to choose the life, and choose the good. The learning must make her become aware that quality of life and wellbeing of a society are determined by moral choices that she makes every day. The evils we face today, she should realise, are the result of wrong choices. In the process of education, a student must be guided to realise that what we face in society in the form of environmental degradation, fundamentalism, corruption, and militant majoritarianism is the result of our choosing to side with greed and power, the wrong choices. It is the failure of making the right choices. The fault lies more in the education system.

## The Ignatian Depth

The Ignatian perspective of education explains this well. The ability to discern a good and true way of life should be the outcome of education.

John O'Malley says that St Ignatius chose to focus on forming the character of students by using renaissance humanism. He did not follow the university system that was speculative. He sided with the great Renaissance educators like Vittorino da Feltre and Guarino da Verona. The goal of university education is to search for truth, absolute truth. The problem at that time was "how to reconcile Christian truth, that is, the Bible, with pagan scientific (or "philosophical") truth, that is, Aristotle. Great theologians like Aquinas believed they had achieved a genuine reconciliation, which meant recognizing the limitations and errors of "philosophy" in relationship to Revelation."

The humanistic schools that St Ignatius chose was not about ancient scientific texts but about literature, poetry and drama, so-called *studia humanitatis*. Poetry, drama, oratory, and history were taught with a view, John O'Malley says, to "render the student a better human being, imbued especially as an ideal of service to the common good, in imitation of the great heroes of antiquity—an ideal certainly befitting the Christian." This schooling went beyond the pursuit of abstract truth, which is what we now in the universities follow and focus on the character formation. It led the students to journey into the recesses of the heart and get in touch with the impulse of interiority. Inner motivations, interior movements and intentions of human beings matter the most in the humanist schools.

This impulse was born out of the early life and conversion of St Ignatius. And it was a counter culture to the culture of elitism of the sixteenth century, highly abstract arithmetic and vague rituals. This, St Ignatius felt, did not give peace of soul and he wanted the Jesuits to have a more deeply interiorized sense of purpose. The impulse to interiority was implemented in their teaching of catechism to adults and children, which we could say was the early mission of education of Jesuits. More sharply, impulse of interiority leads one to any missionary impulse, for any lay collaborators it would guide their work life. Life is formed by interiority that determines mission. Educating for depth lies in this impulse of interiority. The interiority of depth facilitates a better understanding of warring influences of good and bad thoughts, in which a student learns to differentiate between the good and the bad, and finally chooses the good thoughts to lead a life. Following

St Ignatius' both in the *Spiritual Exercises* and *Rules for Discernment of Spirits*, gradually a student should be guided to recognize the difference between stirrings, one from the devil, the other from God.

*The Spiritual Exercises* help one to make a choice between Two Standards. Choosing the standard of Christ makes a person join His company. Transformed by the passion of Christ, one is asked to choose the third degree of humility, and prefer poverty to riches. It is this nature of choice that defines someone Ignatian. Making the right choice is not an easy act. It requires all the three capabilities: intellectual/

rational, emotional, and moral. All the three capabilities provide the depth to the learning process and method of Jesuit education. It is a depth of interiority, in the recesses of one's heart that one makes the right choice<sup>1</sup> and the quality of learning is tightly bound to the moral choices one makes. In this depth, one is called to become aware of oneself, listen to inner movements and orientations, and integrate her choices with the common good of the society in which she lives, especially those most in need and the marginalised.

The real purpose of Jesuit education is transformation of the world, every student who leaves the portals of the Jesuit institutions, must make a decision to serve the least to transform the world. Pedro Ribadeneira explained it well to King Philip II of Spain, by saying *institutio puerorum, reformatio*

*mundi*: every Jesuit school must improve the world. You cannot achieve the intended transformation by a pursuit of speculative or abstract truth or by producing earners, but only by educating men and women who are formed and skilled in moral competencies that would make them decide to choose good over evil and life over death. We need moral agents today, not financial agents formed from our institutions.

Learning to become a moral agent who makes the right choice in life by which she becomes able, capable, employable and noble. This is what educating for depth is. Do we do this? If not, when will we?

“

Learning to become a moral agent who makes the right choice in life by which she becomes able, capable, employable and noble. This is what educating for depth is.

”

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<sup>1</sup>Father Adolfo Nicolás, "Letter on Intellectual Formation", *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*, Vol.XXV (2014): 926.





# The Jesuit Principal

The task of a Jesuit Principal is monumental because he has to ensure the integral formation of the students under his care. He has to see that the institution is functioning according to the Ignatian vision of education. St. Ignatius' vision of education consists in "the total and integral liberation of man, leading to participation in the life of God Himself." Peter Hans Kolvenbach, former General of the Society of Jesus, further clarified St. Ignatius' vision of Jesuit education in thus: "Our ideal is a well-rounded person who is intellectually competent, open to growth, religious, loving and committed to doing justice in generous service to the people of God." The Jesuit Principal, therefore, has to ensure the development of the moral, spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional, civic, cultural and aesthetical potential of the students to the maximum.

According to Fr. Kolvenbach, "The only *raison d'être* of Christian institutions, and therefore Jesuit institutions, is evangelization understood in its broadest and richest sense... namely, building up human communities of love, fellowship, freedom, justice and harmony. This is true service of the kingdom and authentic evangelization." So Jesuit education should concentrate on the life-oriented integral formation of students that will enable them to develop their God-given potentials to the maximum, and grow into persons who are intellectually well-trained, with the right moral values and principles, committed to justice, socially service-minded and sociable, spiritually inspired and personally mature, loving and open to life-long growth. A Principal has to ensure this all-round integral development of all those under his care.

Jesuit education should instil in the students worthwhile habits of mind and will such as systematic hard work, accurate observation, good concentration, excellent planning, unwavering perseverance, an optimistic and mature outlook, and genuine human values. It will foster in the students creative and critical thinking, human relationships and values, self-esteem and self-confidence. Sri Rajagopalachari wrote in *Swarajya*, "A great revolution must be set afoot if we desire to save this nation from decaying and perishing. The great Gandhian achievement will disappear from history if we do not bring about a moral revolution that will restore old values and simple life that will reduce the pernicious influence of the need for making money somehow." Moral and ethical values are a must for the smooth functioning of any human society and Jesuit education should not fail to instil these in the students.



Photo: ST. JOSEPH COLLEGE OF COMMERCE

Schools and colleges should go out of their way to stress the importance of character formation and value education. John Wooden says, "Ability may take you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there." In the words of Albert Einstein, "It is essential that the student acquires an understanding of and a lovely feeling for values. He must acquire a vivid sense of the beautiful and the morally good. Otherwise, with specialized knowledge, he resembles more closely a well-trained dog than a harmoniously developed person." Jackson Davis says, "Truthfulness is the cornerstone of character, and if it is not firmly laid in youth, there will ever after be a weak spot in the foundation."

If the above-mentioned goals of Jesuit education are to be achieved, discipline is a must. Discipline means training children to proper, orderly and acceptable behaviour. It is not the absence of noise and movement. It is self-regulated or self-controlled conduct for the sake of achieving success, happiness and progress. It comes from within the individual and not imposed from outside. If you want to make your life happy and successful, you should be your own master; you should possess self-control and self-discipline. Discipline is based on the principle of right and wrong, not on authority and obedience. If it is not based on the principle of right and wrong, it will produce antagonism, defiance, resentment and a rebellious attitude and behaviour. Besides, it will make children deceitful and cunning.

Love, not the threat of punishment, is the proper instrument for teaching children good behaviour and self-discipline. As a rule, physical punishment is not to be used. Teenagers should never be subjected to corporal punishment. If it is things will get worse. Teenagers need love and understanding more than others.

The health and atmosphere of the school or college depends on the Principal. Values and principles are absorbed and assimilated through osmosis from the prevailing environment of the school or college. In this context, a Principal's role becomes vital as he is responsible for creating such an environment. A capable Principal with strong leadership qualities will create the conditions that will bring out the best in the students, teachers and parents. Everything depends on the Principal.

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# The Mindful Education

Let me note a few remarks on Jesuit education. It is mostly on Tamilnadu Jesuit education—though it can apply to all of India—and it is not about all grades of education, only about the University college education. Many of the Jesuit colleges have got the status of autonomy but still the Government or the University pays the salaries of the teachers. This is a constraint; still there is also freedom in running the education programmes in autonomous colleges.

In the time of St. Ignatius - the founder of the Society of Jesus - in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, education was poor and haphazard. Only the rich had some sort of tolerable education. The Jesuits began education for all, and their education focused on the humanities and the classical languages. It was a great advance for the times.

When the Jesuit missionaries came to India, they began educating the poor, the lower, outcastes, and women too. They had to face great opposition from the higher castes and the rich. The Jesuit education in those days was focused on literacy and job skills, and English language education, which were needed most at that time for the poor. Along with the Jesuits, foreign nuns came, and they started hospitals and nursing courses for women. They too had to face severe opposition from the higher castes.

Nowadays the Jesuit education is no different from other higher education institutions. But the Jesuit colleges and institutions have become rather business institutions like most others in the country. They teach the usual conventional subjects as any other educational institutions. Indian institutions have become well-established and with high competence in secular education, and often superior to the Jesuit institutions.

In the USA, there is a movement to incorporate classical and humanistic education in the Jesuit institutions. There are also in many USA schools, mindfulness courses becoming part of the curriculum. But our Jesuit colleges are mired in educating the students in skills, information, and in preparing them for the job market. Such matters any schools and colleges can do. Are the Jesuit educators educating the students primarily for the capitalistic, competitive world? What about mindful awareness training, ethical questions, questions about sex/gender/unhealthy patriarchy/casteism, religious and spiritual formation, interreligious dialogue, counter-cultural humanistic education? I have written on these matters a few times.

Matthew Walz has written in the Jesuit Magazine *America* (February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020) on the need of classical education in the Jesuit institutions:

“Simply put, conventional education is flat; it has become two-dimensional. Conventional education attempts, on the one hand, to transfer (perhaps “download”?) information to students for the sake of passing tests and, on the other, to produce skills in students for the sake of getting a job. Such activities are not humane—nor, it turns out, even very human.



Courtesy: Indira National School

“What is information, after all? What are skills? Information is mere truth, naked truth— which usually means the ugly truth. Along similar lines, skills are mere arts, naked arts— which usually means tedious arts. Skills are arts bereft of virtue because they have been separated from the discipline of contemplation”.

## Walz remarks on the classical education:

“By contrast, classical education enables students and teachers to garner information and skills within their proper and elevating contexts. Students and teachers alike, as human beings, are called to seek beauty - clothed truth that calls them to goodness and to develop virtue-infused arts that grow out of contemplation.

It is no wonder, then, that students and teachers alike respond to the high calling of classical education. It fans that divine spark within each of us, that potent image of God stamped deeply in our souls. Teachers know, at least implicitly, that students are called to something greater than merely passing standardized tests and finding a place in the workaday world. Students themselves also know, at least implicitly, that they are called to something greater.



And so when the students whom teachers are blessed to teach, ask for bread, teachers ought not to give them stones; they ought, rather, to give them real, wholesome bread. And when students ask teachers for a fish, they ought not to give them a snake; they ought, rather, to give them real fish”.

### **Let me mention some vital questions and subjects:**

Mindfulness and awareness practices should be integrated in our education. This does not mean that the usual subject matters should be neglected. There are hours provided for ethics and religious classes. These usually become stereotypical preaching. Mindfulness and

and judgment of truth, beauty, wonder, value and love.

India is riven with religious conflicts. Our education should be formation in inter-religious understanding and valuation. For this, theory alone is not enough. The students have to learn to listen to each other of different religions or of no religion; have to go on pilgrimage to visit and venerate different holy places. Learn, above all, to appreciate the basic humanness of each other.

Our students have to become aware of the fragility and precariousness of our earth's environment and how to protect and nurture the environment. For this, they have to visit villages or even towns, and get involved in hands-on work in cleaning, farming, helping the people in hygiene and so on.



When the students whom teachers are blessed to teach, ask for bread, teachers ought not to give them stones; they ought, rather, to give them real, wholesome bread. And when students ask teachers for a fish, they ought not to give them a snake; they ought, rather, to give them real fish. ”

awareness can be given periods for practice, and each section of the students can be introduced to this training. It will be not merely awareness and mindfulness; it will be awareness of one's body, emotions, fantasies and thoughts. Further, it will be also becoming conscious of one's overall ideas and prejudices.

When one becomes aware and conscious, one has to open oneself to deeper questions: what are one's experiences and what emotions move one; how one interprets the experiences and emotions; what is the truth or falsehood of these interpretations -- particularly with emotions, one has to reinterpret and re-evaluate them; and what actions one has to take when the judgment of truth is affirmed. This is in brief Bernard Lonergan's basic four-fold scheme for the truth-question. The students' heart and mind have to be opened to the basic life-questions. Such a quest for truth is fundamental, and without this there is no genuine education (See Tad Dunne, *Lonergan and Spirituality*. See also *You Are Not Your Brain*, by Schwartz and Gladding). Our education system is primarily of one of theory, information, memorization and knowledge. This is not education proper. In this, there is no discernment

The students have to be helped, in terms of Lonergan's questions, to become aware of one's attitudes to body, sex, gender, health; and the prejudices of one's society and of caste; further, to inquire and question the country's policies and programmes; and on our attitudes - how we treat our aged, the poor, the unborn and the refugees.

The American Jesuits are called to go back to classical education. Can we also not focus on our own as well as international, world literature and classics? Such literature and classics will educate our students in humanity in terms of breadth and depth.

Our education system is job-oriented; and tests and grades become the signs of success in this education system. Is this the education we want to give? Even our poor students should not

be deprived of genuine education to truth and beauty. But our goal has become mass education. This is a false orientation. Mass education, commercial education system, and rags-to-riches glorification of education are not any more Jesuit education. The major problem will be that our colleges have only a handful of Jesuits. Even these Jesuits are not educated in the above forms of genuine education and culture. The lay staff also will not be easily trained to such an education. But are we condemned to repeat the patterns of stultifying status quo and become blind servants of the capitalistic markets? Where is our spirituality, ethics and religiousness in our work? Is this our apostolate, just teaching English, or physics and such? Have we become servants of the mammon of success in the world?

Jesus proclaimed, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the Good News!”- (*Mk.1:15*).

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# Covid Beckons New Teaching Perspectives

*"Everyone who remembers his own education, remembers teachers, not methods or techniques. The teacher is the heart of the education system."* - Sidney Hook.

The nostalgic memories of school days are associated with our beloved teachers. It is not the content or the knowledge they disseminate. Teachers are the heart and integral part of the education system. The Covid-19 pandemic has created a lot of challenges in the education system all over. The SSC / HSC results of the State Boards as well as the CBSE / ICSE boast of a record high number of successful students. The end product in our institutions is not marks and intelligence alone, rather, it is a familiarity with God and ability to become a person for others.

In most of our institutions we have well qualified members of the staff and lay collaborators. In the past while recruiting the teaching staff, we merely scrutinised the external factors. But these external factors are not enough. Today during the pandemic times, our teachers are required to renew their teaching perspectives. The following characteristics are recommended for our institutions.

## Spirituality and Discernment:

*The Ratio Studiorum, the Characteristics of Jesuit Education, the Ignatian Pedagogical paradigm, and the Jesuit Schools – Living Tradition in the 21st Century, suggest unequivocally that our educational institutions are a sacred space. They are at par with our chapels, churches or the Cathedrals where we offer our religious prayers and the holy Eucharist. The IPP says, "Applying the Ignatian Paradigm to the teacher-learner relationships in Jesuit education, it is the teacher's primary role to facilitate the growing relationship of the learner with Truth (God), particularly in the matter of the subject being studied under the guiding influence of the teacher."* (IPP, no. 27)

Our teachers need to be discerning persons, constantly getting in touch with their inner selves, to discover more what God wants them to convey. It is only then; they will be able to transform our students. Our students make several choices in life, be it their career options, job selection or their future orientation in life. A spiritual discerning process will equip them with these skills.

## Strive towards Peace and Reconciliation:

Our teachers are proficient in their subject matter, but the judicious blend to strive towards Peace and Reconciliation is necessary. Here is where the IPP element "Experience"

comes into play. For instance, the case of Fr. Stan Swamy and his commitment to the poor Tribals, has to be occasionally spoken in the class, and even a conversation with the students will enable meaningful assimilation of content.

The Constitutions of our country is a wonderful document enshrined in the Gospel values of peace, justice, equality and fraternity. Our collaborators have to familiarize the Constitutions to be in a position to speak about it and influence our young students in becoming aware of the injustices and prejudices of the oppressive structures. We need today dynamic, courageous and fearless collaborators.

## Computer-Savvy, Promoters of Creativity and Research:

Our youth today, are yearning for teaching methodology which is more graphic, pictorial, informative and well researched. Students appreciate creative presentation, challenging assignments and interactive sessions. The teacher today has to be better informed and offer apt reference material along with links and google sites to improve their performance. The youth possess immense talent in the digital technology. How can we involve our students in the teaching - learning process? The teacher has to be a humble facilitator. This is the paradigm shift for the better!

## Proficiency and Promoter of the Covid protocols and SOP's:

Our teachers have to be acquainted with 'The Standard Operating Procedures' (SOP's). This is a dire need of the hour. The care of the students is of paramount importance. Appropriate Covid Behavioural Protocol have to be mastered and effectively administered. They have to cater to the students who are stressed, afraid and traumatised. Counselling skills has to be offered to our students and accompany them emotionally.

The Jesuit Universal Apostolic Preferences urges us to be vigilant for the signs of the times, renew our apostolates and make them relevant today. Let us begin with education, and hopefully it will inspire others too!

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# Protecting our Educational Rights

The National Education Policy (NEP)–2020, was released by the Central Government on 29<sup>th</sup> July with the cabinet's approval. We immediately plunged into action and formed the National Federation for the Protection of Educational Rights (*Kalvi Urimai Padhukappu Thesiya Kootamaippu*) on 5<sup>th</sup> August, to aptly reflect, respond and implement action plans towards the declared NEP. Jesuits in Madurai and Chennai provinces played a vital role in the formation of this federation. Educationists, NGOs, social activists, leaders of peoples' movements TN-CRI, TANCEAN (Tamil Nadu Catholic Educational Association), Muslim organizations, students' leaders, interested individuals etc., are part of this group. This is completely apolitical. It gets the cooperation and collaboration of the political parties as and when required.

## Some concerns and contentious issues in NEP-2020:

Let us not be hoodwinked by the fantastic introduction to education, its vision and mission in NEP-2020, found in the first chapter and introduction to the subsequent chapters. The following are some of the concerns and contentious areas and issues in NEP – 2020.

1. Though education is in the concurrent list, NEP aims towards centralizing education through the National Education Commission (*Rashtrya Shisha Ayog*), introduction of the Indian Education Service (IES) in bureaucracy, and centralized curriculum by NCERT. States are reduced only to be executors.
2. Starting regular and formal schooling from 3 years onwards will be too early for children to cope with the pressure of regular education.
3. School complexes/clusters, against the concept of neighbourhood schools proposed by the Kothari commission, will hamper the education of the rural poor, especially girls.
4. Untrained volunteers to teach in regular schools, will pave the way for RSS cadets to enter the schools to brainwash young minds towards the right wing Hindutva ideology.
5. While RTE-2009 mandates no year-end exam till the 8<sup>th</sup> standard, state school exams in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> standards in NEP, will be against the interest of children. This will push them out from regular education. Strengthening CCE (Comprehensive Continuous Evaluation) is what we demand for the evaluation process.
6. Vocationalization of education from VI to VIII standards will stealthily bring back the caste-based employment structure (varnashrama dharma), and affirm the hierarchy of labour and caste system. Exposure to

skills training at the early stage, will definitely be a distraction to the young minds.

7. Promoting privatization of education will result only in uncontrolled exploitation and profiteering. Free and state funded education with incentives should be mandatory in a welfare and democratic country like India. That India does not have resources for public education is a blatant lie. Even poor countries like Sri Lanka have only public education. 110 countries in the world promote only public education.
8. Three-language formula from the III to V standards, will be an extra burden for the students. This will indirectly lead to the imposition of Hindi, and through this, Sanskrit and its hegemonic culture.
9. Multiple Pathways: The 'multiple pathways' is against RTE, which ensures all students access to a physical school.
10. Merit-based scholarship and no reservation in education and employment, are against social justice and equity. This will deny education to the vast majority of the underprivileged.
11. NEET for all higher education courses will hinder the poor from pursuing higher education. Only the rich and affluent who have recourse to exorbitant fee-charging coaching centres will have opportunities for higher education. If only a pass is required from the XII standard, what is the relevance of 15 years of school education for higher education?
12. NEP several times mentions the development of critical thinking skills. These skills are not developed in the vacuum but by analysing our current social structures, the discrimination and the exploitation, etc. Critical thinking will not develop if we do not encourage different perspectives, analyse hate speeches, and analyse incidents of human rights violations and intolerance.
13. Not acknowledging the valuable contribution of minorities towards education in NEP is strongly condemnable. Though Catholics constitute only 1.6% in India, they run about 30,000 educational institutions especially in the rural areas - serving the poor and the neglected.

In conclusion, I would like to state very strongly, that the TN model of organization and protest, should impel and inspire Jesuits of other Provinces to plunge into action, protect our educational rights and thus promote the education of the poor and underprivileged.

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# SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

An 86-page book titled *'It's High Time: Women Religious Speak Up on Gender Justice in the Indian Church'* is set to create a storm in the Indian Church.

The document is a report of a survey that was commissioned in 2018 by the Women's Section of the Conference of Religious India in response to an article in the Vatican's *L'Osservatore Romano*, that exposed the servitude of nuns who cook, clean, and do the laundry of cardinals and bishops, working for unjust hours and wages.

Although only 25% of the Major Superiors who were sent the questionnaire responded, the data provides a good starting point for understanding the problems faced by Sisters in the Indian context.

According to Hazel D'Lima DHM, who led the team that analysed the results, unlike what was reported from Rome, in India "few Sisters have full-time work as sacristans or housekeepers in Church institutions. Most have part-time or full-time pastoral work." However, when it comes to salaries and working conditions, in India too, with few exceptions, service is reduced to servitude.

Topping the Sisters' list of concerns is the lack of respect shown to them by priests, manifested in various forms of harassment. Verbal abuse is the most common. "They make use of the pulpit to negatively criticise, humiliate and belittle the Sisters in front of the faithful." And the reasons? Dissatisfaction with regard to sacristy work and other collaborative activities; jealousy when parishioners appreciate the service of the Sisters; anger at being denied admission to a particular institution. Some Sisters also called out the "dirty jokes, poking fun at Sisters."

Surprisingly, the study is almost silent about clergy sexual abuse. Only 3 respondents alluded to it. This is probably because it is not easy to talk of clergy sexual abuse. Noella de Souza MCJ, a member of the survey team, further points out that the results may have been different if the questionnaire had been sent to all Sisters, instead of only the major superiors.

What does come out strongly is the pain and anger at being subjected to sacramental blackmail. Usually spoken about in closed-door meetings, there is now a written record. Something as trivial as not covering one's head can be cause for priests to refuse to celebrate the Eucharist in the convent, or prevent Sisters from attending Mass in the parish, or deny them Communion at the Sunday Mass. Such sacrilegious behaviour often goes unpunished.

Property disputes are another bone of contention. Bishops and clergy seem to have the power to interfere, control and dispose of land in the possession of women religious even though internal agreements and official documents exist in favour of the women. Imprisoned by their conditioning which keeps them subservient to the 'men of God', the Sisters rarely opt for legal action.

At the heart of the study, permeating every aspect, is fear. When some bishops displayed their disapproval of the study, there was hesitation among the major superiors. If they should participate, what would be the consequences? It is probably one of the reasons why there were only 121 respondents, despite over 400 questionnaires going out. When the manuscript was ready for publication, once again this fear of the bishops prevented the CRI Executive Committee from giving its consent, and the book might never have seen the light of day if D'Lima and de Souza had not forged ahead.

Fear of inviting the wrath of the bishops and priests on whom they are dependent, has also prevented the Sisters from opposing abuse and exploitation. The tragedy is that Sisters who have the courage to challenge the status quo, often do not get the support of their seniors who would prefer to appease the clergy and perpetuate the culture of silence and submission. As the respondents acknowledge, much needs to be done about the formation of Sisters. Conscientization about Gender Equality; training in legal and human rights; studying feminist theology and learning about emerging trends in religious life, must find a place.

It takes two hands to clap however, and the study recommends that the formation of seminarians too needs to be revamped, to break patriarchal biases and foster respect for women as equals. Priests need to understand "that they are not in competition with women religious for power" but that both are working for a common mission, to promote the 'Kin-dom of God'. Greater interaction with Sisters, including joint exposure programmes, is recommended, and a plea is made to respect the different charisms of Congregations. More women on the faculty of seminaries would also help to break gender stereotypes and hierarchies.

Indian women religious have spoken. Is anyone listening?

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# Women in Islamic Religious Thinking

Photo: Muslim

**T**he cover story in the March 2020 issue of *Jivan* entitled 'Will Women's Struggle for Dignity Ever End?' by Professor Shalini, focusing on the place of women in Christian faith and practice, made an interesting read. As a sequel to her essay, I thought of writing one on women in Islamic religious thinking. As a student of the history and theology of Christian-Muslim relations, I am aware of Muslim theologians engaging with many basic questions vis-à-vis women and their status in Islam. Moreover, Christian brothers and sisters often ask me about the place of women in Islam, often with the issue of 'triple talaq' at the back of their minds!

Often, Muslim religious teachers, especially in the rural places, whom we meet in mosques, tell us that women are created of and for men and claim that God made men superior to women and hence women are defective in reason and faith. These men associate femininity overwhelmingly with the concept of fitna (socio-moral chaos) and hence in constant need of very tight control. In contrast, masculinity is constructed in relation to man's ghira (unreasonable levels of sexual honor and jealousy).

Neo-traditionalist Islamic discourses presuppose radical differences in gender roles and norms that are premised on artificial binaries such as associating men with religious authority, reason-based discourse and political and public engagement, and linking women with sexuality, domesticity, emotionality and nearly exclusive preoccupation with matters pertaining to the private domain of human existence.

I am fortunate to have continual interaction with the Australia-based Professor Adis Duderija, one of the leading experts of gender-sensitive interpretations of Islam. In one of our conversations, he underlined the urgent need to develop an Islamic ethical and legal theory which is ever responsive to the contextually sensitive realities in which Muslim women (and men) find themselves, so that gender-based inequalities are not structurally disadvantageous to any of the sexes on the basis of a particular interpretation of Islamic teachings.

Duderija clarifies that gender-egalitarian interpretations of the Qur'an for generating gender-justice and gender-symmetrical formulations of legal rights for Muslim women must come from within the Islamic interpretational and methodological framework. He advocates systematically deriving and justifying these rights on the basis of a particular conceptualization and interpretation of the Qur'an.

Duderija points out that some Muslim reformist scholars from the 19th and 20th centuries such as T. Haddad (d. 1935), Q. Amin (d.1908), and M. Abduh (d.1905) advocated gender equality affirmative interpretations of Islam. However, their efforts in this regard were relatively isolated and were theoretically significantly less robust than the efforts of the proponents of contemporary gender-egalitarian interpretations of Islam.

Coming to the issue of the interpretation of the Qur'an, Duderija highlights several interpretational methods. Here we briefly mention one such method: the interpreter-centred interpretational approach. According to Duderija, this approach is based on the idea that the meaning of a text is significantly influenced or determined by the prior self-positioning of the reader/interpreter herself/himself (in contrast to that of the text or the author). The interpreter does not simply retrieve the meaning of the text but plays an important part in creating meaning.

In this approach, the role of the interpreter in arriving at the meaning of texts is central. In this regard Duderija points out how classical Muslim exegetes such as al-Zamakhshari incorporated many elements of their patriarchal beliefs and worldview into their exegesis.

He further notes that the intrinsic contextuality of some of the ethico-legal elements in the Qur'an makes for an interpretational distinction between what the Qur'an reflected as opposed to what the Quran initiated. Duderija points out that the latter is universal while some aspects of the former (such as the unilateral power vested in husbands to divorce their wives, a practice from pre-Islamic times) were part of the then prevailing customary practice which was considered reasonable and rational for the time and place when and where the Quran was revealed, as Muslims believe. The Quran merely reflected these and sought to mitigate their harmful effects.

Consequently, Duderija believes that it is indeed possible to systematically and authentically engage with much of the patriarchal residue that remains in Islamic traditions, laws and ethics and engender non-patriarchal interpretations of the same. He is convinced it is possible to make a compelling case for the development of gender-egalitarian interpretations of the Qur'an.

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# THOUSAND WORDS

In commemoration of the International  
Day of Democracy - 15<sup>th</sup> September





“

We owe our Children -the most vulnerable citizens in any society- a life free from violence and fear. ”

- Nelson Mandela







# Exploring New Frontiers in Interreligious Dialogue

“To be religious is to be interreligious.” This inclusive, integral insight of General Congregation 34 (130) served to widen the frontiers of interreligious dialogue in Jesuit circles. While GCs 32 and 33 focused on the inseparable link of faith and justice, GCs 35 and 36 drew attention to urgent environmental concerns. Pope Francis calling for a response to the cry of the Earth and cry of the poor, highlighted Integral Ecology in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, thus demonstrating the inseparable connection between justice and ecology. As we become more aware of the unifying web of the universe, it is vital to develop a holistic approach to dialogue so that together with faith, justice, and ecology, it is viewed as interrelated and interdependent in our interconnected universe.

Among the major blocks to interconnection today, the following four “isms” rooted in egoism need to be addressed urgently: i. Individualism: I am the best; ii. Fundamentalism: My interpretation of religion is best; iii. Nationalism: My nation is best; iv. Anthropocentrism: My species is best.

Like John Donne’s assertion “No man is an island,” we can also say that no religion, nation nor species is an island. While our individual, religious, national, and human identities need to be valued, we cannot consider ourselves as isolated individuals, religions, nations or species.

It is imperative to foster the paradigm shift from “Me” to “We” and inculcate a spirit of collaboration rather than fall prey to the prevalent culture of cutthroat competition. It is vital to accept the reality that “to be” is to “inter-be” popularized by the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. This enlightening insight affirms our interconnection with and interdependence on other human beings, other species as well as the rest of creation. A spirituality of compassion, common to all faiths, is captured concisely in the dictum: “Kindness gives to ‘another’, for Compassion there is no ‘other’”.

All faith traditions have their own version of the golden rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” It is inclusive, communitarian and seeks the common good which eventually benefits the individual too. Our growing ecological concern has recently made us aware of the universal green rule: “Do unto the Earth as you would like the Earth to do unto you.”



The Sanskrit dictum ‘*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakum*’, which literally means ‘the earth is one family,’ is usually translated as “the world is one family.” As a result humans are kept in focus, while other species and the rest of creation are overlooked.

Are we being called to go beyond interreligious dialogue with humans, to ecological dialogue, namely, dialogue with the Earth? The first step in this holistic dialogue would be to listen to the Earth. Are we listening to the Earth that is screaming, through current crises like climate change and COVID-19? Such crises are provoking widespread panic but also bringing the stark realization that we swim or sink together. There is a desperate search, understandably, for a vaccine to cure COVID but the root causes related



to disastrous projects of unbridled development involving deforestation and degradation of the environment are ignored. This calls for radical ecological conversion as promoted by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* (LS 216-221) and involves a threefold reconciliation with nature, others and God as envisaged by GC 36 (1:21).

Albert Einstein offers us a wholesome universal vision that challenges us to free ourselves from the constricting confines of the prison of anthropocentrism.

“A human being is part of a whole, called by us the ‘Universe,’ a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something



separated from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”

Fritjof Capra, the legendary author of the “Tao of Physics,” who explored the similarities between mystical traditions and science, confirms: “In today’s world, we belong to many different communities, but we share two communities to which we all belong. We are all members of humanity, and we all belong to the global biosphere.”

The renowned secular humanist Carl Sagan, calls for the solidarity of human beings, who, despite divergent ethnic and cultural backgrounds, are more alike than different. He recommends for our survival, a broadening of our narrow loyalties to include the whole community of humans as well as planet Earth.

This demands a radical change in our traditional understanding of interreligious dialogue that was focused exclusively on humans. In ‘The Sacred Universe,’ Thomas Berry, who is deeply indebted to Teilhard de Chardin, starts with the story of the universe from the Big Bang about 13.8 billion years ago, to make a convincing case for an interdisciplinary dialogue that can ensure a sustainable future. He states unequivocally, “The universe is the primary revelation of the divine, the primary scripture, the primary locus of divine-human communication.” Many religious leaders, with a fundamentalist attitude, who tend to give absolute authority to their own scriptures and traditions, may find this a bitter pill to swallow. Exploring the insights of science, as well as various religions and indigenous traditions will offer diverse perspectives on creation and the integral divine-human-nature relationship. This will open up abundant scope to widen the horizons of dialogue that envisions a re-interpretation of the sacred scriptures from an ecological and evolutionary perspective.

Prominent secularists are advocating that the Constitution of India should be treated as a sacred book, as fundamentalist interpretations of various scriptures and traditions can be divisive and dangerous for communal harmony. Going beyond our narrow national interests, can we look to the Earth Charter as a common universal ground for interdisciplinary dialogue, as it provides a comprehensive vision of our ideals of respect and care for the community of life, of ecological integrity, of social and economic justice, and of democracy, non-violence, and peace. It “seeks to inspire in all peoples a sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family, the greater community of life, and future generations.”

We are being called to radically reconsider our human identity as a part of creation and not apart. In the process of saving the Earth, we should make use of the resources of various faiths and secular sciences to respect and revere God’s creation. Our interreligious dialogue, while exploring new frontiers, should flow from and lead to joint compassionate action that will ensure not only human survival but the flourishing of all life in the universe. Just as we assert “to be religious is to be interreligious,” can we also assert “to be human is to be universal,” where ‘universal’ literally means our connection with the whole universe?

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# Zoom Masses Unite a Faith Community

"We all lost our hope as the fear of Corona surrounded us. I was the front-line caregiver in the Emergency Room of North Shore University Hospital in Manhasset. I am the breadwinner of the family. Everyday awful thoughts, fearful scenarios of Corona-infected patients haunted me. Every day I was seeing death very closely and could not concentrate on anything." These were the experiences of Jacinta Maria before she began participating in our Zoom Masses.

These fears and anxieties, were with everyone who had to encounter the COVID -19 pandemic on the frontline. It was frightening to hear or read about the number of cases and deaths, especially here in New York. I felt moments of despair as I read the disheartening news about massive suffering caused by the infection. Two people whom I knew became victims of this pandemic. Steven Aranha, a Zoom Mass participant, too, experienced such anxieties: "I was very terrified and was scared to go outside. I could not even go to the Church to pray. I felt that God had forsaken us. There were many online Masses I attended several times but never felt satisfied."

As people struggled to find hope in this hopelessness, technology, such as Zoom, connected, united, and strengthened the faith and hope of a group of Catholic families in and around New York, the epicenter of the pandemic in the USA. Stany Lobo wrote: "I would like to thank you for celebrating the Holy Masses through Zoom meetings with our Kursa Vado community in these COVID-19 pandemic times. These moments, when the world is full of fear and chaos, is when we need our faith the most, and these Masses with our community helped strengthen that faith."

As a Jesuit priest, I had the privilege of celebrating Masses in my community. Some families from Mangalore, India, now settled in New York, New Jersey, and Long Island, known as Kursa

Vado Family (KVF), asked me for online Masses. I was more than willing, as it was God's mission and the need of the hour. Thanks to the Zoom network, we could have a personalized Mass experience, even though the participants couldn't receive Holy Communion physically.

These Masses enabled the families and me to connect to our mother tongue, Konkani. God didn't abandon us even in this crisis. It was a blessing for the families as they tried to make sense of such an uncertain and dangerous situation, and yet focusing their faith on the Lord, who, through His passion, has shown us how to face our struggles and sufferings, and even death itself. Arun Menezes tried to remain strong in his faith as he expressed: "The COVID-19 pandemic might have brought different changes in one's life for sure - some good and some bad. My experience of this change has been very positive, and even though there might be a few negatives, I want to be optimistic and want to cite the hymn - "Count your blessings, name them one by one and see what God hath done."

Kursa Vado Families are deeply rooted and grounded in the faith and love of God, which was handed to them through their parents in Mangalore, India. They continue their faith traditions through regular rosaries, Masses, Stations of the Cross, retreats. It was such an enlightening and inspiring experience for me to see children actively involved through reading Scriptures and prayers, playing musical instruments, and singing. Sienna Lobo, a high school student, shares her experience: "When the Mass with Fr. Vinod started, it felt like the same devotion, or rather a stronger one came to me. In my parish, I was a lector, so I felt better when I started having a chance to read again. In the Zoom Masses, I was also given a chance to play hymns, and that made me feel much more involved. I also saw how happy my parents were that they were given Masses in Konkani again. In times of chaos and terror, faith was sadly in the back of our minds."

Shanessa Aranha, another high school student, wrote, "Thank you for all the wonderful ways you shared the Lord's love and taught his Word. Your gentle words filled my heart with gratitude and showed me the way of hope. Your prudence has helped me elevate my inner self." Aston and Joevin,



Photo Courtesy: Vinod Fernandes, SJ



grammar school students, said: "We prefer having a Mass on Zoom than walking to Church and getting sick. Also, we can see our friends during the Masses, and we were able to do the readings. We were happy we got to play a musical instrument (guitar), and our Mom got to sing along with it."

Our small Zoom community with twelve families, grew as many more families joined from different countries, such as UAE, and India. My sister's and brother's families joined the celebration from India. My niece, Jennifer Pinto, who had to stay at her Hindu friend's house in Bhubaneswar, India, due to the sudden lockdown, also joined us. I was amazed to see her Hindu friend participating in one of the Masses, even reading the prayers of the faithful.

Jennifer wrote on behalf of her family: "The celebration of the Eucharist plays an integral part in our family. The testimonies by different people who were affected by the pandemic were heart-touching. The nurses in the group shared their experiences on how God gave them the strength and courage to do their duties. The melodious choir played a vital role in increasing our faith, and it was very similar to the Mass we attend in the Church."

I requested some members of KVF to share their faith experiences at the end of the Masses, especially on their faith in the Risen Lord, who has been helping them to face this pandemic. Many members shared their powerful faith experiences of the present as well as of the past. Some have been working as nurses and essential workers in hospitals and nursing homes. I was personally moved by hearing how they were able to find strength and hope because of their faith in God and how they were able to give hope to patients who were dying or on the verge of recovery. God was the final hope of these patients as they struggled to breathe for their lives. The faith witnesses given by these members were nothing less than Jesus being present before them. They indeed participated in the healing ministry of Christ.

All the members of KVF felt that after these Zoom Masses, they not only grew in their faith as individuals but also as a community. On this aspect of community, Jacinta

Maria shares: "Moreover because of these Zoom Mass celebrations, we became very close with Kursa Vado Families. I learned some difficulties of some families where we could pray for each other and extend some sort of help within our capacity."

It certainly was a powerful experience recognizing that God was in our midst, and each home was a church. The Lord is truly present wherever two or three were gathered in His name (Mt. 18:20).

Steven Aranha reflects: "After attending these Zoom family Masses, I felt that even though all the churches were closed, God converted every home into a church. Our kids started singing and closely participating in reading. This made me strong that God has a good plan in every moment, whether good or bad. We might see it as hopeless or very bad. But we fail to see the good that comes out of it. I have never seen my kids participating in any Mass until the Zoom Mass during the pandemic. I felt consoled and started feeling less worried about the pandemic. I started looking at all the new things we started as a family during this pandemic. I learned how to find good in every bad situation."

The Zoom Masses continued for three months from the end of March till June. Shyna Quadras, a student from Stony Brook University, coordinated the Zoom sessions and recorded the Masses so that I could send them to my family and friends who could not participate.

I sincerely believe that the Lord has touched the lives of many with His love and graces. I was able to celebrate Masses from my community house chapel. However, there was a time when the community was in lockdown for two weeks as one of the Jesuits tested positive. I had to celebrate Masses from a reading room adjacent to my room. These Zoom Masses have immensely strengthened the faith and hope in the Lord, of all the participants, and given us the courage and strength to face the pandemic and future crises as a deeply united faith community.

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## JIVAN CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST (Poem) - 2021

We are happy to announce the JIVAN Creative Writing Contest (Poem) this year. The cash prizes to the winners come from a generous grant offered in 1997 by the family of Fio Mascarenhas, SJ and his brother Frazer Mascarenhas, SJ, in memory of their beloved parents – Francis and Flora Mascarenhas. The poem contest invites all who love creativity and imagination – Jesuits, non-Jesuits, men, women, the youth, and senior citizens. The poem should be original, unpublished and in English. It must be set in contemporary Asian context; highlighting its people, events and ethos that offer us hope for the future.

There are three prizes:

The first prize:  
₹ 4,000

The second prize:  
₹ 2,500

The third prize:  
₹ 1,000

Rules:

1. Send your entries to [jivaneditor@gmail.com](mailto:jivaneditor@gmail.com) with the subject title 'Poem Contest'.
2. The entries should reach us by 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2021. The results will be announced in the February, 2022 issue of JIVAN.
3. All entries shall be the property of JIVAN.
4. A person can register only one entry and, therefore, send only one poem in his or her name.
5. Only the first prize-winning poem will be published in JIVAN.
6. The decision of the Jury will be final.

- Editor



# O God, Where are You?

## A post-pandemic reflection

**T**his pandemic has been a testing time for all. Every aspect of life is challenged. We are learning from experience that to live is to make many adjustments. No permanency for anything. Nothing as before! Those who are not adjustable, break themselves.

I focus mainly on the psycho-spiritual issues of our life. Those who see people in agony - gasping for breath and dying, heaps of corpses, witness burial or cremation with all protocol, orphaned children, non-availability of vaccine, oxygen and hospital services, ask: "Where is God? Has God abandoned us? Is God punishing us? Why did God send/allow this pandemic? If nothing is impossible for God who is all-mighty, why does He not stop it immediately? If God is unconditional love, why is He deaf to the agonizing cry of millions? These are some of the questions of even people who are seniors, and considered to be living a 'spiritual' life. Job's answer was, 'God gave, God took. Blessed be God.' Tobit's answer was: 'God afflicted me, and God had mercy on me.' (11:15). We need something more, attempting an answer. After science taught us how AIDS started and was propagated, we don't blame God for it. As scientists speak of the most probable origin of the virus in laboratories, as there is the deadly possibility of biological wars, and as there are selfish and wicked politicians, how can we blame God for the pandemic? As Judas did not ask and get God's permission to betray Jesus, nor did Pilate ask and get God's permission to condemn Jesus to death, nor is there any proof that God commissioned them to do it, how can we say that God allowed the pandemic? Did the virus or any scientist or politician seek God's permission to afflict humanity?

Is God indifferent to human suffering? Our Scriptures would say 'No'. We have a God who responds positively and mightily to the cry of His people; a God who would satisfy his peoples' hunger and thirst; who would lead them in the long march to freedom; who would camp with them and reach them to a land flowing with milk and honey; who would console them as a mother would. Jesus is sure that our God is His own God and everybody's dearest Father (Abba). God weeps with those who weep, and rejoices when people are happy. Our God died a very painful death in Jesus so that we might live.

Where is God when we are suffering? Viktor Frankl speaks of an incident in the Nazi concentration camp.

Since nobody owned up a small offence, as punishment the jailor arbitrarily decided to hang ten prisoners publically. One of them was a child. The grown-ups died rather quickly but not the child. Seeing the child in agony for long and not dying, someone shouted, 'Where is God?' The answer came from a fellow prisoner, 'There! God is hanging with the child!' Faith's answer. A compassionate and 'helpless' God.

During the pandemic many live in fear. An indication of deficient faith. Faith gives us courage and peace. When a lady was led to the gas chamber, one of her inmate friends asked her if she was afraid being in the grip of the Nazis. 'No' was her emphatic reply. She added, 'I am not in the grip of the Nazis. I am in the grip of God. If I am in the grip of God, I have nothing to fear'. Faith overcoming fear. Shortly before his death by hanging by the Nazis, Alfred Delp, S.J. wrote on a scrap of paper: 'God's love oozes out to me from every pore' (of the prison). Faith's consolation.

When we ask 'why does not God stop it?' God is asking us the same question, 'why don't you stop it?' God wants us to be responsible for ourselves and others. As St. Teresa of Avila said: "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands but yours. It is through your hands that he..." God and people need us.

The pandemic has taught us to live simpler lives, to avoid wasteful luxuries. Deprived of church services and free of customary or obligatory spiritual exercises, we have learned to be more responsible for our 'spiritual' life. Karl Ratner's prophecy that 'the Christian of the future will be a mystic or nothing' is true.

The pandemic challenges us thoroughly. We are forced to think of death as a clear and near possibility. We cannot take good health for granted. Life is full of unpredictable ups and downs. The frequent siren of ambulances force us to think of the suffering millions, inviting us to be compassionate and concerned, and not to be self-preoccupied. We are forced to take seriously the question: 'What after death?' Similar considerations can produce healthy spirituality. Healthy spirituality produces cheerful and meaningful lives.

The author is engaged in spiritual ministry, especially retreats.

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PHOTO: ABIVE





# Remembering GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS (1844 – 1889)

**What would the world be, once bereft  
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,  
O let them be left, wildness and wet;  
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.**  
*Inversnaid (1881)*

It is 130 years since Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ, left this world leaving behind a great legacy in the field of English poetry. His posthumous fame established him among the leading Victorian poets. Born in 1844 in Essex, England, he studied Classics at Balliol College, Oxford, from 1863-67. There he struck significant life-long friendship with Robert Bridges (the eventual Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom). He held regular correspondence with Bridges through which the two friends discussed Hopkins' poetry in great detail.

## **Influences that marked in the life of Hopkins**

According to some sources, Hopkins was deeply impressed with the work of Christina Rossetti. He met her in 1864 and she influenced him greatly. During his years at Oxford he studied with the prestigious critic Walter Pater, who first tutored him in 1866 and remained a friend of Hopkins until he left Oxford in September 1879.

Hopkins was born in a committed Christian family. He began his novitiate in the Society of Jesus at Manresa House in Roehampton, September 1868. Two years later he moved to St. Mary's Hall, Stonyhurst, taking his first vows. Despite his love for writing and poetry, Hopkins vowed to 'write no more... unless it were by the wish of my superiors.' He burnt all of the poems he had written so far, and did not write any poems again until 1875.

Hopkins was ordained in 1877. For seven years he worked in London, Oxford, Liverpool, and Glasgow. In 1884 he was appointed Professor of Greek and Latin at University College, Dublin. His English culture and his disagreement with the Irish politics of the time increased his sense of isolation in Ireland. This deepened his feelings of depression, and the poems written during this period, such as 'I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark', reflected

this sadness. The poems Hopkins wrote during his time in Dublin came to be known as the 'terrible sonnets' as they capture the feelings of exile and melancholy which plagued the later part of his life.

## **Poetic Style**

In the pages of history we realize that the struggle between faith and reason has remained a very critical subject. Yet, Hopkins has turned as an inspiration for theologians, philosophers, artists, writers, playwrights and poets. Irrespective of time, place, social-political conditions and cultural differences and boundaries Hopkins has invariably endeavoured to explore the nature of God and to improve his knowledge of the mystery of the universe and the existence of man. Being a Christian, Hopkins has creatively written on God, man and man's relationship with God by using a very innovative language.

It is well known that in 1874, during his theological studies in North Wales, he learned Welsh, and later adapted the rhythms of Welsh poetry to create what he called 'sprung rhythm'. This was a concept Hopkins invented to describe verse in which only the stresses are counted. He marked his verse with foot divisions, accents, and loops, to illustrate where the accent should fall. When examining the original manuscripts of Hopkins' poetry, it is possible to see his use of loops and accents to enhance the sound and stress of each poem.

It is noteworthy that dualism and contradiction constitute the essence of his poetry and they are reflected in every subject-matter and linguistic pattern. God, a central figure of almost every one of his poems, is depicted, on the one hand, as a creator, life-giver and feeder, but, on the other hand, as a severe final judge who reprimands, punishes and takes human life.

Hopkins died of typhoid fever in 1889 and was buried in the Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin. Among his unfinished works was a commentary on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. After his death, Robert Bridges helped to publish and promote his friend's work, editing a volume of Hopkins' Poems that first appeared in 1918.

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# ECO-STORYTELLING

## Sowing seeds of transformative action

We are a fraction of the Earth. The Earth is a component of us. The pandemic has taught us that we are one of the tiniest miniscule beings on this planet trying to comprehend the giant mysteries of the universe. Human beings have the innate capacity to think and express their ideas, emotions and feelings through words. Storytelling has been a part of human existence right from ancient times, when men and women set out to carve images and symbols in the caves. This essay underscores the significance of Eco-Storytelling as a consciousness-raising tool for the well-being of our planet.

Eco-Storytelling draws inspiration from the earth-centred ideologies and principles from different indigenous and classical spiritual traditions. It tries to explore the questions such as: What is the significance of Earth-centred stories in contemporary times? Why do we need Eco-Storytelling? How do Eco-Stories help people to find a voice for themselves and for their environment? Where does Eco-Storytelling begin? And what is the impact of Eco-Storytelling on our society, culture and environment?

Words, sentences and stories are born into this world every second of our life. This act of verbal procreation can be both positive and negative. Positive thoughts deliver encouraging words which in turn create constructive action. On the other hand, negative words lead onto negative

thoughts and adverse action. Indigenous tribes across the world believe that stories are living beings composed of words, symbols and sounds. In this era of indifference and insensitivity, stories are breathing visionaries with a conscious vocation to re-weave the world. They help humans to subvert dominant malevolent discourses of power, suppression and injustice, and rewrite new histories and her-stories to heal our planet.

In the past, very often, the world has witnessed narratives of the powerful silencing the narratives of the powerless. The stories of the weak, marginalised and others, were aborted as foetus or smothered in infancy. The muffled voices and the stifled expressions were soon buried, forgotten and lost. Human beings have the right to express themselves in each and every moment of their lives. However, the respect for other beings is shown only through their power of listening.

As Jane Goodall said, "Change happens by listening and then starting a dialogue with the people who are doing something you don't believe is right." Hence, Eco-Storytelling encourages effective speaking and conscious effectual listening.

For several centuries, women and other marginalised groups were silent or silenced by the patriarchal society.



Photo Courtesy: AMCF, CCC



The binary opposition of nature vs. culture, and man vs. woman in the dominant western ideologies, have created major havoc in the present era. The acknowledgement of the role of women has been minimal in all walks of life especially in the developing and underdeveloped countries. The lack of participation of women in shaping the societies and cultures has resulted in ecological chaos, economic crisis, political unrest and social disintegration. At this juncture, it is important to redefine the role of women and other marginalised groups as messengers of simplicity, goodwill, peace and hope in rebuilding the ethos of a new era. Eco-Storytelling is a wakeup call to the human race in deep slumber.

An injury to one life on earth will have repercussions on all life forms on this planet. The cruelty and exploitation of innocent women, children, men, animals, birds, trees and land, has resulted in the suffering of life across the world. If the word 'culture' denotes "respect" then it certainly calls for the reverence of living beings regardless of colour, caste, race or class. "We are here to awaken from our illusion of separateness," says Thich Nhat Hanh. Hence it is important to create, procreate, and re-create stories of life affirmation for the well-being of this green planet. Stories that promote interconnectedness and interdependence, must be set in motion through Eco-Storytelling. Through Eco-Storytelling, men and women can communicate the qualities of "motherhood" and "Mother Earth hood" in their thoughts, words and deeds.

Eco-Storytelling upholds stories: of love and care for Mother Earth; abundance and benevolence; regeneration and revival; sacredness and healing; togetherness and peaceful coexistence; human-nature proximity and continuum. As Pope Francis noted, "Rivers do not drink their own water; trees do not eat their own fruit; the sun does not shine on itself and flowers do not spread their fragrance for themselves. Living for others is a rule of nature. We are all born to help each other. No matter how difficult it is...life is good when you are happy; but much better when others are happy because of you." Eco-Storytelling endows a special role and responsibility on the human race to realise their potential as agents of change for the welfare of all life forms.

Stories are potent seeds that have a healing touch on the teller and the told. Stories with destructive intent are floated

across several modes of communication in this digital era. As a counter-current, Eco-Storytelling attempts to create positive, constructive, holistic narratives that will nurture hope in young minds, flag bearers and torch bearers of the future society. Stories of greed, avarice and discontent must be balanced with stories of benevolence, magnanimity and contentment; tales of treachery and narrow-mindedness with tales of truth, trust and abundance; and, legends of individual achievements with stories of collective strength. Quite specifically, Eco-Storytelling attempts to promote Carl Rogers' idea of the "unconditional personal regard" where "we" replaces "I", "us" replaces "me" and "ourselves" replaces "myself". One story leads on to another story and the chain moves on. Eco-Storytelling initiates a dialogic pedagogy in both formal and non-formal settings.

Eco-Storytelling emphasizes the importance of "now", or the present moment in relation to the past and the future. They

underscore the cyclical pattern of life. But unfortunately, a large section of the youth of today are missing out the bigger picture. They are hastily grappling with the bits and pieces of the giant jigsaw puzzle. Through Eco-Storytelling one can rekindle the passion to narrate holistic stories of heirloom that are productive to the individual and his/her society. Eco-Storytelling aims at praxis where reflective

stories end up as responsible action. The affirmative stories as living seeds are fortified and nurtured by the power of love and care for fellow beings in this planet.

This pandemic is only a symptom, the tip of an iceberg. There are worse, deep-rooted problems in our society. Farmers die of poverty and debts. Women die of harassment, rape, ill-health and domestic violence. Children die of malnutrition and abuse. Migrants die of hunger. The connecting thread that links all these social problems is the mismanagement of fundamental structures controlled by patriarchy, materialism and consumerism. Critically conscious men and women have the responsibility of rebuilding the world by garnering a repertoire of time-tested Earth-centred stories that will result in authentic transformative action. And Eco-Storytelling is here to pave a way towards sustainable development, gender equity and social justice.


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**"Rivers do not drink their own water; trees do not eat their own fruit; the sun does not shine on itself and flowers do not spread their fragrance for themselves.."**

*- Pope Francis*

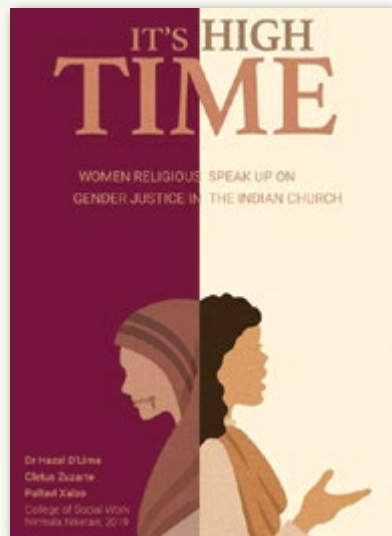
Intention  
for  
September 2021

**Universal intention - An environmentally sustainable lifestyle**  
We pray that we all will make courageous choices for a simple and environmentally sustainable lifestyle, rejoicing in our young people who are resolutely committed to this.





## Gender Justice for Women Religious



**TITLE:** It's High Time- Women Religious Speak up on Gender Justice in the Indian Church

**AUTHOR:** DR. HAZEL D'LIMA, CLETUS ZUZARTE, PALLAVI XALXO

**PUBLISHER:** CRI Women's Executive 2018

**PAGES:** 86

**PRICE:** ₹ 100/-

This slim volume packs a powerful punch. Released in June 2021, it is a report of a survey commissioned by the women's section of the Conference of Religious India (CRI), to ascertain the truth of media reports in 2018, claiming that women religious are grossly exploited by bishops and priests. The survey was conducted among Superiors General and Major Superiors in India.

The results based on the answers of 121 respondents from across India and the *sui juris* churches, were collated and

analysed by Hazel D'Lima DHM, Cletus Zuzarte and Pallavi Xalxo of the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan.

The book identifies problematic issues faced by Sisters in their relationship with the clergy, attempts to understand the Sisters' perception of their charisms and their engagement in the mission of the church, and explores best practices as models of constructive action. It has a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, and in addition to informative tables, tells stories of harassment, verbal abuse, injustice and sacramental blackmail that show bishops and priests in bad light. It however, also cites examples of successful dialogue with bishops.

There is some introspection on the passivity of Sisters, their desire to please the authorities in the Church, their prejudices rooted in caste, rites, class and language, and the power dynamics within their own Congregations.

The book ends on a positive note, addressing avenues for change in formation, suggestions to improve working relations with the hierarchy, and an action plan for effective follow-up of the study.

This Report is a must-read not just for women religious, but also for the ordained in the Church who hold power over them and with whom they work closely. Reading it would mark the first step in a process of listening - so essential for dialogue that leads to change.

| Astrid Lobo Gajiwala

## The Eucharist that really was

The book, *Seven Baskets Full: The All-Embracing Lord's Supper*, my study of the Christian texts of the first three centuries was a real surprise. The Lord's Supper was different in so many ways from the Eucharist of today.

It was held in the homes of people, presided over by some respectable persons. No Apostle is reported to have presided over it. Wheat or barley bread was the primary constituent of the meal ("breaking of bread"). Often dried fish was also used. Wine was a rare commodity among the poor.

The meal had a horizontal axis. The fellowship of fraternal love, particularly with the poor, was a special concern. Part of the meal was sharing the memory of Jesus; the struggles of the disciples; and airing the concerns of people in need. The early writers repeatedly spoke about love, justice and prayer. They hardly mentioned any cult. Nowhere does the New Testament invite the reader to participate in Lord's Supper.

There were instances of women presiding over the Last Supper. The men tried to stop them, labelling them as heretics. The president and the people extemporized the prayers. The words of institution were not part of the Lord's Supper.

As the meal was not a sacrifice, it did not need some special priesthood or have atonement as one of its functions. There were no Masses for the dead. The idea of and the term

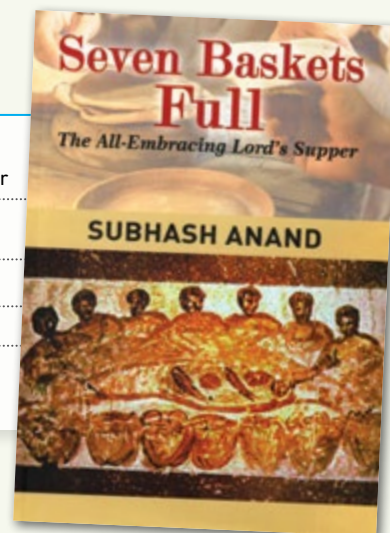
**TITLE:** Seven Baskets Full: The All-Embracing Lord's Supper

**AUTHOR:** SUBHASH ANAND

**PUBLISHER:** Media House, Delhi

**PAGES:** 877

**PRICE:** ₹ 1500, US \$ 50.00



'transubstantiation' were totally absent. If what is said in the book is truly in accordance with the early Church, then it is time that we come together and discern what course of action we need to follow. To ignore the data is to ignore the truth. To be open and learn is to move deeper into Christian and human fellowship.

| Subhash Anand



## First Jesuit Residence in Tripura, “Arrupe In” Inaugurated

In the Ignatian Jubilee year and on the occasion of the feast of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the Jesuits in Tripura have opened their first residential house and christened it as “Arrupe In”. Arrupe In is located in Jamtalibari, Kailasahar, about 150 km north of the state capital Agartala. ‘In’ in local Halam Tribal Language means ‘House’. Bishop Lumen Monteiro CSC inaugurated and blessed the house in the presence of local parishioners, religious and priests.

The Jesuits did not have a permanent residence. In 2018, two Jesuit missionaries, Babu Paul and James Morias, arrived in Jamtalibari from Kerala Province. In a few months they built a tin house which was later handed over to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy. The Nuns collaborate in the new Mission. This year, a Jesuit from Calcutta Province, Irudaya Jothi is collaborating in the new mission of opportunities.

‘Arrupe In’ focuses on the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus. Arrupe In will help change the face of neighbouring villages in the years to come, hopes local youth Sanjith Halam. The locals are basically tribals working in rubber plantations and tea gardens.

The Jesuits have already registered as a Trust - Xavier Institute for Developmental Education (XIDE), and an integrated approach in intervention is being adopted.

The state of Tripura is home to 19 tribal communities, including the Halam, which is made up of about 57,000 people. The other tribal groups are Tripuri, Debarma, Jamatia, Noatia, Uchai, Chakma, Mog, Lushai, Kuki, Munda, Kau, Orang, Santal, Bhil, Chaimal, Garo, Khasia and Lepch.

Since their arrival, the Jesuits have dedicated themselves to tribal groups, which make up 31% of the population of Tripura. Kailasahar, a sub-division of Tripura, is given to Jesuits as their mission area. In the coming months, collaboration of many of our provinces will be sought for various needs.



Irudaya Jothi, SJ | Konchowki, W. Bengal

## Nashik based Jesuit NGO cares for the Covid affected Tribals

Maharashtra Prabodhan Seva Mandal (MPSM), a Jesuit NGO, working in the Nashik district of Maharashtra, arose to the needs of the tribal communities who were badly affected by the second wave of COVID-19. Though medical care was never a part of the NGO's work, the MPSM team started the MCCU to cater to this emerging need.

Initially, the team comprised a nurse, a social worker and few others. As the coverage had to be increased, two more teams had to be put up. This was possible thanks to Jesuit scholastics, Daughters of the Cross (FCs), Religious of the Assumption (RAs), Canossian Daughters of Charity (FdCCs), Carmelites of Charity -Vedruna (CCVs) and a Nashik Diocesan priest who readily volunteered for this novel mission outreach. Thus, we were men and women from six different congregations and lay collaborators working with one charism – service.



In a way, this became a model of collaboration across boundaries. The team would visit a village and patients were examined for symptoms of COVID. Medicines and vitamin supplements were given to all the patients. A follow-up visit was done after eight days to ensure that the suspected patients had recovered.

The camps started on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021, and continued for three months, reaching out to more than 50 Gram Panchayats in the three talukas of Peth, Surgana and Trimbakeshwar. We had 5768 patients visiting our camps out of which 1254 were suspected cases. This venture was possible thanks to the generosity of many collaborators. The provincials and superiors were audacious enough to let their men and women undertake this risky job. Many benefactors from across the globe contributed towards the expenses of the unit. Thus, MCCU proves to be a perfectly divine inspiration made possible by human cooperation

Seby Varghese, SJ and Joel Noronha, SJ | Pune

## People of All Faiths Pledge to Pursue Stan's Legacy

On 28<sup>th</sup> July 2021, the progressive denizens of Jamshedpur City and its vicinity observed National Justice Day with a unique gusto and grandeur. Avidly reminiscing the incredible legacy and contributions of **Fr. Stan Swamy**, people from all walks of life and faiths demonstrated with their luminous and evocative candles, posters and banners across the Steel City. In fact, it was a clarion call by the urbane and cognizant citizens to stand in solidarity with the margins deprived of basic human rights and justice.

The silent candle light demonstrations reflected growing inequalities, violence, atrocities, discrimination, cry for justice, and liberation from oppressive structures in the Indian Republic. Besides, the observation of National Justice Day beckoned the general public to pursue and further the rousing legacy of Fr. Stan Swamy, **"Not to remain a silent spectator"** and more significantly, join hands with compatible minds to protect the secular, democratic and cultural integrity of our nation.

Fr. Stan's custodial death is an awaking, and awakening call for all the Indian citizens amidst nationwide gross human rights violations. It is worth-remembering that Fr. Stan Swamy worked tirelessly for the exploited and dispossessed, displaced and convicted, vulnerable and voiceless, irrespective of caste and creed. Throughout his life history, he incarnated the egalitarian values of peace, love, equality, justice and truth, braving all the odds and challenges of the state absolutism. Undoubtedly, the entire nation consisting of the **Adivasis, Dalits** and other backward sections of society has lost a daring, dedicated, committed and gentle priest-activist. He has left behind a legacy of in-depth Christian faith as an inspiration for all generations to come.

This candle-light demonstration urged one and all to demand justice for Fr. Stan Swamy and all the accused in Bhima-Koregaon

Case. The assembly of all the concerned citizens demanded the Central Government to free all the human-right defenders and under-trial prisoners languishing in jails for years now. They called on the government to defend democracy, repeal sedition law, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and repressive state laws, and restore citizens' right to dissent. The entire assembly sang the song of Rabindranath Tagore unitedly and unisonally, **"Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake."**



| Gerald Ravi D'Souza, SJ | Jamshedpur

## A conference webbing together the Ignatian Spirituality and Islamic Teachings

JaMiA [Jesuits among Muslims in Asia] organized a web-conference on August 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> with the theme "The Ignatian Spirituality and Islamic Teachings/Muslim Communities in Asian Contexts". Twelve papers that were presented by Jesuits and their collaborators in the web-conference, dealt with themes extending from Ecology to Christology, Prayer to Mysticism, and Spiritual Conversations that facilitate Inner Freedom. Many a bridge between Christianity and Islam, and Christian reflections on the Qur'an, were some of the other topics dealt in the miscellaneous papers. The papers thus focused on sharing and deepening of the Jesuit charism of Ignatian Spirituality in 'deep conversations' with Muslim communities. The papers explored the many adaptations that needed to be made in content, format, and language of the Spiritual Exercises, in relation with Muslim communities - especially in the context of UAPs, in engaging with the poor and youth.

Greg Soetomo SJ, secretary for JaMiA from the Asia Pacific Jesuit Conference, pointed out: "By compiling the articles and publishing

them as a book, altogether, this is a long-term, methodical preparation for Dialogue with Muslims in Asia, and assisting and collaborating with other sectors (Jesuit Refugee Service, Jesuit Basic Educations, Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, Asian Theology Program, Youth Apostolate, Buddhist Studies and Dialogue, Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN)).

Joseph Victor Edwin SJ, secretary for JaMiA for South Asian Conference, drawing from the paper presented, pointed out that "Discernment is an important tool for any serious engagement with people of other religions. We must use this tool very conscientiously for the academic pursuits, as well as in personal interactions with Muslim believers". He further pointed out that both longstanding friendship with many Muslims and a deep awareness of being sent by the Church, for the ministry of dialogue with them, are essential for Christian-Muslim Dialogue.

| Joseph Victor Edwin, SJ | Delhi





## Fr. Anton Weerasinghe, SJ (SRI)

Fr Anton Weerasinghe hailed from Elpitiya, a Jesuit Parish of Galle diocese in the south of Sri Lanka. He was born on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1939 to a family of five siblings. He was an altar server and took a liking to the Jesuit pastors. But when he expressed his desire to become a Jesuit priest, he was sent to the diocesan seminary by a secular priest. It took him three years to realize that he was in the wrong place and with the permission of the Bishop, he joined the Novitiate in Calicut which was later shifted to Bangalore. He did his studies in Pune and Manila where he also specialized in Mass Media.

Upon his return to the island, Anton got busy with the Media apostolate. Through many years, he produced the Catholic Half-Hour over Radio Ceylon, reflections and articles in the newspapers, until he was picked by Bishop Oswald Gomis

to inaugurate the South Asian services at Radio Veritas. Returning from Manila, he taught Mass Media at St Xavier's College, Mumbai. Then he took up the South Asian broadcasting services of Radio Vatican. Thus, many had heard him over the air. Besides, he also served as the secretary to the South Asian Assistant of the Jesuits, Socius to the Provincial and chaplain to Sri Lankan ex-patriates in Naples. He has many compositions in liturgical music to his credit and translating and setting of Gitanjali into Sinhala music.

Though involved in media, his was a quiet personality, deep in thoughts and convictions and gentle in relationships. He radiated his Master's presence in his demeanour. He returned to the Master on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2021.



Fr. Baylon Perera, SJ



## Fr. Peter J. Kurukula Aratchi, SJ (SRI)

Fr. Peter Kurukula Aratchi was from Ampitiya, Kandy and came under the influence of the Jesuits of the Seminary and of the parish. There was a group of young men who joined the ranks of the Jesuits from Ampitiya and Peter was one of them. Peter joined the Novitiate at Calicut together with many other Sri Lankans, most of whom eventually left. He did his studies in Pune and Manila where he also specialized in Rural Development.

Fr. Peter joined Fr. Stefanizzi for rural development at Dehiowita. He approached the little people in the villages and tried to bring up their lives with little projects. His contacts were at a lower and smaller level. For many years he was involved with people of Trincomalee, Nilaveli, China bay, Kantale, Gantalawa and the Sugar Factory. As a member of the local peace committee he worked much for reconciling different races, cultural and

religious groups. He was a well recognized citizen of a town where all three races were equally represented. He kept in touch with the Alumni of St. Aloysius' College, as the Jesuit in Attendance. He was involved with their families and lives as a mentor. A similar service he rendered to the diocesan priests and the Religious of Kandy. Until the end, he organized the activities of the OBA of Berraewerts' College, Ampitiya. Besides he also served as Provincial of Sri Lanka, and as Pastor, as Superior and Director of Institutions.

Peter had the knack of moving with all classes of people. He related with and served them equally well. He returned to the Lord on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2021.



Fr. Baylon Perera, SJ



## Fr. Paul Valappila, SJ (GUJ)

Fr. Paul Valappila was born in Kerala. Fr Miguel Urrutia, who was vocation promoter for the Gujarat Jesuits, recruited Paul for the Gujarat Province. Paul joined the apostolic school at Loyola Hall, Ahmedabad, in 1956. He did his college studies at St Xavier's, Ahmedabad, in 1960. He entered the Society in 1961 at Vinayalaya, Bombay, and later did his juniorate at the same place. After finishing his philosophy studies at DNC, Pune, he came to Gujarat in 1966 to learn Gujarati. He excelled very well during his regency period and found his vocation to be a school teacher.

Soon after his ordination he was sent to do his B.Ed studies at Vidyanagar. He taught mathematics, and the students enjoyed his classes. He developed a special concern and love for weak students, and tutoring them to achieve results beyond all expectations, became

a mission within the education ministry for him. Besides mathematics, he taught them the value of discipline, hard work and, above all, commitment to what one undertakes. He instilled in them self-confidence which enabled many to achieve significant success in life.

His service in the field of education as a teacher at Anand, Bharuch, Kalol and Radhanpur brought new heights in the academic as well as disciplinary life of the schools. He contributed much as principal at St Xavier's Bharuch, Bhiloda and Surat. After retirement, Fr Paul served as minister in the novitiate for a year. From 2000 to 2018, he dedicated his life to pastoral ministry, along with looking after the boarding. He began to learn the tribal languages wherever he was placed in order to break the Word of God in that language and build relationships with the people of God.



Fr. Rappai Poothokaren, SJ



**Note:** This section invites moments of turning point or experiences of conversion in your life just as the moment of conversion in the life of St. Ignatius after the injury of the Cannonball at Pamplona. This section will continue throughout the Ignatian Year sharing moments after which your life was never the same.

## My Manresa Experience!

At the age of 28, during a *crisis of faith* caused by unexplainable failures *three times* in a chemistry examination at the University of Bombay, God entered my life in a special way. One morning on 11th February 1972, I was suddenly moved to kneel before my Vows Crucifix in Vinayalaya, and to surrender my life to Jesus. When I did this, I *heard* the Father say to me, “*Fio, you are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.*” My ‘Jesuit mind’ at once protested: “How can God be well pleased with me, when in frustrated anger against Him (for abandoning me during these crisis years), I had gradually given up daily prayer, and begun to act as a worldly person?” If God had scolded me, I could have understood

it. But to be affirmed, to be welcomed so lovingly, was too much for my small mind! Nevertheless, though I could not understand it logically, deep down in my heart I felt a tremendous joyfulness springing up, a divine consolation, which St. Ignatius calls “*a consolation without cause.*” And I was filled with such exultation that I remember shouting aloud in my room, “JESUS, YOU ARE ALIVE, ALLELUIA!” (This was before the Charismatic Renewal came to India!)

Through this totally undeserved “ABBA experience” (“Baptism in the Spirit?”), I was granted a gratuitous “spiritual connection” with each Person of the Blessed Trinity, which endures till today (even during tribulations). I understood at last that the text: “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you*” (2 Cor. 13:13) is not just a ‘theological statement’ but a most powerful blessing, which transmits (to a person of faith) a constant lived-experience of “*spirit and life!*” I understood that Christianity (and my life as a Jesuit priest) is not to be first of all a matter of external rules and rituals but of a *network of divine and human relationships*.

Since then, the conviction has never left me that for my Father-God, I am “a son *first*, a sinner *second*,” even when I sin from human weakness. This grace of experiencing “*the spirit of sonship*” (Rom.8:15) has never been revoked. I also now accept that for God’s plans for me to be fulfilled, my ego had first to be broken (through my exam failures?) and I had to be given a new mindset. Only then could I begin to appreciate the *gratuitous* character of salvation in Christ, that God’s abundant love for each of us is a free gift, and that we are saved *by grace*, through faith, and not by our merits.

Till today, my Cannonball Moment has brought me many *Ignatian graces!* Apart from a pioneering servant-leadership for over 30 years in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in India and worldwide (based in Rome for 8 years), I have had, over the recent 20 years in the Catholic Bible Institute, Mumbai, the joy of being used much in the pastoral-biblical ministry as a preacher and writer. (Benedict XVI designated me as “*peritus*” for the 2008 Synod of Bishops in Rome on the Word of God). By God’s amazing grace, I have (unworthily) proclaimed the Good News in over 80 countries to literally hundreds of thousands of people hungry for the word of God.

Moreover, everywhere I went, bishops and Superiors would confide to me that I was being invited by them to preach charismatic retreats to their clergy or communities *because I was a Jesuit!* “*Your talks are Ignatian!*” they would say. How prophetic then, was my Provincial, who, after I had finally passed those pitiful chemistry exams and got my Science degree with honours (April 1972), said to me after ordination in 1975, “Fio, we don’t want you anymore to become a Professor in our College! You have had a special spiritual experience – go share it with the world!” Truly, God writes straight on crooked lines. My three failures in the University exams were the “cannonball” opening me to a whole new world of God-experience and ministry!

Together with my birth to wonderful Catholic parents, and my Jesuit vocation in 1963, I consider my “Abba-experience” (1972) to be among the three most important graces I have received “for God’s greater glory.” It has brought me a consoling, ongoing relationship with each Person of the Blessed Trinity, and has made me experience the “infinite power” that St Paul asked for every Christian: “*...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is his infinite power in us who believe...*” (Eph 1:17-20). Praise Jesus!

The author is a well-known preacher and writer.

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# The First Railway Station in India with Vertical Gardens!



**E**nvironmental scientists visited and recorded the Air Quality Index (AQI) of Ludhiana and found it 275. But the AQI in the Office of Rohit Mehra at the India Revenues Service (IRS), was just 78!

Greenery has all but disappeared in Railway Stations, and plastic is littered everywhere. Ludhiana Railway Station found a way to increase greenery and reduce plastic waste, all in one shot – vertical gardens with plants in plastic bottles! The Ferozepur division of the Indian Railways, and the Income Tax department, Ludhiana, joined hands, and this initiative was inaugurated on Income Tax Day, 24<sup>th</sup> July.

The vertical garden was the brainchild of Rohit Mehra — an IRS official. He visited Singapore and was awestruck at how green and clean the citizens kept their country. They have plants planted on home terraces too - but in very costly containers. He decided to use plastic bottles instead - the kind used once and discarded.

He used plastic bottles for a vertical garden at his home, and then in his office. Mehra's office now sports 18,000 plastic bottles, up-cycled as pots for plants. Then he took off – other Govt. offices, Schools, Gurudwaras, and even hotels to house up-cycled plastic bottles with plants to make the surroundings greener and enhance their aesthetic appeal! So far, he has established over 75 vertical gardens in Punjab.

They have planted about 2 lakh plants, up-cycling the same number of plastic bottles!

The most frequented Gurudwara in Ludhiana, Gurudwara Dukh Niwaran Sahib, has a vertical garden of about 37,000 plants!

The vertical gardens are silently battling air pollution, when the entire city is struggling to breathe fresh air. "Where all the schools in the country have just two long holidays—summer and winter—my sons had a third one: a smoke holiday!" Mehra says. While this statement is indeed amusing, if you think more about it, you'll realize how disturbing it really is.



Photo Courtesy: The Logical Indian

"The vertical garden at the railway station is a very special project for us, as exactly a year ago on the Income Tax Day 2017, we launched a green plastic campaign from our office at Rishi Nagar by starting the work on the first vertical garden, using waste plastic bottles. Ever since the day, there has been no looking back," Jha said.

With imagination and creativity even a Government Official can initiate and sustain a wonderful way of re-cycling plastic bottles scattered all over in our cities.

*Adapted from TBI*



## THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

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# COVID TREKKING



She is a healthcare worker. Yes, of course, she is paid by the government. But she has gone beyond the normal duty to save five villages from COVID-19. Please meet Suman Dhebe, in Pune Zilla Parishad; she will inspire you. And you would feel immediately that you must do something in life. In July 2020, two villagers from a nomadic tribe in remote Mangaon from the Pune district of Maharashtra were diagnosed with COVID-19. A few days after recovery, they ran away from their location. Suman Dhebe had to find them for contact tracing.

She learned about the new location of the infected from other villagers, and climbed alone two mountains to trace them. After finding them, she isolated them from other people in the village until they recovered, for which she had to walk every day to monitor their recovery. From that time onwards, she made sure that all the five tribal villages, the population of 1,000 people, remained COVID-free throughout the second wave.

She treks everyday 13 kilometres to reach the five villages that have no roads, not even proper paths to climb up. Every day it takes ten hours to walk the distance. A bamboo stick is her only support and strength in the hard terrains. "It is my job and I have accepted it as my responsibility to fulfil it



Image Source: The Better India

with complete dedication," she tells The Better India. Unlike any government employee, she feels that she is part of the tribal community and can't abandon them at this difficult time. It's not the vaccination that saves the poor and the marginalised, but people like Suman remain the vaccination against infection. In fact, they are anti-bodies not only against the corona virus but also all the viruses.