

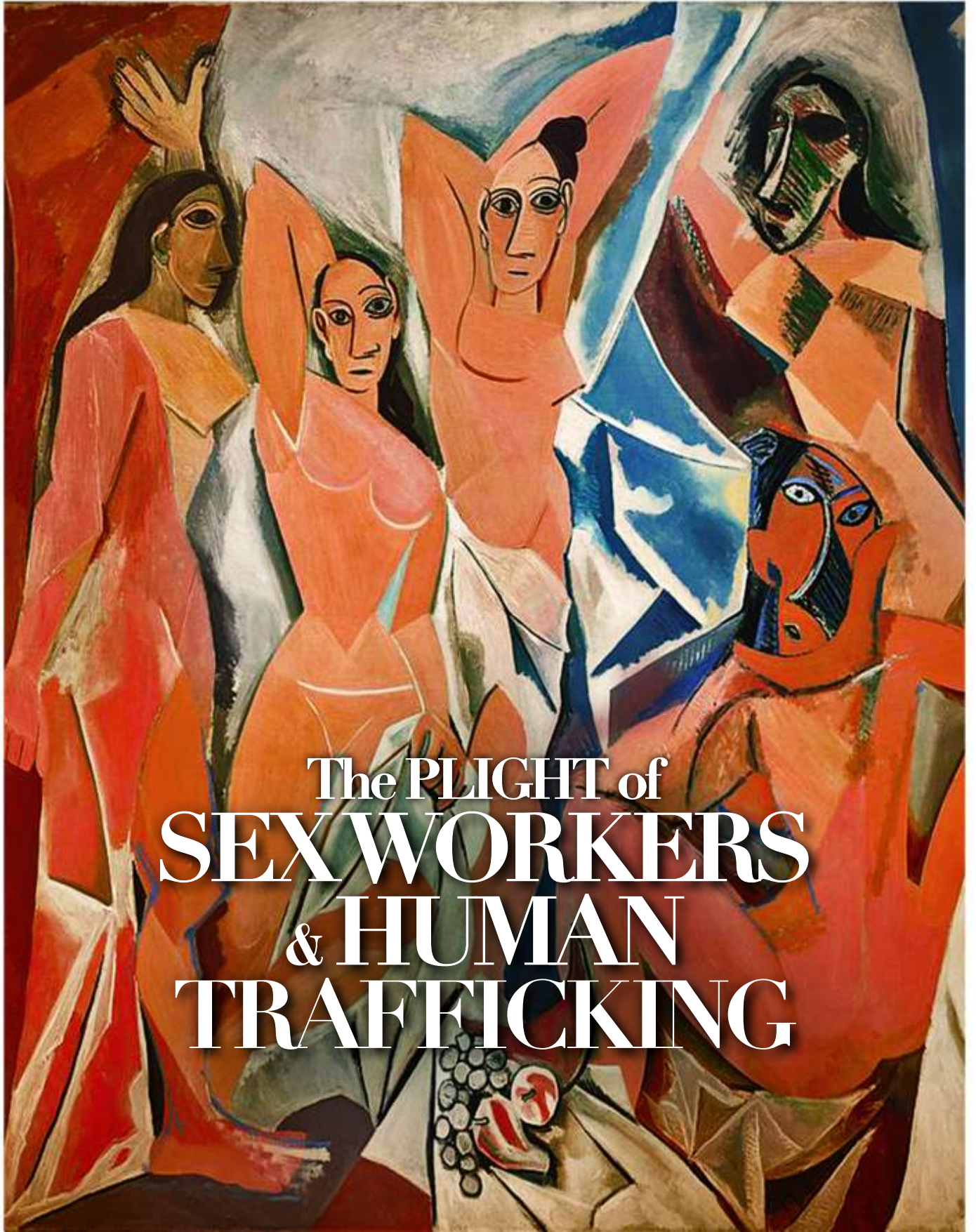
Bimonthly

# Pax Lumina



Vol. 2 | No. 1 | January 2021

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



The PLIGHT of  
**SEXWORKERS**  
& HUMAN  
**TRAFFICKING**

*There really can be no peace without justice.  
There can be no justice without truth.  
And there can be no truth, unless someone rises  
up to tell you the truth.*

*- Louis Farrakhan*

# Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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Vol. 2 | No. 1 | January 2021

# Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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Cover  
**Les Demoiselles d'Avignon**  
Painting by Pablo Picasso (1907)

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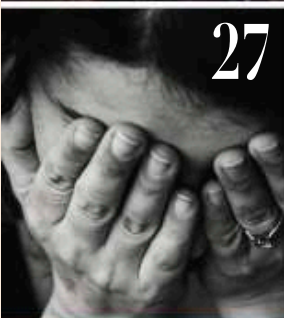
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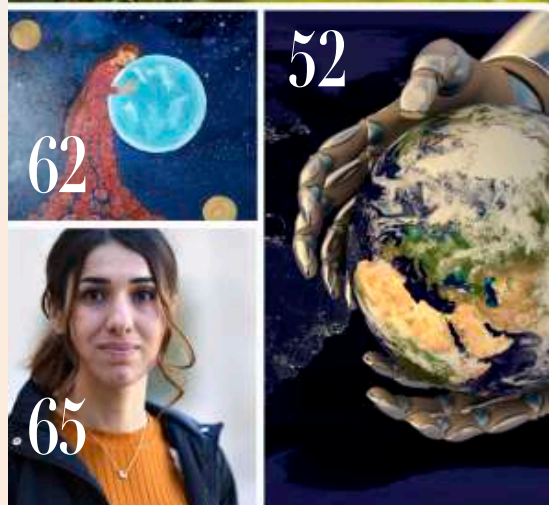
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### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# Sellers of Selves



## Editorial

**W**e have 'Les Femmes d'Alger' ('O Version O') on the cover this time. Picasso himself liked to call it 'the Brothel at Avignon'. Picasso did this painting in 1907 when he was only 25 years old. By then, he had already made a name for himself in the Paris avant garde circles with his blue period paintings and later, with the rose period ones. But this was a marked shift from his earlier paintings and, indeed, a new beginning for modern painting. Though partly cubist in style, the five sex workers are devoid of the allurements of flesh and clothes, normally associated with such women. They are a bit unreal and appear not to be part of this world while being in it. They are plain and do not possess any sophistication of colour or line. Picasso had many women in his life but he couldn't love any one of them. Actually, Picasso didn't possess love for anyone or anything other than art. But still, this painting shows he had great empathy for these women. He shows them as they are, as they see themselves rather than as others see them. Moreover, as a keen observer of Picasso's paintings can note all the women look like Picasso. What was he trying to say? Probably, "You are all part of me, part of us". Artists can possess such empathy. But in real life? That too empathy for the sex workers?

The condition of the sex workers has not changed, if not for the worse, from the time Picasso painted them. They remain where they are, in their ghettos, universally lit up in the red of the setting Sun stoically waiting for the darkness to swallow them. But there are lights of hope. Fr Jinu Eapen Kurien and Fr Manu Abraham have been living in Kamatipura, the red light area of Mumbai and working for the rehabilitation of the sex workers, their re-employment, the education of their children and their eventual migration to the main stream life. You will find Fr. Jinu's interview in the following pages.

Next, we have a veteran social worker giving us the heart-rending stories of human trafficking. Then we have Anuradha Koirala, the Mother Teresa of Nepal Telling us about her work in rescue and rehabilitation of sex workers in Nepal through her organization, Meiti Nepal. We also have the narration of the personal experiences of Sr. Sherlykutty Joseph of the Medical Mission Sisters with the sex workers in different cities of Kerala.

Many have raised doubts about the choice of articles in the Focus Section of the magazine. As a digital magazine with a global reach is it appropriate



*to be "purveyors of dirt" all the time, they ask. Our answer is simple. We are not into the business of cosmetic surgery of reality. So far as the dirt of exploitation, exclusion and intolerance exist in our midst, we feel it is our duty to bring it to our readers' notice without sensationalism, without hidden agenda. In fact, we do something more. We feature brave women and men who, despite all odds, have shown that change is possible, justice and peace are realizable. We just want to walk with the excluded in the hope of some meaningful action from those who are moved by the plight of these unfortunate people who are part of our society.*

*Actually, many consider these social tragedies to be just a result of demand and supply. The amoral economics of the human mind; what else to say! In fact, market is at issue in the farmers' agitation raging in New Delhi and the surrounding areas now which is covered in the magazine's national section. The farmers in Punjab, Haryana and some areas of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh want the Government Procurement Policy to continue undisturbed. But, the Government of India wants to open up the markets to the private sector through legislation. This was done without proper consultation with farmers. We present the different aspects of this problem and a kaleidoscopic view from different perspectives. We also have a report about the violence in Afghanistan and the threat this region poses to world peace while Prof. Carlos E. Vasco of Colombia shares his views on the challenges to peace at the global level. In 'Science and Peace,' Ted Peters from Berkeley, California takes a philosophical view of the relationship between science and peace whereas, the eminent Entomologist, Dr. S. Ignacimuthu SJ, gives a down-to-earth account of how science can empower peoples' lives.*

*'Art and Peace' column tells the story of a group of artists, CARP and their experiences during an on-line camp in these COVID times. They compare their efforts to the work of an oyster which converts a hurting intruder, a grain of sand, into a pearl.*

*We hope for your support, understanding and action.*

*Wishing you a healthy, peaceful and fruitful 2021,*

*Jacob Thomas  
Editor*



# Sex Workers AND Human Trafficking

*Prostitution is a serious, ugly, social phenomenon. Young women do this connected to the fact that they cannot survive any other way and that is a problem of society.*

- Vladimir Putin





## INTERVIEW

Fr. Jinu Eapen Kurien

navjeevancentre@yahoo.com

# A LAMP IN THE DARKNESS OF THE RED STREETS OF MUMBAI

*Pax Lumina 1(5) / 2021 / 09-13*

Interview with **Fr. Jinu Eapen Kurien**, Director, Navjeevan Centre, Mumbai which has been engaged in the ministry of rehabilitation of Commercially and Sexually Exploited Women and their children for over 25 years.

**Navjeevan Centre is an initiative of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church headquartered in Thiruvalla, Kerala State.**





**W**hat was the motivation of the Marthoma Church in starting this mission?

This is a fall-out of a Christmas programme organised by the Marthoma Youth Fellowship (Yuvajana Sakyam) in the Red light area of Kamathipura, Mumbai, in 1994. In fact, the mothers in Kamathipura had requested us to start a Centre to take care of their children. In response, and fired up by compassion towards their plight, a few youth and volunteers motivated by Adv. P.A. Cyrus decided to start the Centre. With the blessing of Rt. Rev. Dr. Issac Mar Philoxenos, then Episcopa of the diocese of Mumbai, the centre was given a formal organizational set up. Currently, the Centre is a Registered Trust managed by an executive committee and presided by the Bishop of the diocese of Mumbai. Most Rev. Dr. Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan is its Patron and Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos Episcopa the President.

**How many sex workers are there in Kamathipura?**

It is approximately 20-30,000. Now, there is a slight change in their modus operandi. They are supplied from the brothel houses to the suburbs and outskirts of Mumbai.

**Has the volume of trade increased over the years?**

Yes, the number has increased mainly due to human trafficking. The women come from almost all the states of India especially Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal. The major reason for their plight is economic deprivation (food, shelter, and security), and the lack of education over generations, augmented by pervasive poverty. It makes them vulnerable to the exploitations of the sex trade. Some are trapped in it. They are dehumanised and marginalised at every step, either by outsiders or, as in most cases, by their family members.

**Is the centre involved in rehabilitation work?**

First of all, rehabilitating mothers is a tough task. The primary step is confidence-building and instilling

hope in them. The next step is skill development and job training. Despite these hurdles, 10-15 people are trained annually and given placement. Some are assigned the job of taking care of the children. As we have limited facilities, we refer a few of them to other NGOs which are involved specifically in the rehabilitation of sex workers.

### **How are the children taken care of?**

We are running three 'Day and Night Care Shelters' at Kamathipura, Sindhigalli and Bhewandi. Children between one to six years are entrusted to our care by the mothers who are concerned about their welfare. The children are provided food, shelter and education. We had 65 children in our centres and now it has come down to 35. On account of the pandemic, half the children have gone back to their mothers. To take care of the children, there are foster mothers (we call them 'house parents'), social workers and tuition teachers. We send them for formal education in due course.

When a child is brought to the centre, we present them before the Child Welfare Committee, Mumbai, to ensure their safety and protection as their mothers are in the flesh trade. After this legal

procedure, they are given schooling up to 15 years.

Navjeevan Village is a residential home to 120 children (5-18 years), both boys and girls, to support their educational, physical and emotional needs. Eight cottages are set apart for their integral development. The village also has a State government-recognised school called 'Navajyoti' and a vocational training institute offering various trades to the youth of Navjeevan as well as nearby villages.

### **The Marthoma Church has been running the ministry for the past 25 years. Now some of the children under your care must be well placed?**

Yes, some of our children have passed their Bachelors Degree in Nursing (B Sc. Nursing) and are employed. Some are in social work. One of our students has obtained a Masters in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Work and will be joining for research shortly. A few of our children are working for the corporates.

We have Extension Homes at Kalyan, Mumbai, for the children who pass out



**T**he major reason for their plight is economic deprivation (food, shelter, and security), the lack of education over generations, augmented by pervasive poverty. **It makes them vulnerable to the exploitations of the sex trade. Some are trapped in it.**



**A**ctually, we are still in the dark regarding who is behind this multi-million dollar business. There is a strong lobby supported by money and muzzle power.

of Navjeevan village, and are yet to be settled. At present we have 15 of them with us. Of these, five of them are doing their Bachelors Degree at Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai, two will be completing their Diploma in Education, and five will be completing their Bachelors in Commerce.

### **Do you get any financial support from the government?**

As the Navjeevan Centre is affiliated to the State Social Welfare Board (ours is the only affiliated NGO in the RED light area) our counselling department receives an annual grant of Rs. 2.8 lakh. Apart from this, we have no other governmental support. We get generous contributions from individuals. Besides, we get funding from a German NGO which helps us to meet 30% of our expenditure and the rest 70% we are raising on our own.

### **Are there any threats for you and your ministry?**

Two priests, including myself and Fr Manu Abraham, are involved in this ministry, along with social workers. As you know, we are engaged in two levels of work. One is for the welfare of the children and the other is for the mothers. There is not much resistance as far as

the rehabilitation of senior mothers is concerned. However, rehabilitating the young and active sex workers is always under threat. The reason is obvious. But if a request comes, we will take up the case. Actually, we are still in the dark regarding who is behind this multi-million dollar business. There is a strong lobby supported by money and muzzle power.

### **What is the attitude of the police?**

The Mumbai police are in the know of things. There are cases when they have supported us in our rescue and rehabilitation work. Recently, with the support of the police, we rescued a girl before any lasting damage was done to her. Later, we came to know that she is the daughter of a police officer from Gujarat. In general, we get good support from the police.

### **Is there any possibility of a systemic change?**

One possibility is police rescuing them using force and taking them to shelter homes. But, what is the guarantee of their safety and security there? In the absence of alternative employment and income, they will resume their old profession.



### **How has your ministry fared during the COVID?**

Another concern is regarding their acceptance in their family and by society. Many of the sex workers are addicted to drugs and alcohol. Most of them are suffering from sexually transmitted diseases, besides viral infections and tuberculosis. Over and above, there is a judgmental approach and an unforgiving attitude towards them. Unless and until there is a drastic change in the mindset of society, this tragic system will continue to exist. The Navjeevan Centre vehemently condemns prostitution as a trade, but not the prostitutes.

### **Is there any organisation similar to that of yours?**

There may be other organisations. We take care of a child from his or her birth and follow it up throughout their lives. For example, Anil lost his mother when he was four years old. We took care of him and provided education. He completed his Masters in Business Administration and is now an employee of an American company. I blessed his marriage two years ago and now he is the father of a young child and the owner of a flat in Mumbai. This is something soul-satisfying.

All our centres are operational. We have given new admissions and things are functioning as usual. Concerning sex workers, there was some slack in the initial months of COVID. Later, Kamathipura returned to normal. We have been supplying provision kits to mothers since the outbreak of the pandemic. Besides, micro-credit facilities are also provided to them. We helped some of them in gaining self-employment. By the way, we cannot afford to take care of all in need. But, so far, we have been able to support around 300 mothers and their children.

### **You have been in this ministry for almost four years. Do you have any heart-rending experience to share with us?**

I remember meeting a mother at the initial phase of my ministry at Navjeevan. During our conversation, she apologised: “After all, I’m fallen. Will my prayers be heard?” That question still haunts me...

*(Interview by Dr. Jacob Thomas, Editor, PAX LUMINA)*

# Escaping through the Skin of Her Teeth

*Pax Lumina 1(5) / 2021 / 14-20*

**Offered a job as a babysitter in Qatar, the Mangalore native Jacintha Mendonca underwent months of torture before she was rescued.**

■ **I**n January 2016, Mr Mendonca, who lived in Mangalore, died of tuberculosis, leaving behind his wife Jacintha and three children. Jacintha searched for a job that could put food on the table and pay for the children's education.

In early 2016, Jacintha got in touch with Ramesh Powar (name changed) who recruited people for high-paying jobs in Qatar. With the help of Ramesh, she got her paperwork and documentation done. On June 10, 2016, she left for Mumbai.

What was supposed to be a train to Mumbai and a flight to Qatar turned into a month of continuous travel and detention. With none of her documents (she was told to send her passport



through Ramesh to Mumbai, where further formalities were pending), she depended on the people who took her from Mangalore to Mumbai via Goa-picking up a few other girls on the way.

From Mumbai, they moved Jacintha to Delhi, where she stayed in a women's hostel for a few days. There, she was told there had been a delay in procuring her visa, but she would be sent to Qatar as soon as possible.

After several days, Jacintha landed in Dubai airport with a visiting visa for only three months. She was tutored to say that she had come to visit her husband, who was an unskilled worker. She was whisked away to a large hall and made to sit with other women, some young, some old.

### **Like cattle for sale**

Inside the hall, human traffickers invited affluent individuals from around the Middle East to choose the women they wanted to purchase. The younger and more attractive women were sold into the sex trade, or forced into marriage, while the older ones were selected to be housekeepers, servants, and slaves. Jacintha was sold to a rich businessman named Abdul from the port town Yanbu, almost 1000 kms from Riyadh.

Abdul paid the traffickers Rs 5 lakhs to buy Jacintha. An amount of around Rs 30,000 was later given to Ramesh in Mangalore.

Jacintha realised something was wrong. Instead of being a babysitter for a young family in Qatar, she began work as a servant for a large family. This family comprised Abdul, the 66-year-old patriarch, his three wives, and their children.

The first wife had eight children, the second wife, 11, and the third wife, at just 22 years old, was already a mother to a toddler. Each of his wives had their bungalow, and all three houses were inside an enclosed compound. Jacintha was told to cook and clean for all these people, as well as a constant stream of visitors. At one point they even sent her off to the employer's father-in-law's house to work.

The first three months were uneventful. Despite working for over 18 hours a day, Jacintha was neither hurt nor abused.

Her situation changed for the worse when her visa expired. She was no longer protected by the local government. So Jacintha was trapped. Local law enforcement authorities could throw her into jail if they found her roaming



Inside the hall, human traffickers invited affluent individuals from around the Middle East to choose the women they wanted to purchase. **The younger and more attractive women were sold into the sex trade, or forced into marriage, while the older ones were selected to be housekeepers, servants, and slaves.**



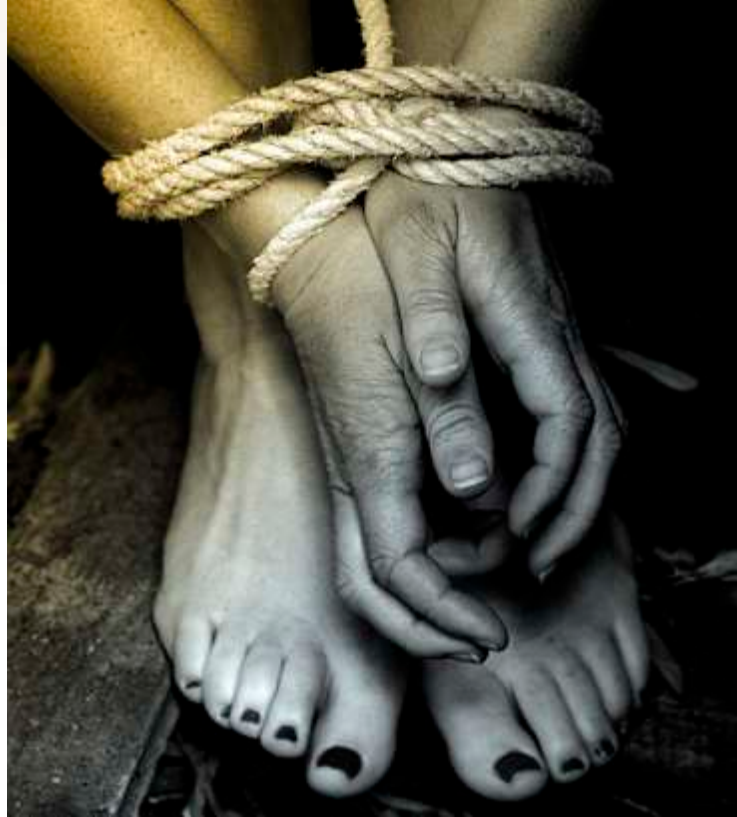
around the streets – both as a woman and an immigrant without valid identification and visa.

### **Beaten and broken**

Jacintha was physically and mentally abused. Made to sleep on the floor in the corner of the kitchen, Jacintha cooked and cleaned for the household at all times. She answered the door late at night and cooked for visitors.

She was violently awoken to cook for a guest at 3 am. If she faltered, she was beaten by her owner, and not provided with any medical care. Even the children were encouraged to lash out at Jacintha physically and she was powerless to defend herself.

With no discipline or care for basic hygiene, they would throw their belongings around, expecting Jacintha



to clean up after them. She was told to serve their food on large communal plates. Jacintha could only eat the leftovers. She refused and gradually became weaker and malnourished.

Jacintha could not contact her family or be given access to a telephone or the internet. Her first call to her family, in November 2016, was made by borrowing the cell phone of an Indian driver who worked in the compound. This phone call confirmed to her children she was alive, but was being tortured mercilessly.

The next time she made a call, Abdul chanced upon her, and snatched the phone and beat her – with her children listening in. Jacintha's youngest daughter, Vineeta, said she had nightmares because of hearing her mother's tortured screams.

After one particularly harsh round of physical abuse, Jacintha attempted to run away and found her way to a police station.

The police officers seemed to be in the pocket of the rich and the powerful. She was held in the station and Abdul



was called. He dragged Jacintha back to his compound. She was kicked violently, slapped, thrown against a wall, insulted and yelled at. He broke three of her ribs. Not surprisingly, Jacintha lost consciousness. She was left to lie where she fell. After three days of being comatose, she was provided medical attention.

### **Desperate times and desperate measures**

Back home, Jacintha's children Velita, 20, Vinroy, 19, and Vineeta, 17, floundered helplessly. In April 2017, they approached Dr Ravindranath Shanbhag, president of the Human Rights Protection Foundation (HRPF), at Vaikunta Baliga Law College, Udupi. In the small, brightly lit office, a large table occupied most of the room, with piles of files, papers, newspaper cuttings, and books.

"The three children looked tired and worn-out," recalled Dr Shanbhag. They told the HRPF team their mother was stranded abroad. They knew nothing about her whereabouts, her state of

health, and could not converse properly with her for months.

They told Dr Shanbhag that they had already approached the police, and an MLA, Ivan D'Souza, for help. However, no effective action had been taken.

Dr. Shanbhag and his team realised this was a classic human trafficking case. First, Jacintha had placed her trust in a stranger and had agreed to go with him, despite not knowing him through friends, neighbours, or through recommendations. Second, she was told that her employment would be as a babysitter for a Hindu family in Qatar, and not as a housekeeper elsewhere. Third, the lack of formal documentation regarding her appointment hinted at illegitimate work.

The first course of action was to approach local law enforcement authorities. Dr. Shanbhag, along with a few of his team members, took the three Mendonca children to the Deputy Commissioner of Police. The latter instructed them to file a complaint. After over three weeks of waiting and multiple attempts to reach



out to the police, they realised it was a dead-end. It was time to take matters into their own hands.

Dr Shanbhag contacted the Indian embassy in Riyadh. With Jacintha's passport details, he requested them to check if any individuals matching her particulars had entered the country on the 19th, 20th, 21st and 22nd of June. At the time, there were 16 flights every day from Mumbai to the Middle East. However, there were no records indicating her entry. They tracked the cell phone number that Jacintha had called her children from. It was discovered that she was in Yanbu.

### **Sent to her doom**

Ramesh was in contact with a man named Shabha Khan, in Mumbai,

who he assumed was the owner of the recruitment agency. Over a year, Ramesh recruited 13 people, including Jacintha from the Mangalore area alone.

Along with the HRPF team, the children located Ramesh. Pleading innocence, Ramesh said he was not aware of Shabha Khan's nefarious human trafficking ring. He volunteered to travel to Mumbai to confront the ringleader.

Ramesh went and later told Dr. Shanbhag and his team that Shabha was the successor of a well-established human trafficking business, which had been run by his mother for over 30 years.

The authorities had never confronted or caught his mother. She groomed her son to carry forward her dark legacy. This crime ring sent 400 girls every month to the Middle East.

By this time, Jacintha had contacted her children two more times. Dr. Shanbhag immediately told his contacts in Saudi Arabia to make enquiries.

### **Timely assistance**

Roshan Rodriguez, the then president of the Karnataka NRI Forum (Jeddah), came across a news story on the Daijiworld television channel about a woman stranded in a town close to where he lived. He immediately offered his help to rescue Jacintha.

As soon as he received sufficient information, Rodriguez contacted Jacintha's employer, Abdul. He said, "Abdul was not willing to talk to me. He reacted with anger and outrage that a stranger was interfering in his private affairs."

Rodriguez informed Abdul that if he didn't cooperate, he would face consequences. Finally, after six months,





**D**r. Shanbhag and his team realised this was a classic human trafficking case. First, Jacintha had placed her trust in a stranger and had agreed to go with him, despite not knowing him through friends, neighbours, or through recommendations. **Second, she was told that her employment would be as a babysitter for a Hindu family in Qatar, and not as a housekeeper elsewhere. Third, the lack of formal documentation regarding her appointment hinted at illegitimate work.**



Abdul demanded a replacement slave or reimbursement of Rs 5 lakh. He said there was nothing wrong with keeping a servant locked up in his house.

HRPF is a non-monetary organisation and has no reserve funds. All the members worked for free. They reached out to the Minister of External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj and the Protector General of Emigrants (India) M C Luther.

This proved to be fruitless, as the government did not want to give the money. Their reasoning was a logical one – if they paid Rs 5 lakh to rescue one woman stranded in a nation, they would be expected to help rescue hundreds,

or maybe thousands of people stranded all over the world. This was not a sustainable model.

Dr. Shanbhag conducted a press conference where he accused the police officers of Mangalore of not doing enough to ensure the safe return of one of their citizens. He publicly declared that despite giving the police force many details, they had not even made one arrest.

Ramesh was arrested later that week.

### **The turning point**

They received word from Rodriguez that the owner had relented slightly, and instead of paying Rs 5 lakh, they would have to pay Rs 3.5 lakh. Ramesh's father approached the HRPF. Dr. Shanbhag reassured the father that Ramesh would get out of jail soon. However, there was one request.

Dr. Shanbhag stated that he needed the father to pay Rs 5 lakh to an associate in Saudi Arabia to get Jacintha back.

The father agreed to the plan. An NRI account was opened. Roshan ensured that Abdul received Rs 3.5 lakh. The remaining money would be used to buy her air ticket.

However, there was a hurdle. Jacintha had no valid visa, and without that, she would be immediately thrown into jail.

### **Lucky break**

It was June, 2017. Muslims from across the world celebrated their holiest month, Ramadan, devoted to prayer, purification and charitable acts. Saudi Arabia declared an 'Immigration Amnesty'.

Under this scheme, illegal workers and undocumented immigrants would be



Jacintha

exempt from the consequences of the 'deportee fingerprint system' and would be allowed to return to the Kingdom if they followed legal methods of entry.

This meant that anyone violating Saudi residency laws, labour laws, or border security laws would not have to pay any fine or penalty. This scheme had worked efficiently in 2012; 2.5 million violators had left the country. This time, Jacintha would be one of them.

Dr. Shanbhag learnt of this scheme a mere eight days before the ending of the grace period. It was time for quick action. He learnt that individuals employing this scheme would have to pay a one-time fine of Rs 37,000 and spend one night in jail. Immediately, he contacted Roshan, who paid the money to the government. She spent one night in jail.

The next morning, she was taken to the airport and flew back to India.

About eight hours later, Jacintha was greeted by her three children. She was nothing more than skin and bones, and her bruises were visible. Her demeanour was muted; however, Jacintha experienced an overwhelming relief of being back around with people who cared about her.

Greeting her at the airport, Dr. Shanbhag reassured Jacintha that she was safe and that he hoped she would live a happy life henceforth.

Jacintha was admitted to the A.V. Baliga hospital. For 15 days, she was treated for hyperacidity, malnourishment, a possibility of tuberculosis, and was given general care for her bruises from the beatings she received. She expressed her immense gratitude to Dr. Shanbhag and the HRPF team.

## Happy ending

When she recovered, Jacintha, as well as the HRPF team, spoke at a press conference, detailing the events of the case. Today, her life has improved manifold. She has found a job at a nearby college. Her eldest daughter, Velita, is now happily married. Her son, Vinroy, has found a well-paying job and lives with his mother and younger sister Vineeta, who is now pursuing her undergraduate degree. Ramesh, released from jail, remains out of the spotlight now. Having faced the consequences of being entangled in something nefarious, his life now is focused on his family and his new bride.

The publicity that this case received had a positive outcome. A woman, in the same predicament as Jacintha was, was about to board a train from Mangalore to Mumbai with a stranger. That woman had sent her passport beforehand and was expecting to work as a babysitter for a family in Dubai. She recognised these exact details from Jacintha's case and realised what she was getting into. Immediately, she contacted Dr. Shanbhag. He told her not to embark on the journey. There was no need to get her passport back, he said, as it is easier to get a new passport than it is to be rescued from a potentially fatal situation.

The members of the HRPF continue to work tirelessly to provide justice and respite for the underprivileged and the under-represented. In their work, they encounter ceaseless oppression and injustice, and yet they remain hopeful, tackling each case with enthusiasm and earnestness.





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# The *Modus Operandi* of Human Trafficking

**The most urgent need is to pass  
legislation to establish rehabilitation  
centres for the victims.**



**T**here are agents in tribal and under-developed areas in the North-Eastern States of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Assam, Manipur, as well as coastal Karnataka, Kerala and Goa.

Every agent will get Rs 25,000 per victim. Each agent sends 25 to 30 girls per year. It is estimated that about 300 girls are human trafficked every year from coastal Karnataka only.

The agent, somehow, has to convince the girls that there are attractive job opportunities to work as a domestic help in the Middle East. Once they get convinced that a salary of Rs 20,000 to 30,000 can be earned, apart from food and stay, they are eager to go. Arrangements are made by the agent for the girls to travel by train or by bus to Mumbai.

In Mumbai, they stay at hostels. Depending upon the demand, the main agent at Mumbai arranges air travel either to Dubai or Abu Dhabi. Once they reach Dubai or Abu Dhabi, there is an auction. Factors such as age, capacity to work and the language spoken is taken into account. The next week, tourist visas will be obtained from the respective consulates. During the interview at the consulate, the girls are told to tell they would like to visit their husbands working in the country. Once the visas are obtained the victims are shifted to their destination.

For the first three months - the duration of their visiting visa - the victims are looked after well by their 'owners' because they can go to the nearest police station and report they are being cheated. Once the visa expires, their overstay will be considered as an offence and they can get arrested and put behind bars. Therefore, they automatically



become 'slaves' and will be at the mercy of the 'purchaser'.

They have to do all household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning the utensils and the floor, from early morning till 11 pm. Even after the working hours, they have to serve food to the employer, family members and guests whenever they return home. After all the family members have finished their supper, the leftover food can be eaten by the slaves.

Victims are also used for sex by the males in the family and their guests. Once the employer comes to know that victims are of no use, they will either be killed or will be taken to the hospital where their organs will be harvested and sold. Finally, the victim's dead body will be disposed of, in the sea.

In case the girls are caught by the police, they will be imprisoned and will face similar consequences. If the victims are rescued and brought back to India, usually the family members will not accept them easily. The family fears they may be cast out by their community.

There are no hostel facilities in India to take care of these victims under the Children and Women Welfare Ministry. They cannot get married easily. So, they end up in red-light areas like Grant Road, in Mumbai where they spend their life as sex workers.

The most urgent need is to pass legislation to establish rehabilitation centres for the victims.

**(Dr. Shanbhag is the president of the Human Rights Protection Foundation at Mangalore)**

# TRAFFICKING FACT SHEET

**25 Million** adults and children suffering from labour and sex trafficking all over the world

Trafficking generates **\$150 billion** for traffickers each year



**64%**

victims today are in labor slavery

**17%**

victims today are in forced marriage slavery



**19%**

victims today are in sex slavery



**72%** of slavery victims today are women and girls



**28%** of slavery victims today are men and boys



**25%**

of slaves today are children **under age 18**



## A Global Problem



Sources

U.N. International Labor Organization

# Commercial and Sexual Exploitation in Nepal

An interview with **Anuradha Koirala**,  
founder of Maiti Nepal, an organisation that protects  
Nepali women and children from human trafficking.



**W**hat are the economic  
and social factors  
behind human  
trafficking?

Poverty and limited access to education, lack of job opportunities and livelihood prospects are the prime factors for human trafficking. Most of the victims are girls and women from every nook and corner of Nepal. Traffickers lure the naive girls under the pretence of a good job or a better life and, eventually, they are trafficked internally or to India or the Middle East for commercial sexual exploitation.

**Do cultural and religious  
practices have a role?**

Nepal is a country with a deeply ingrained patriarchal structure. It has a religion that places women below men. The practice of male domination and female subordination has been the culture for ages. There have been some changes, but it is limited to a few cities. Even today a woman's access to social, economic, and the political arena is limited. Further, women's educational attainments are lower than those of men, so they are less aware of human trafficking and its consequences.





## Dedicated to the cause

**A**nuradha Koirala, lovingly called Diju (elder sister) founded Maiti Nepal in 1993 to protect women and children who are being trafficked within and from Nepal for commercial sexual exploitation. Prior to this, she had spent more than 20 years teaching children at various schools around Kathmandu.

After establishing Maiti Nepal, she set up a home so that she could provide an abode to those who have nowhere else to go. Now, Maiti Nepal has three prevention homes, 11 transit homes, two hospices and a formal school. More than 1000 children are receiving direct services from Maiti Nepal every day.

There are awareness campaigns, community sensitisation programmes, rescue operations, apprehending traffickers, providing legal support to the needy, women empowerment programmes, and providing antiretroviral therapy to children and women infected by HIV.

Anuradha has received 38 national and international awards in recognition of her work. These include the Prabal Gorkha Dakshin Bahu Medal, Nepal, 1999, Trishaktipatta Award, 2002, Best Social Worker of the Year Award, Nepal, 1998, German UNIFEM Prize, 2007, Queen Sofia Silver Medal Award, 2007, and The Peace Abbey, and Courage of Conscience, 2006. Due to her continuous struggle, the government of Nepal now recognises September 5 as Anti-Trafficking day. Anuradha is a former Assistant State Minister of Women, Children and Social Welfare.

In 2010, she was declared as a CNN Hero. Mother Teresa has always been her largest source of inspiration.

## What happens to the victims?

They are sexually exploited. Minors are given hormone shots to accelerate sexual maturity and are forced to entertain more than 10 men in a day. If they show reluctance, they are punished physically. Many girls and women are prone to sexually transmitted diseases.

## What is the level of awareness of these victims about human rights?

The victims' level of awareness about human rights is nominal. They are barely aware of their fundamental rights. They are not aware that the buying and selling of human beings is a heinous crime.

## What is their attitude towards rescue operations?

While conducting rescue operations it is very hard to gain the trust of the survivors as in many cases they have been sold by their close relatives. Also, the brothel-owner instils a negative message about Nepal and its rescue mission. So, at times, it becomes very hard for us to change their minds. But, after individual, group and peer counselling, healing therapies and the interaction

 After individual, group and peer counselling, healing therapies and the interaction with many survivors with similar or more horrendous stories, **we gain their trust and bring them back to normalcy.** 



with many survivors with similar or more horrendous stories, we gain their trust and bring them back to normalcy.

### **What has the government of Nepal done?**

The government has enacted the Human Trafficking and Transportation Control Act, 2007. It has instituted a comprehensive legal framework to combat human trafficking. It has also endorsed four key policy documents in 2012 that includes the national plan of action against trafficking targeting the children and women, minimum standards for victim care and protection, standard operating procedures for rehabilitation centres and guidelines for psycho-social counselling. Despite the laws, human trafficking has increased.

### **What has been the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of the victims and their children?**

The lockdown has put human trafficking survivors at higher risk. As we were talking about the migrant workers of Gulf countries and stranded ones at the Nepal-India border we were not prioritising the trafficking survivors from Nepal who have no food and cannot meet their minimum basic needs.

Further, COVID-19 has been a bane to the girls and women working in the entertainment sector. Their life was never easy as the entertainment sector is a fertile ground for the traffickers. Some women had to face harassment and were forced to

do unethical work. Some were thrown out because they were reluctant. Also, their pay was nominal, but somehow it was helping them to make both ends meet. However, the lockdown has cast a shadow in their lives as they have lost their jobs. Their families were on the verge of hunger as they had no foodgrains left. To ease their battle for survival Maiti Nepal initiated the relief distribution campaign and reached 500 beneficiaries. They were offered basic necessities that included foodstuffs and hygiene kits for a few months.

### **What is the government doing?**

At the initiative of the local government of Bardiya district, a women-friendly quarantine was made. Food packages were distributed at the initiative of the local level government to wage earners and needy people.

The government initiated Holding Centres and Quarantine Centres at the central and municipality level. The Covid Crisis Management Centre took the lead at the central level and the District Disaster Relief Committee helped at the municipality level.

Earlier, the Polymerase Chain Reaction test was limited to the government-run labs only but lately, it has also allowed private labs to conduct the test.

*(Interview by **Jomon Jose SJ**, Research Scholar in Education, Trnava University, Slovakia)*





Interview with **Sr. Sherlykutty Joseph, MMS,**  
on her mission among  
the sex workers in Kerala, India.

**1** **What is the nature of your work? Could you share with us how you got inspired to work for the sexually exploited?**

I was assigned to be the Co-ordinator of PRANA (People's Response to AIDS, Narcotics and Alcohol), initiated by the Medical Mission Sisters, a Catholic missionary Congregation of which I am a member. Responding to the signs of the times is a priority in our mission. Accordingly we launched PRANA at a time when even AIDS Cell had not yet commenced.

My work has been mostly in Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulam but for a period of 5 years in Peru where the nature of involvement was different. In Ernakulam, initially, I was with the Claretians, in one of their projects. Then I moved to Thiruvananthapuram and was Woman/Child Coordinator with Trivandrum Social Service Society (TSSS). And now I am working on a Government project - AIDS Control Cell - as ICTC Counsellor in Fort Kochi as well as in the Medical College, Kalamassery, Kochi.

Though our activities are mostly aimed towards HIV positive cases, we also deal with all kinds of problems associated with Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Tuberculosis, etc. Out of 700 to 800 reference cases we receive in a month, not more than two or three are HIV positive.

There are two types of references: Client-Initiated Clients and Provider-Initiated Clients. While the first includes Female Sex Workers, Male Sex Workers, Truck Drivers etc., the latter includes references from hospitals, diagnostic centres etc. Those using drugs are relatively more in Fort Kochi.

## 2. How do people end up in sex work?

While dealing with them, initially, these victims are a bit reluctant to open up. Later, they will cooperate. Usually, persons with financial difficulties are the ones who end up in this category. Sometimes, their husbands may be sick or an alcoholic or drug addict. Or it could be due to a sudden financial crisis. However, those who get into this work seeking pleasure are relatively very few.

At times, women work door to door selling textiles or other utility items. The husbands who are left alone at home may get in to relationship with these saleswomen and they may continue seeking pleasure. There are localities in the city where apartments are hired for the convenience of sex workers.

## 3. How is the rehabilitation work going?

Rehabilitation through counselling often meets with opposition from other umbrella organisations with vested interests. Young women in their teenage who are helped to get out of the ditches are often blocked by them alleging that their income and livelihood will be badly affected. The explanation that rehabilitation is meant to rescue these women from their unfortunate situations seem to fall on deaf ears. Client load is foremost for these organisations.

Often, the Police would counter these sex workers by night and would be rescued by their organisations by the day. However, most of the religious organisations like that of ours usually do not get into the law and order part of the issue. However, there are some organisations such as *Swantham* in Ernakulam, which play a supportive role in the legal process.



#### **4. Are there successful cases of rehabilitation?**

Rehabilitation of these people is not an easy task. From this work, they are not able to pay off their debts. There is also risk in assigning them for domestic work. First of all, the families may not accept them, given their background. Second, once exposed to the pleasure of sex, they may try and seek it out elsewhere too. It is to be noted that most of them are careful about safety measures as they use condoms and seldom are HIV positive.

#### **5. Does the government organize any programmes for their welfare?**

The Government conducts a lot of training programmes like soap-making, tailoring, etc. to help them out. But the organisational umbrella with vested interest will not encourage them mainly to maintain their business.

Legally, the Government does not approve prostitution/sex work. Nevertheless, its existence is quite obvious. NACP (National AIDS Control Programme) has many an opening for those who would like to discard their old ways. But often, a lack of interest of the officers concerned becomes a hindrance. As often, things are taken for granted in the government set up. They are often more bothered about the quantity of the programmes rather than the qualitative outcome.

#### **6. Have you ever faced any criticism in your mission?**

There have been criticisms both from within and without. When I began my work among the affected men and women, I was advised by some in the Church leadership, not to distribute condom personally. I promised not to distribute it, but resolved to provide it.

Questions were also raised about my reluctance to go to the rich, where too such malaise is rampant. It was pointed out that there was no dearth of these things happening in star hotels. I countered these criticisms with the fact that the rich take adequate safety measures and protect themselves.

#### **7. What are the areas of concern at present?**

It is a hard reality that in the IT field which works round the clock, there is a mushrooming of this menace. In fact, it is a complex situation, ushering in all kinds of hypocrisy and cheating leading to several family problems including divorce. Compared to the olden times, today's women too explicitly seek sexual satisfaction.

Another concern is the problems associated with the identity of the MSMs (Male Sex with Males) and Transgenders who are involved in sex work. I have come across a lot of college students and teenagers who are HIV positive and also those who seek abortion. This is a clear indication of premarital sex.

All the more heart-rending is the exploitation among the sex workers. There are elderly women who are no more active workers but work as touts and middle persons, who would, say for example, collect Rs 3000/- but pass on just Rs 1000/- to the actual worker. Such injustice is widespread.

#### **8. How do you feel after undertaking this challenging mission?**

I am happy about my involvement and I consider this mission God-given. I am grateful for the support from my Congregation and thankful for this opportunity of sharing this with Pax Lumina.

*(Interview by  
Binoy Jacob SJ & Devassy Paul SJ)*

A photograph of a man in a light-colored shirt and dark shorts, standing in a muddy field, guiding two oxen as they plow. The oxen are harnessed together and pulling a wooden plow. The background shows a lush green landscape with trees and a small white building under a cloudy sky. The overall scene is rural and traditional.


# National Affairs

*Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.*

- Benjamin Franklin

# Farmers' Protest

**M**ost farmers demand the withdrawal of these new legislations. They believe that these bills will privatise the agricultural system and make them vulnerable to corporate exploitation. **And this is being regarded as an attack not only on the peasantry but also on all the working class.**

  
**T**he country has been in turmoil for the past few weeks because the farmers are agitated over the three farm laws, namely the Farmers (Empowerment & Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, the Essential Commodities Act (Amendment) Bill, and the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill.

Farmers from North India, spearheaded by those from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, have braved tear gas and water cannons in the cold. Millions of them are on the streets and the national capital of New Delhi is under siege.

Under these new laws, as Prime Minister Modi argues, the agricultural system will be streamlined and farmers will have more freedom to sell their goods at any price directly to private businesses, rather than having to sell their products through an

auction known as the 'mandi system,' which provides a Minimum Support Price (MSP). However, most farmers are demanding the withdrawal of these new legislations. They believe that these bills will privatise the agricultural system and make them vulnerable to corporate exploitation. And this is being regarded as an attack not only on the peasantry but also on all the working class.

The protests are a crucial test of Modi's ability to reform India's vast agricultural sector, accounting for nearly 15 per cent of the country's \$2.9 trillion economy and employing about half of its 1.3 billion people.

## Farmers' Concerns

North Indian farmers supply 95 per cent of their surplus rice and wheat production to the Regulated Market Yards known as Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMC) as compared to the national average



of 10 per cent. Annually, Punjab and Haryana farmers receive about \$10.9 billion in MSPs and see it as a critical means of finance for small-scale farmers (85 per cent of farmers nationwide hold less than one hectare of land). Traditionally, the MSP has been a key revenue for local and State governments, as well as for intermediaries operating in the APMC.

Protesters are concerned that legislation will allow the private sector to buy products below MSP, tie farmers to unfair contracts, and allow companies to store commodities that will create large monopolies. Besides, the Punjab and Rajasthan governments, both led by the opposition Congress Party, have each passed counter-legislation intended at maintaining the MSP and limiting any trade outside government markets. But, the Modi administration has given assurances that the government will not remove the MSP.

Since the big agribusiness and private/corporate buyers have a monopoly in private markets, they decide the terms and conditions of purchase from the farmers. The small and marginal peasants, who lack the power to bargain or negotiate and compete in private markets, fear that the new laws will lead to the dismantling of the MSP and the APMC, which will further lower the price of the produce. This will inhibit the freedom of farmers: they will become more dependent on corporations and private farms.

Large corporations can dominate the market by driving down prices and diminishing any advantage farmers had at setting their prices. This will add to India's growing

unemployment and debt among the farmers. The new laws disproportionately affect small landholders who lack the resources to recover from losses, lack the influence to negotiate on their behalf, and have the fear of losing their land to private firms.

The farmers' protests have put the government in a quandary because farmers and soldiers are iconic figures in India; agriculture being the main occupation of Indians since prehistoric times. The country also owes a debt of gratitude to the farmers who, after the Green Revolution, made the country self-sufficient in food, cultivated enough foodgrains to feed the ever-growing Indian population and generated a big stockpile.

Presently, Food Corporation of India godowns are holding 2.7 times our annual requirement. This is not a one-off phenomenon; as on 1 April 2020, foodgrain stocks stood at 73.85 million tonnes which is three-and-a-half times the reserve requirement of 21.04 million tonnes.

It is also true that the present situation needs to be changed, to improve the economic conditions of the agricultural sector and the farmers, and this requires systematic changes along with legislation. This need has arisen because the present situation cannot solve the problems of the farmers. The disparity in income and economic status between farmers and non-agricultural workers is increasing. It is clear that farmers' incomes need to be increased, and this is not possible based on the income from crops. The likely solution is to reduce the cost of producing crops so that the profits can be increased.



# Various Views

Day by day, the movement is getting bigger. Observers were surprised by the organisational strength and solidarity of the farmers. It is a concerted and collective action of farmers' organisations across ideologies, including small, medium, marginal and large farmers. It has been successful in building its support base across rural and urban classes, even across sectors such as trade unions, activists, students, teachers, some political parties and others.

According to eco-feminist Vandana Shiva, many women in Punjab seek economic independence from agricultural work, and if unemployed, women can be susceptible to violence and sexual assault. Additionally, corporate control over farms will lead to the ecological destruction of rural lands. These farmers hold cultural, and generational knowledge about how to cultivate and tend to the land that corporations will only look at to maximise profits. Furthermore, farmers were already experiencing high suicide rates in recent years. As conditions worsen, there are alarming implications that these rates will rise. These new laws are at the expense of our earth, and the farmers.





## Withdraw unconstitutional laws

- P. Sainath

**E**minent journalist, P. Sainath believes the farmers were right in demanding the repeal of the laws and he would not want to be a "party to death" by any panel formed to resolve the crisis. The operative part of the APMC was barely four pages. "When the government says it is willing to make amendments to 12 of the 14 or 15 points of criticism the farmers have levelled against them, it is accepting how seriously flawed these laws are. It seems pointless to amend 80-90 per cent of such flawed documents (which many, including serious legal minds, are calling unconstitutional). These are sweeping bits of legislation by the Centre on what is, under the Constitution, a State

subject. Can you amend unconstitutional laws? No, you withdraw them," he said.

From 2018, he said, the crisis has gone beyond the agrarian and run berserk. "We need a special session of Parliament to discuss the agrarian crisis and related issues," said Sainath. "The need for this is greater now than ever before. The farmers have also been calling for a special session. If that happens, India should inaugurate a practice in our Parliament that is common in the legislatures of some Democracies - a system of public hearings. Let those who have suffered the crisis most also speak for themselves on the floor of Parliament."

He said one Bill that posits the APMC is showing that it is some sort of hideous monopoly from which you are liberating the enslaved farmer. "You have another one on contracts, in which the bill is about written agreements but nowhere mandates written contracts. So, it makes that voluntary," said Sainath. "Now, the idea the APMC is controlling everything, is so stupid, simply because the bulk of the transactions of marketable surplus and agriculture have always been outside the gates of APMC; most farmers – the vast majority, it varies from region to region, park their produce at the farm gate because they have already got 'pre-contracts', unwritten contracts with commission agents, with big creditors, so they are anyway releasing there; they haven't realised even the MSP that is possible at the APMC."

Sainath continued: "What we are doing with this law, is that we are exponentially expanding the reality of Non-State monopolies. So, if 98% of transactions were taking place in the APMC and you say I want to break that... you know, just check how many farmers access MSP, how many of them can, because you have not been able to break farm indebtedness, you have not been able to break the hold of private profiteers over farm produce. Most farmers do not control the price of their produce anyway."



## In a democracy, you cannot bulldoze your way through

- Shashi Tharoor

Hitting out at the Centre over the farmers' protest, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said, "The government has failed the nation and the farmers. Why did they pass the laws in such haste without consulting the stakeholders? The winter session should have taken place normally by the third week of November."

When asked what is the way forward, the Congress MP said, "The government should give assurances to the farmers. The farmers are insisting the laws be withdrawn. If technically they (government) feel they can suspend its application for now pending discussions, let them suspend it, and convene Parliament. The Parliament has the authority to withdraw the laws; they can also talk to the unions. The government should realise that in a democracy, you cannot bulldoze your way through. We stand for democracy and the rights of the people."



## The government does not want to bring MSP into the legal framework

- Medha Patkar

Medha Patkar said the paradigm behind the three Acts was the 'corporatisation of agriculture'. "These will create new landlords," she said. "The laws give concessions to the agents of corporates. The present system has its checks and balances, but the new laws will introduce the agents of big corporates as official agents. The freedom to stock and hoard will mean farmers will not get their due prices. They will be forced to move from food to cash crops. So, the new laws will not only affect procurement but production, too. The mechanisation of agriculture would affect the employment of labourers."

The government and a section of media, she said, are trying to divide by invoking China, Pakistan, and Khalistan but they will not succeed. "The government had reservations about talking to some groups," she said. "They might not be present during the meeting with the ministers but they are very much part of the alliance. This is how the movement takes shape. They (owner-cultivator) are not as big as the Ambanis and Adanis. In our calculation, everybody's share should be taken into account but the government doesn't want to bring the MSP into the legal framework."



## 90 per cent of the farmers sell their produce to private buyers

- Ashok Gulati

Professor Ashok Gulati, a well-known agricultural economist, pointed out that there has been a communication gap between the government and the farmers. "It's unfortunate there is so much opposition to these laws. My take on this is they have not been communicated properly to the farmers," he said. On the question that the small farmer might get exploited by private buyers under the new laws, Professor Gulati claimed that more than 90 per cent of the farmers sell their produce to private buyers. "Only six per cent have gained from the MSP even though it has existed since 1965," he said, quoting the Shanta Kumar panel report and the 70th situation assessment survey of the National Sample Survey Office.

Prof. Gulati said that MSP was just an indicative price and not a legal one. And it has been so since it was introduced. He explained that under the MSP system, only the government is mandated to buy at the MSP whatever quantity it purchases. Private buyers could not be forced to buy at that price.



## We should listen to the farmers

- Subramanian Swamy

In view of the ongoing struggle of farmers, BJP MP, Subramanian Swamy said, "I am in favour of reforms, but this bill was passed in great haste, without consulting anyone. MSP is a vital thing. When you frame the rules, include it. We should listen to the farmers. The government should take a soft position and not make it a prestige issue like they are now doing."

Dr. Swamy said the farmers need to be empowered and given the freedom to choose their buyers. He added that legislation would result in favourable outcomes, but the rules should take into account the specific concerns of the States. The reforms in the agricultural sector were the need of the hour and farmers will realise its benefits in the next few years, but he stressed that, farmers being the major stakeholders, they should be consulted and their concerns about MSP alleviated.



## The aim is the maximisation of profits

- Sitaram Yechuri

“The bourgeois-landlord ruling classes in India, using neo-liberal economic reforms, have been consolidating its efforts for maximisation of profits,” said CPI (M) leader, Sitaram Yechuri. “The loot of national assets, the large-scale privatisation of the public sector, the handing over of all public wealth like mines, and public services to the private sector accompanied by abrogation of labour rights are a part of this process.”

Yechuri said the ongoing historic struggle of the peasantry has sharply brought out the efforts by the Indian ruling classes to acquire corporate control over agriculture for the maximisation of profits.

(Prepared by **Manu Achuthath**,  
Senior Subeditor, Ezhuthu Magazine)






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# WE ARE GRAPPLING WITH A FOOD MOUNTAIN

One of the biggest misconceptions across a large section of our society, and even among a number of our graduates is that India is severely short of food production. Nothing can be farther from the truth. After the Green Revolution and the White Revolution, India has a food surplus. School and college textbooks may not have changed much from the 1960s. In those days, when we spoke about a food crisis, it always meant a food deficit crisis. Today, when we speak about a food crisis, it means a food surplus crisis, and very many are still not aware of the change on the ground.



**A** recent RBI report said India has now reached a stage where surplus foodgrain management has become a major challenge. **So, if India's farmers are such world champions, how does one reconcile that with all that farm distress and suicides?**



India is one of the world's largest producers of milk, sugarcane, pulses, cereals, vegetables, fruits, fish, livestock, poultry and much more. If anybody has taken the 'Make in India' campaign to heart, it is the farmers, even before the slogan was coined.

Our godowns are full and overflowing. We don't know what to do with our milk, rice, sugarcane or wheat and many other commodities. From as far back as the 1990s, India has been a net food exporter. And this year, that food mountain has assumed Himalayan proportions, with a record of 297 million tonnes of foodgrain. Add to that the horticulture output of 320 million tonnes, plus milk, fish, poultry, and livestock. If export performance is a barometer for judging international competence, our farmers are right up there.

In the list of the world's leading agriexporters, India is ranked eighth. It is a leader in

agriexports while in most other global rankings, from the per capita GDP to the happiness index, on which we are ranked among the last 10 in the world, India comes towards the bottom. In contrast, our farmers are right on top. Our agri exports have grown from a mere \$4 billion in the early 2000s to \$39 billion.

In 1943, India experienced the Bengal famine, which killed two million people and here we are in 2021 grappling with a food mountain. So much so that even the Reserve Bank of India has said salaam to the Indian farmers. A recent RBI report said India has now reached a stage where surplus foodgrain management has become a major challenge. So if India's farmers are such world champions, how does one reconcile that with all that farm distress and suicides?

There are two reasons. First, India's farm sector is easily the most overstaffed in the world. And by extension, having the lowest productivity. Around 60% of Indians depend on agriculture for a livelihood. That is 780 million people or one-tenth of the world population. For comparison, the United States had about 60% in agriculture at the end of the 19th century. In the 100 years of the 20th century, they could get most of them out of farming, moving them into industry and services. So, the US now has only 2% of its population in agriculture.

India in 2021 is where the US was 121 years ago. We still have 60% of our people in agriculture, and they contribute 15% to the GDP. No major modern nation can have either 60% of people working on the farms or agriculture contributing as much as 15% to the GDP. For comparison, China has 7% of its GDP coming from agriculture and given China's \$14 trillion economy, that adds up to about half of India's GDP.

Second, the issue of post-independence governments wanting to always keep food prices as low as possible. Food security has



been the watchword for successive Soviet-thinking, socialist-minded governments for decades. So the farmers of India have been reduced to labouring on the fields to produce cheap food for Indians, meaning the urban residents.

So whenever potato or onion prices rise, the government intervenes and brings down the prices and India loses out every time. But when prices fall, there is no such intervention and farmers are forced to throw their onions and tomatoes on the roads and pour the milk in the gutters. So when onion prices shot up recently, the same Indian government that says it's going to free farmers from the control regime immediately imposed an export ban on onions because it has to keep urban Indians happy. And so the farmers lost out on an export opportunity and getting good prices.

The government is vague even when it says it is freeing farmers from the control regime. The very day after the bills were passed, the Prime Minister said the mandis (markets) would stay and the MSP or the minimum support price regime would also remain. Even more shocking is India's refusal to let its farmers use the latest technology or seeds.

Our leaders are all the time talking about going hi-tech, but see what's happening on the ground. A few years ago, a marginal farmer in Haryana planted Bt Brinjal in his plot. His entire crop was uprooted because he didn't have the permission to plant that particular variety. And who has to

Also, note that the government is vague even when it says it is freeing farmers from the control regime. The very day after the bills were passed, the Prime Minister said the mandis (markets) would stay and the MSP or the minimum support price regime would also remain. **Even more shocking is India's refusal to let its farmers use the latest technology or seeds.**

give permission? The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), which was formed in 2009. The GEAC met some 35 times between 2011 and 2021 but has yet not decided whether to permit growing of Bt brinjal or Bt mustard.

There is a civil disobedience movement going on in Maharashtra over the past three years, with farmers openly defying the law by planting HT GM cotton or herbicide-tolerant, genetically modified cotton and Bt brinjal. The farmers say the regulator is sitting on the clearance of these varieties, but they can't wait. The farmers say India allows high-tech in military, in space research, in industry, but not in agriculture. In Kerala, a group of farmers are going from pillar to post pleading with the communists and the Congress begging them to let them plant some fruit trees on their plantations. And this in the 21st century!





Make no mistake, India's agricultural sector is the biggest victim of the License Permit Raj system. Every step of its operation, from land to seed to fertiliser to pesticide to cropping to transporting to processing to pricing to exports, is regulated. Indian farmers are enslaved by the need to create cheap food for their better nourished urban counterparts. They are stabbed by India's socialistic attitude, and they are robbed of a future for decades together.

1991 is seen as the year that India's industry escaped regulatory clutches to a large extent. The farm bills of 2020 are seen as providing such an escape for India's farmers. And as farmers escape the regulatory clutches, many are asking the question, won't they be trapped by corporates and hoarders? Are you joking? The Government of India has been the biggest hoarder of foodgrain for decades, perhaps in the whole world.

And the other question is whether they will fall an easy prey to corporates. When India's farmers have burned in a regulatory government hell for decades, what does it matter if they walk into a private hell for a change? It can't be worse than what they endured over the past seven decades and more. But urban India, which cries hoarse every time potato and onion prices rise, and share social media posts, urging each other to boycott these commodities to teach the farmers a lesson and bring down the price of these commodities, have no business to shed tears for the farmers. The monsoon rains would be sufficient for the farmers. They don't need crocodile tears.

*(Author: Former Senior Assistant Editor, The Economic Times)*



Dr. Vandana Shiva

# AGROECOLOGY

**P**eople across the world are living through 30 years of a build-up of a health emergency, where they are fed with toxic and nutritionally-empty food just because super-profits.

For three decades, we defined food to be just a commodity. And it created chronic disease and hunger. In the United States, there are food deserts - because this is an extractive economy that takes and takes without ever giving back in gratitude, and based on needs and rights.

Food is the currency of life. If we look at it spiritually, everything is a sacrament - from the smallest of microbes to the planet as a whole, there is a seeking of participation in the integrity of creation.

But food has been turned into a commodity and people are getting sick. Instead of life flowing through the system we have poison flowing through it.

A greed-driven and unscientific food system has given us hunger, and it has given us other problems, including the pandemic. Because it is such a hungry system, hungry for profit, and is guided by mismeasures like yield, producing more and more Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) soya everywhere,

including burning the Amazon, the heart, lung and the liver of this planet.

## **The need for a new model: Agroecology**

The pandemic has grown because forests were invaded for an agribusiness model that does not care for the world. New diseases are coming up, including the coronavirus. Three hundred new diseases have come from the forests including the Ebola, SARS, Corona, and many others. The Wuhan virus is the result of invading other species. The hunger for profit is creating diseases. The COVID lockdown is an economic emergency. The International Labour Organisation has stated that billions will lose their livelihood. Climate change is linked to agribusiness and a commodity-driven system.

Industrial agriculture is creating havoc. The magic word that is used in industrial agriculture is 'yield per acre', to feed the people. It does not measure how much we use on our farm, and it doesn't measure the fertility of land where we grow food.

The result is we have lost 75% or more - of the fertile soils. We never used to see cyclones of the velocity and devastation that we see today.



For 60,000 years, the Australian aboriginals have farmed without destroying Australia. For 40,000 years, peasants of India and China have farmed, enriching the land.

'*Laudato Si*' (the second Encyclical of Pope Francis) talks very clearly about living in this common home with care and responsibility. But there is also this idea of conquest over nature.

Pope Francis has talked about these two world views. So what is the alternative? The alternative is agroecology. What is agroecology? It is working with the land, working with the laws of the earth, the laws of integrity and creation. The ecological systems recognise two cycles: the cycle of nutrition which is the cycle of food, and the cycle of water. Food and water make life.

**F**ood is the currency of life. If we look at it spiritually, everything is a sacrament - from the smallest of microbes to the planet as a whole, **there is a seeking of participation in the integrity of creation.**



Alternatively we can build circular economies. We can build economies of giving back, of saying thank you to the earth, thank you to creation, and allowing every species to say 'give us this day our daily bread'

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*(Dr. Shiva is Founder of Navdanya, and the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Natural Resource Policy, India. She was speaking at the webinar on 'Agroecology for Food System Change: Responses and Collaborations to Address the Present Economic–Ecological Crisis', organised by the Jesuit Conference of South Asia in collaboration with Ecojesuit Network and the Initiative on Environmental Justice and the Common Good of Santa Clara University in California, USA on November 19, 2020)*



# International Affairs

*Ethics  
and equity and  
the principles  
of justice do not  
change with the  
calendar.*

-D.H. Lawrence

*Violence in  
Afghanistan*



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# Aftermath of the Bomb Blast in Bamyan



**24** November 2020 was, indeed, a nightmare for the people of Bamyan in Afghanistan. The double bomb blast that occurred took away 29 precious lives leaving 36 injured. Bamyan is a Hazara-dominated place. The Hazaras are a Persian-speaking ethnic group native to, and primarily residing in, the mountainous region of Hazarajat, in central Afghanistan. Bamyan is well-known for Buddha statues, and many statues of Buddha are carved into the sides of cliffs facing Bamyan city.

The Taliban had destroyed a few Buddha statues in 2000 with three truck-load of explosives. Since the fall of Taliban in the same year, Bamyan always enjoyed a

peaceful ambience. But the recent blasts there shattered the serene atmosphere. 4500 Taliban were released from jail in the context of COVID. Later, there was a demand to release 500 more Taliban and they were released. Now, no Taliban is in the prison. Despite the release of Taliban, a series of bomb blasts took place in 23 Provinces out of 34 in Afghanistan on the same day. What a contrast, it all happened in a land where the statues of Buddha are a plenty.

It was a dreadful day for the Jesuit Refugees Service (JRS) animators, their students and families too. In Afghanistan, JRS is serving primarily in the field of education in Kabul, Herat, Bamyan, and Daikundi.

It is engaged in teaching at universities, conducting English language training for school teachers and less-privileged youth; providing online education especially for girls and children; and in supporting the sustainable development of refugee communities.

Usually, JRS English classes get over at 4 pm and the students pass by the bazaar by 04.30 pm. The blast occurred at 4.30 pm sharp left all of us panicked. We, the JRS educators, were informed that all the children are safe. But, we got disturbed hearing the casualties tolled 19. Each JRS educator had only this prayer: "Let my student may not be among the 19."

Meanwhile, photos started getting circulated in the social media. Crumbs of flesh scattered on wayside and limbs cut off from bodies generated a nauseating feel. The dead body of a seven-year-old child still finds difficult to be faded out of memory. Tears couldn't be held back when we came to know it was the brother of one of our students. "He wanted to become a doctor and he had recited the English alphabet rhyme to me yesterday," said Fatima, a JRS student, trying to control her emotions.

The JRS is running four Educational Centers in Afghanistan with approximately 4500 students including 2300 in Bamyan. On the following day, many students reached the JRS Educational Center as usual. But we noticed sheer lifelessness in their eyes out of anxiety and fear. All the educators convened an urgent meeting under the guidance of JRS animators. The students were grouped into two and were accommodated in separate rooms. Soft instrumental music was looming inside.

The students were provided with a sheet of paper. The animators helped the students to roll back their memories and relive the unpleasant event that had occurred on the previous day. We could see the emotional outburst in each, with some weeping, others taking a deep sigh, and some others



in a state of numbness. This catharsis was a healing process. We created a space for the students to ventilate their history of wounded memories.

Later, when the students interacted in smaller groups, they could open up their hearts out. Batool, a JRS student recollected her lost friend. "We had planned to apply for a scholarship and go to India. She wanted to be a teacher. Now, the hands that strengthened me and painted colours to my dreams are no more,". We assisted them to be composed. Both the animators and educators struggled to hold back their grave emotions. Though time is the best healer, the scar of wounded memories still clips thoughts to flow free and to dream big.

JRS has been giving a priority to girls and children in its ministry. There are umpteen number of cases of verbal abuse, sexual abuse and gender discrimination in Afghanistan. Social constructs do not allow girls to share their constraints and problems even to their parents and friends. Many girls suppress their bitter and painful experiences to their parents, lest they will be stopped from going to school and university. The setting up of a grievance redressal mechanism, psycho-social support and professional training and guidance to educators, etc. are the current concerns.

At present, the National Defence Security, Police Department and the Department of Education in Afghanistan have asked us to slow down our activities because of the prevailing threats against Educational Agencies including JRS.

**(Linto Kanichai SJ** is serving as a JRS educator in Bamyan)



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MESSAGE  
OF PEACE

VALEDICTORY LECTURE:  
XLRI-LIPI Peace Studies 2020

*Pax Lumina 1(5) / 2021 / 47-51*

# We are all Children of the Universe

**M**y message today is about a commitment to a new and old kind of duty, and a new and old kind of commandment: **the commandment of personal and universal care to all and for all.**



**T**his is exactly what we have always needed, and now we have a new opportunity to try again in this time of Pope Francis when the deep meaning of Kath'olicity is rediscovered as the Universality of a simple but powerful message: the Good News coming from a small group of friends and apprentices of our Galilean master, 'to be preached to all nations'.



'Kath'holic' means for all men and women, for all nations. It is the new meaning of Ecology or Oiko-logy, with the root \*oikos of house, home, ecology and ecosystem. It is the message restarted again by Pope Francis in his letter 'Laudato Si', the first one in centuries that starts not in Latin but with a poem of Francis of Assisi in old Italian, and in the new letter 'Fratelli Tutti'", not in Latin but in old and new Italian: we are all brothers and sisters.

My message to you, as you start your peace project, your new embassy of peace, in your place of birth, or of work, or exile, is about hope, warmth, hope and encouragement for the near future: "This new force field, this new Kingdom, this new Home, is now at hand again, here and now."

Let us start here and now another effort to make a cosmos out of this chaos, an Oikos out of this cave, a family out of this horde, caring for each other as brothers and sisters, children of the same Mother Nature and the same Father Universe, who, for some ancient peoples, are dimly represented by the Sun and the Moon, or by the Day and the Night, or by any of the many pairs of God-Goddess or Great-Ancestor couples in the traditional lore of each nation, ethnic group, country or land.

By the way, Nation is a word that, in Latin, comes from Natus, Native, Natura. We are all children of Nature, the Universal Mother, and of Cosmos, the World, the Universe: they are the universal Proto-Parents of us all: 'Deus sive Natura', as the philosopher Baruch Spinoza's pregnant pronouncement reads.

The Paleo-Aramaic language family, with Hebrew and Arabic as brother or sister languages was where this message started about 2000 years ago, not yet explicitly intending to be understandable by all nations. It was initially addressed only to the twelve tribes of Israel, but, then, sixty years later, it was translated into Greek and then into Latin, and perhaps to several of



**W**e defend the rights of animals, but not of people. If a tiger escapes from its cage in a zoo or a circus, we shoot it with hypnotic darts, but if a prisoner escapes from prison, we shoot him with live ammunition.

**Why?**



the Indo-European languages spoken in Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malabar, Goa, Kochi, or Madras (which could be a Portuguese abbreviation of 'o porto de Madre-de-Deus', the Port of the Mother-of-God, now Chennai in Tamil Nadu, at the other side of Kochi and Kerala).

The Kath'holic vision of Paul of Tarsus convinced even the Stone-Headed Simon to abandon his restrictive view that the message was addressed only to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now, for me, the main hermeneutic source to spread this message is the Ancient Aryan language and its successors, widespread in Central Asia even before Sanskrit was written, the base of the Thousand Languages of the Indo-European family of East and West, including Latin and Greek as brother or sister languages, along with all the Latin Languages, and even German, Dutch and English, in which I am now speaking. This message, spreading out in Greek and then in Latin from a small European peninsula of Mother Asia more than 2000 years ago, is now spread out to the whole world.





I often think of Ignatius of Loyola in Paris and Rome, sending Francis Xavier to Goa, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines and Japan to preach this message. I am sure that Pope Francis adopted his new name because of Francis of Assisi, but perhaps also from Francis Xavier, and why not, from Francis Borgia.

You are now in the same Southern India where Francis Xavier landed, at the epicentre of this Earth-shaking movement, then only a tremor, now again trembling deeper and wider.

When the Jesuits came to India, sailing from Madagascar to the Malabar islands and getting to Goa, they found out that the Malabar Catholic communities or 'churches' had been established there 15 centuries earlier, and they knew the message very well.

These 16th-century missionaries arriving in Goa from Rome were astounded that the traditional Hindu and Buddhist wisdom they found in India far surpassed what they had imagined. They realised that they had little or nothing to add to the millions of shlokas of Vedic writings, except for that one strange utopian message pointing to a blind spot in Indian and Buddhist wisdom: that we were all brothers and sisters of the same universal Father God and Mother Nature, implying that we should be caring for each other as for ourselves and should not be warring endlessly among us, like

those apes in the Kishkindha Kanda of the Ramayana.

The Good News is that there is hope that we can end these stupid monkey wars, that we continue, stop and restart as if we had not evolved yet, without having to wait 426,000 more years for the end of the Kali Yuga.

Look at the recurrent pattern: we animalize our adversaries, calling them apes, beasts and brutes, and then we feel free to kill them. Label them infidels, now terrorists, and they become the beastly enemies we not only may kill but must kill. Again and again, after two thousand years? Yes, sadly so.

But why do we preserve the lives of the temple monkeys and abstain from eating meat not to kill the sacred cows, but we do not care to preserve the life of our fellow humans?

We defend the rights of animals, but not of people. If a tiger escapes from its cage in a zoo or a circus, we shoot it with hypnotic darts, but if a prisoner escapes from prison, we shoot him with live ammunition. Why? Haven't we evolved yet? So it appears, sadly no.

In every great spiritual tradition, philosophical or theological, explicitly religious or not, we now have very good resonance for this 2000-year-old profound message to preach to all nations, in the sense that it overflows any restriction to Christian Ecumenical inter-church dialogues and even any restriction to inter-faith and inter-religious dialogues. It is universal, inter-ethnic and intercultural, in whatever language you translate it. Preaching, the Kerygma is now the effort to translate this simple peace message and this simple peace commandment into all languages, here and now.

The Kosmos, the Oikumene, the Universal home, where brotherhood and sisterhood of all men and women of our species occur, is much wider than any territorial, national or cultural enclave. It concerns everything,

every place, every time: Kath'holon, for the whole world, and Kath'olic, for all nations, cultures and spiritualities. This one simple message and this one simple commandment are compatible with every legislation. every religion, every philosophy, every spirituality.

You still have around you, there in India very near you, the same wars of the Tamil Tigers against everybody else around them, even though some scholars think that in distant proto-South-Dravidian times, the 'tri-lingual' mixture might be indicating that Telugu also included Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam as they developed later into separate languages and states.

The boundaries of Bangladesh and Pakistan seem to be very far away from Kochi, but the tensions between the Vedas and the Quran flare once and again in the East and the West, and the internal tensions between those two Islamic brothers, Sunnites and Shiites, are even worse, and many other tensions surface again and again between both of them and different Indian religious traditions.

But that is nothing proper of Asia or India; it has lasted at least 10,000 years. Let us look back in history and all around our globe:

There has been a 1000-year rift between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Catholic Church in Europe. It still lasts, and it is very difficult to keep the dialogue going, even sharing the same scriptures.

After Luther's call for Reformation, there was a 100-year war between Reformed Lutheran churches and not-yet-reformed Roman Churches, apparently based only in the decision either to adhere strictly to the letter of the scriptures as they stand, solascriptura, or as interpreted by the Roman oral tradition.

This rift repeats now again and again in many Latin-American countries, often



**The worries of the peacemakers increase with the current situation in Turkey under Erdogan, in Hungary under Orban, in the Philippines under Duterte, and on and on, and you in India feel again the pain of the continuing border skirmishes between Kashmir and Pakistan and the mounting troubles with the displacement of ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand.**



very aggressively, where many Protestant churches side with the traditional right-wing parties and think that Catholic liberation theology is a Communist threat, while many right-wing Catholics are just as vehement and aggressive against those left-wing Catholics as they are against Protestants.

As I just mentioned, we are witnessing now all over the world, from Spain, France and England to the Far East of Asia, and in the Twin Towers even in America, the 1200 year-long implausible and incredible confrontation between the Sunnites and the Shiites, and of both against everybody else, even though both share the same book of the Quran, adhering either to the letter only, solascriptura or to the letter as interpreted by the Ayatollah's oral tradition. Where is the Arab Brotherhood gone?

There is a dim hope that the recent so-called 'Brotherhood Pact' between Israel



and some of the Arab Emirates might start a new era, but it is obviously a low blow to the Shiites, and it will be broken up easily according to the political conveniences of the times and the egos of their leaders. Still, we must acknowledge that this is the first opening of a future reconstruction of the Abrahamic Brotherhood between Israelites and Ishmaelites, broken up three thousand years ago.

If we go back to Europe, we see now with the rift of England from the EuroZone, the peace talks between Sinn Fein and the Orange Party in Belfast, also charged with centuries-old inter-Christian strife, are again in peril.

Here in America, we are witnessing the incredible, almost unthinkable transition problem in the United States between Republicans and Democrats, with over 70 million people on each side, though they share the same language, the same schooling, the same Constitution and the same 200-year-long history. Fortunately, the President-Elect, Joseph Biden, also a Catholic like John F. Kennedy 60 years ago, has promised not to take revenge for the insults, abuse and slander from President Trump and the Republican Senators and Governors. He promises to care for them as for his followers.

The Colombian Peace Talks in Havana between the Liberal government of Nobel-Prize Winner Santos and the 60-year-old

Communist guerrillas, with the support of then-President Obama, are now at risk by the rightist government and the new and old Presidents of Colombia, with the support of President Trump. We seem to be going back to square zero, or even worse.

We could look at the situation in Brazil under Bolsonaro and feel despair, but we can also look at the new situation in Bolivia after the last election and feel some hope. The new Vice-President, appealing to old Inca and Quechua wisdom, has promised not to take revenge on the politicians and entrepreneurs that staged the putsch against Evo Morales a year ago.

But the worries of the peacemakers increase with the current situation in Turkey under Erdogan, in Hungary under Orbán, in the Philippines under Duterte, and on and on, and you in India feel again the pain of the continuing border skirmishes between Kashmir and Pakistan and the mounting troubles with the displacement of ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand.

Should we not start now again and everywhere our efforts to spread this message of peace again and again? Let us start now. Make this message and this commandment the main content of your embassy of peace.

You are at the right spot and the right time to start again spreading this message of peace and universal care. Right where you are. Do start tomorrow your mission as ambassadors of peace, and good luck to you.

**(Carlos E. Vasco, Emeritus Professor, National University, Colombia. Lecture delivered at the convocation webinar, XLRI-LIPI Peace Studies Programme on 21 November 2020).**



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SCIENCE  
& PEACE

# *PACCEM in SCIENTIA et TERRIS*

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**P**peace means the cessation of strife and the arrival of harmony. Peace includes the death of discord, the ceasing of conflict, and the end of anxiety.

**Peace also includes beauty in nature, justice in society, and tranquility in the soul. As such, peace is eternal.**



**W**hen he wrote his 1963 Encyclical, 'Pacem in Terris', St. John XXIII was "inspired by a longing which we feel most keenly, and which we know is shared by all [persons] of goodwill: that peace may be assured on earth." When Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9)," those peacemakers among us are quenching a profound human thirst.

Peace means the cessation of strife and the arrival of harmony. Peace includes the death of discord, the ceasing of conflict, and the end of anxiety. Peace also includes beauty in nature, justice in society, and tranquility in the soul. As such, peace is eternal. In our own

ephemeral experience, however, we can realise only fragments of peace. We catch hurried glimpses of God's everlasting peace only in anticipation, only as a prolepsis of the Kingdom of Peace God has promised us. Sips of daily peace simply enhance our craving for God's final and total peace.

Science similarly slakes a deep human thirst, namely, the thirst to know. The curious among us thank God for the advent of modern science: the mental machine-emitting knowledge of the intricacies and complexities

and immensities of our natural home. Through microscopes and telescopes, scientists daily uncover unseen yet ever-present dimensions of nature's mechanics along with glittering treasures to be cashed in by new technologies.

Yet, science is morally ambiguous. On the one hand, the international community of virologists has just teamed up to rescue the human race from the scourge of SARS-CoV-2 by developing protective vaccines. For this we stand up to proclaim: blessed are the peacemakers!

On the other hand, it was America's Manhattan Project in competition with Nazi military research that bequeathed to the world the threat of self-annihilation through thermonuclear war. This threat is compounded by runaway technologies contaminating, polluting, and overheating our once fecund Planet Earth. For this, we stand up and ask: where are the peacemakers?

## Digitisation and Dehumanisation

We helplessly watch as this ambiguity is being played out right before our eyes

on the worldwide web. On the one hand, the digitisation of our heartfelt thoughts distributed immediately via electronic communication to every continent on the globe should, in principle, foster empathic sharing and social harmony.

On the other hand, much to our chagrin and disappointment, just the opposite is happening. Like hail from a thunderstorm, we are bombarded hourly by disinformation, conspiracy theories, ethnocentrism, pornography, and competing ideologies. Instead of approaching social harmony, we are hopelessly entangled in a web of crisscrossing contrasts, counterpoints, and conflicts. If we had previously donned a dhoti of hoped-for-peace, that fabric of unity has been torn.

It appears that digitisation dehumanises. Yet, we should be careful. The technology of digitization combined with access to webthink does not dehumanise. Only humans dehumanise. Machines do not.

To get more precise, dehumanisation is the process of 'othering' or perhaps 'otherising' people. Dehumanisation begins by turning a 'we' into a 'they.' Tacitly, we allow the 'they' to slide




gradually down a slippery slope to a subhuman status. Once at the subhuman level, do we lose our moral obligations toward them? Yes. Apparently, this is human nature we have inherited from our ancestors. Scientists call it evolution; theologians call it original sin.

Just as science slakes our thirst to know, technology assuages our thirst to change things. Both, however, are ambiguous. To be ambiguous is to be subject to more than one evaluation, to be either good or evil depending on the contextual situation. We human beings must honestly confess: it is we who determine whether science saves or whether technology kills. No matter how beautiful the human artwork, someone is capable of spoiling it with graffiti.


### **CRISPR Gene Editing, AI, IA, and the Coming of the Posthuman**

Our generation bears the albatross of ambiguity when it comes to the question: should we employ science and technology to alter our human nature? Should we direct our electric rickshaw up the road toward a new stage in evolution and the engineering of a new posthuman species?

The transhumanists among us see today's 'Homo sapiens' as a 'trans' species on the way, so to speak, to a super-intelligent post-human species. How might today's engineers enhance human intelligence sufficiently to take control of our evolutionary future?



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Rightly or wrongly, many evolutionary theorists believe that the unit of speciation in evolution is the gene. With the ongoing perfection of CRISPR/Cas9 gene-editing [a newly developed technique in molecular biology for altering the genomes of plants, animals, and people], the prospect lies before us of enhancing human traits and even enhancing the human germline for the foreseeable future. Might we edit into our children genes for increased intelligence? Right now, the technology is too underdeveloped to make this happen; yet it's on the futurist's horizon.

Artificial Intelligence or AI has taken centre stage in the world drama, with many fearing that AI robots will replace flesh-and-blood workers. Far more significant, in my opinion, is the prospect of Intelligence Amplification or IA. Medical practitioners have successfully implanted computer chips in people's brains for therapeutic purposes, such as to govern epilepsy episodes.



Is it only a small step to implant a computer chip in a human brain that provides access to information? And with instant access to all the information in Wikipedia, will this lead to amplified human intelligence? Will the cyborgs of the next generation attain a level of intelligence sufficient to take over? Might our enhanced intelligent creatures then ratchet up the process leading finally to superintelligence? Will our super-intelligent descendants then think of us back in the 21st century as antiques, dinosaurs, fossils to be buried and forgotten?

Upon a closer look, such a scenario for taking control of future evolution seems more like relinquishing control.

## Conclusion

We human beings know what it means to thirst for peace when we have only discord available to drink. We also know what it means to have the thirst to know things through science and the thirst to

change things through technology. But let us be clear: science and technology cannot quench our thirst for peace.

Science and technology are morally ambiguous. They can be used by human individuals and societies either to inflict suffering or to relieve suffering. Determining which is strictly a human contribution.

With or without science and technology, the thirst for peace drives us from faucet to fountain looking for what Jesus called, 'living water' (John 4:11).

**(Ted Peters** co-edits the journal, *'Theology and Science'*, on behalf of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, USA. He recently edited a new volume on artificial intelligence, *'AI and IA: Utopia or Extinction?'*. Along with two colleagues, Arvin Gouw and Brian Patrick Green, he is now editing a new book, *'Religious Transhumanism and its Critics'*)



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# SCIENCE for PEOPLE'S WELFARE

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**Science and technology provide us with the tools to understand the world, analyse the problems and arrive at solution.**



Science and technology are powerful tools that influence the lives of people in various ways. They play an important role not only in determining what we have and can have but also in shaping what we are and what we want to be. Science and technology provide us with the tools to understand the world, analyze the problems and arrive at solution. If we look at the various gadgets, instruments, devices, applications and so on that are being used by people all over the world, it becomes very clear that science and technology have certainly contributed for bettering the lives of people.

The poor and the marginalized also stand to gain from this when all these become affordable like mobile phone, medicines and so on. Thus, the research related to science and technology can definitely be used to improve the living conditions of those who are at the margins of our society, provided those who are involved

in such research take up problems of the marginalized people and try to find solutions with real passion and commitment.

Science and technology can also be employed effectively to protect the environment and thus contribute to the welfare of our planet earth. Today more and more people are aware of the various negative effects of our activities on the environment. Research in science and technology has yielded many vibrant technologies which are being used by various industries and agricultural people. For example, to reduce pollution, to generate power from renewable natural resources and to minimize the use of chemical pesticides and chemical fertilizers are some attempts.

India is blessed with many indigenous people and they possess a lot of indigenous knowledge on various fields, such as medicine and agriculture.



They also have tremendous knowledge in matters related to environmental issues. These can certainly be harnessed in a cost-effective manner to produce appropriate technologies and processes for the welfare of the people as well as for the protection of the environment.

Let me elaborate on this here with our own example. Some twenty years ago we were constantly hearing the news of farmers' suicide due to crop failure, inability to repay loans and occurrence of resistant insect pests. Through research we tried to find a solution and help the farmers. We collected information about the use of natural oils by farmers based on indigenous knowledge. We scientifically evaluated different oils and came out with an effective botanical biopesticide called PONNEEM. It is a combination of neem oil (43%), karanj oil (43%) and emulsifier (14%). This acts as an excellent antifeedant, insecticide and growth regulator against insect pests. It promotes natural enemies of insects. It is cost-effective. One litre of PONNEEM can be mixed in nearly 400 litres of water and sprayed on the crops in 2.5 acres. It is cheaper than chemical pesticides. We have given this technology to the farmers themselves. Besides, one company called Nimbion Organics is producing and marketing it. The farmers find it very effective and useful.



This is just one example. There are many other products developed by many other Indian scientists using indigenous knowledge which are benefitting people in India and in other countries.

Ensuring a balanced and sustainable growth of the economy as well as preserving the environment through scientific research will largely depend upon the availability of financial support from various funding sources such as government, private and other civil society organizations. There are many problems which need scientific solutions and interventions. For example, tackling the problem of malnutrition, finding solution for women suffering from anemia, providing better housing facilities, controlling infectious diseases, protecting natural resources and so on. Solutions for all these can be identified through scientific research. Any serious research needs finances. Hence, if various players get involved with scientists to find solutions to many problems which affect people, then, we can certainly find good progress and prosperity.

If a country has to develop, it needs to have personnel who will be involved in scientific research. It is only through scientific research new technologies are developed, new instruments are discovered, new models are evolved and new methodologies are worked out. Hence, it is very important to motivate the young students to take up science as a fruitful and rewarding career. Many times, students refuse or fail to opt for science subjects due to factors such as lack of budget and technology, lack of guidance from adults who are knowledgeable and involved in the field of science-related careers, psychological restraints whereby students believe that the field of science is difficult and the assumption that science is an uncreative endeavour.

It is only through scientific research new technologies are developed, new instruments are discovered, new models are evolved and new methodologies are worked out. Hence, it is very important to motivate the young students to take up science as a fruitful and rewarding career.



To revive students' interest toward science and to address the negative perception, respective stakeholders need to take necessary actions and to play their roles. Here the roles of parents, teachers, scientists and role models are all crucial. The success stories of some scientists will also be effective. All these have the ability to increase the self-efficacy, attitude and a strong expectation towards science. Once a student likes a science subject and has aptitude to pursue it, then it is easy to get motivated to move on. Strong level of curiosity will be very useful to motivate students to pursue science and research career.

Over the years, history has shown that resolving society's problems through a scientific approach is the best way to handle those problems. A lot of mistakes and logical fallacies can be avoided from being repeated by thinking scientifically. Scientific thinking helps us make better decisions and provides a rational outlook towards problems we are facing. In order to develop scientific thinking, we need to talk about science outside class rooms and should be part of public conversation.



The elements of curiosity and critical thinking should be nurtured, nourished and encouraged throughout the educational system. Dr. Rosalyn Yalon, the Nobel laureate in medicine, says the following: 'Science is not simply a collection of facts. It is a discipline of thinking about rational solutions to problems after establishing the basic facts derived from observations... Logical thinking must come first; the facts can come later. The Article 51A of the Indian Constitution clearly states; 'It is the fundamental duty of every citizen of India to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform'.

In conclusion, the influence of science on people's lives is enormous; its benefits to humanity are great. Indigenous knowledge can be used to promote welfare of the people. Curiosity and critical thinking are very important to make rapid advancements in science. Scientific temper should help us to evaluate our blind beliefs, our superstitions and myths. We should be ready to apply scientific methods such as observation, experiment, logic, internal consistency and questioning.

**(Dr. S. Ignacimuthu, SJ, Director, Xavier Research Foundation, St Xavier's College, Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu, is an internationally acclaimed Jesuit scientist. He is placed among the top 1% scientists in the world in the field of biology by professors from Stanford University, USA based on total citations of his publications by other scientists).**





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ART  
AND  
PEACE

# ART against LIE

*Pax Lumina 1(5) / 2021 / 59-64*



*Snail O' Clock by Dr. K.M. George*

## **D**uring a Pandemic

Attempting to form a collective or individual opinion today is a daunting task, especially when you witness a kind of verbal diarrhoea through the government-controlled, corporate-sponsored mass media.

The public narrative is often created and maintained by the so-called newsroom and the paid professionals in them. While talking about his origins and how it influenced his thought process as a historian and thinker Yuval Noah Harari believes that he was born in this myth factory of the world -- a world that introduces extremely powerful stories, for

good and for bad; and when you live in such a place, you cannot ignore the enormous power of human imagination and the enormous power of the stories to move the world.

In India, artists across the nation have attempted to create a counter-narrative that can influence the public more truthfully, as truth seems to be the greatest casualty in a fake-filled media.

As Harari pointed out, the power of human imagination is enormous and though artists don't have a monopoly over it, they surely have a tool to materialise their imagination in a truthful way to move the public in an informed manner. "A lie is a lie, even if everyone believes it. The truth is the truth, even if nobody believes it," said the Palestinian writer and director, Davis Stevens.

To deal with the pandemic, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, declared a sudden lockdown without any prior preparation in March. It was so ill-advised that the lower middle class and the poor labourers had to clamber for food and sustenance within the given four hours before the shutters were closed on them. The tragedy that unfolded before our eyes, thanks to the unorganised media, was unimaginable.

There is an often-denied fact that autocratic rulers love these times more than any other and giggle in the privacy of their rooms, at the prospect of unlimited, anti-democratic, unaudited powers and publicly pretend to be concerned and make a PR stunt of "trying to help".

### **Making peace through their art**

How do you approach a pandemic and the consequent lockdown that seems to be one of the ways to manage this situation?. As this is being written, we know the lockdown has misfired. The present situation has brought along a plethora of problems as well as opportunities.



*Bodhi by Fr. Manoj Ottaplackal*

*Untitled by Jameson*



Today, the social media are filled with images of people managing this particular time in creative ways.

The story of oysters is familiar to us. When something goes inside the shell of an oyster, even a grain of sand, it gets hurt. To manage this crisis, it has a mechanism. It produces powerful stuff that begins to cover the irritating thing over and over again. Eventually, this stuff is transformed into a beautiful pearl. Twelve artists from the Company of Artists for Radiance of Peace (CARP) decided to do an oyster.

They painted. The result was three online virtual painting camps and exhibitions, the first of its kind as far as we know. 19 members residing in different parts of India, came together online under one umbrella to paint.

CARP is an association of artists -- friends, who are like-minded, from all walks of life, like, religious, priests, laymen and women. Their sole aim is to make peace through their art.



*Clowns of Life by Sr. Sandra Soniya*

They conduct art camps for schoolchildren and adults in a non-competitive atmosphere. The resultant works are often exhibited for the public.

Art in different forms, as we know, plays a vital role in transforming people. A visual art form, like painting, has proved that it can act

*Untitled by Sr. Vincy*



*Bodhi by Fr. Manoj Ottaplackal*



*Surge 10 by Joseph Joyson*



as a powerful tool of resistance, dissent and revolution, like Banksy, the anonymous artist, whose art is always satirical, anti-authoritarian and witty.

It can act as a reminder to humanity of the atrocities it has committed. Artist Pablo Picasso's Guernica is a grim reminder of the ravages of war, and at the same time, a protest against such bloody undertakings by humanity.

The attack by the Germans and Italians on Guernica, one of the Spanish cities, took place on a market day, April 26, 1937, when ordinary folks gathered on the streets to buy and sell. The notorious carpet bombing was experimented for the first time; it was designed to destroy everything systematically. The survival of humanity depends on the ability not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Guernica, as a painting, has acted as a conscience-keeper for generations. A simple cartoon can expose the fact that the king is, indeed, naked.

### **A soul-ward journey**

When people face this 'never-heard-before' type of staying in, one can go through an

experience that French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre discusses in one of his short essays called 'The Wall.' The protagonist Pablo observes that being confronted with death radically alters one's attitude to everything. When the doors are shut and there is no escape, naturally, you are compelled to go inward.

The need to go slow, to put on a new cloak of an enlightened snail as it makes its slow stride through life is the call of the hour, as Dr. K.M. George portrayed through his Snail O'Clock. Francis Kodankandath, Sunil Jose, CMI, Fr. Manoj Ottaplackal and Ameera Sarah Thomas, reflected on this moment of realisation through their paintings believing that the pandemic could act as an agent (Bodhi) of wisdom and enlightenment.

Anything associated with Buddha always invokes in us a feeling of a love-lost, of a journey yet to be undertaken, which we keep postponing because we have better or more urgent things to do. We are warmed often by some external source of light. But an event like a pandemic or flood or when you attend to the last rites of a loved one, puts a sudden break on our narcissistic wanderings and forces you to look at the soul.

*The Flame of Resurrection by Athulya Priya*





*Never Ending Plight by Roy M. Thottam*

## **Intensive caring moments**

We are cared for and sustained by Mother Earth and innumerable mothers whom we see all around us. Mothering and caring are not done just by homosapiens as we see, but the pandemic has highlighted the importance of caring by health professionals and all kinds of people, whose unassuming, selfless service is often taken for granted.

CARP artists like Ebey Edassry, Vincy Kallidukkil, HSM, Sandra Soniya, SFN, and Athulya Priya coloured their canvas, mirroring this reality. Caring strokes that accompany us as we go through life, from the time we start breathing till we stop; and there are people offering care, though their own life is at stake; the bubble-like delicate protective cover that we create around us; these are insights that

find expression on their canvases. We have a collective history and memory and creating a space for another and our belongingness is what matters the most.

## **Back to the roots**

When we face an existential threat, our movements become more measured and cautious. Every moment becomes a point of return to the basic questions about one's existence and the meaning of life. One micro-organism can become either an eye-opener or a life-threatening element for another. All the barricades that we create to divide and protect ourselves have become a joke. Artists like Joby Maryson, OFM Cap., Shaiju Mathew, OIC, Divya Jose and Aneeta Rose Abraham created pointers to this need to make time, to go back to our roots, and realise the beauty of the 'now' and savour the sweetness of being.

## **An exodus without manna**

When you want to get rid of pests, there are pesticides. You have an excuse for saving your crops or your beautiful, expensive garden, though pests have a right to exist as you do. Consider a country where a whole lot of people are treated like unwanted pests or termites, use and throw materials.

The reverse migration that took place when the lockdown was announced exposed this nation's basic hypocrisy. During the India-Pakistan partition, we did not have the logistics and the conveyance we have today. It is all the more criminal when it happens today when we have all these facilities at our beck and call; when hundreds of thousands of people are made to walk hundreds of miles, often in the scorching sun or torrential rain. They walked hungry.

It was an exodus without manna. Arundhati Roy, the well-known writer and activist, called it an 'ambush' on the hapless people. The Manusmriti runs deeper than we can



*Be Positive by Mariakutty*

imagine in the Indian psyche. We are capable of building walls that can hide the poor, the same ones that keep this country running. Lower-middle class and the poor labourers have become the unwanted and aliens in their land. Roy M. Thottam, S.J., Joseph Joyson, OFM, Cap. Vimal Kallokkaran, RCJ, and Jamesmon, OFM tried to portray this Indian reality which did not appear on the radar of the mainstream Indian media, most probably because of the cloud cover.

### **Beauty can save the world**

Arundhati believes in an alternative world: 'To love. To be loved. To never forget your insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. And never, never, to forget.' In one of Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels, 'The Idiot' the main character makes a statement: Beauty will save the world.

Interestingly, there is a country that believes that beauty can save the world, and that is France. No wonder most fashion comes from the French. They are also great art lovers. They believe that beauty is a pathway to truth and freedom.

Pope John Paul II too made a statement in his letter to the artists that "people of today and tomorrow need this enthusiasm (of wonder) if they are to meet and master the crucial challenges which stand before us. Thanks to this enthusiasm, humanity, every time it loses its way, will be able to lift itself and set out again on the right path. In this sense, it has been said with profound insight that 'beauty will save the world.'

Artists believe that they have a responsibility to tell the king that the cloak he wears is just imaginary and that he is, indeed, naked. They believe that they have the responsibility to tell the truth because they too believe in an alternative.







John Francis  
johnfrancissj@rediffmail.com

BOOK  
REVIEW

# The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State

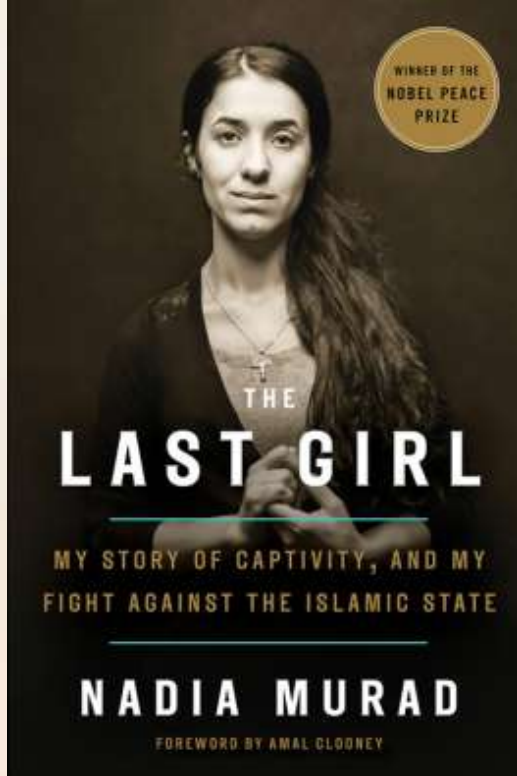
By Nadia Murad

*Pax Lumina 1(5) / 2021 / 65-68*

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter,” said Martin Luther King Jr. Natural calamities, disasters and even the most grisly massacres and human rights violations often

Nadia Murad in her book, “The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against the Islamic State” narrates the grisly and heinous massacre and violence perpetrated by IS militants in the Yazidi village of Kocho in the Sinjar region of Iraq, and the plight of the girls captured as sex slaves.





believe that God made the world and left it to the control of seven divine beings. The chief divine being is Malak Ta'us, a peacock angel, who is worshipped in the form of a peacock. Malak Ta'us has often been identified by outsiders as Semitic religious figure, Satan. Due to their belief in the peacock angel the Yazidis had been persecuted by different sects of Islam over the centuries. Some Muslims consider them heretical devil worshippers. As a result, they were subject to religious persecutions over the years. Often, they were asked to deny the Yazidi heritage and conform to Kurdish or Arab identities. The IS considers the Yazidis Kuffars, infidels, and thinks that they are worthy of rape, enslavement and killing. The mind of a Yazidi is full of stories of persecution which they suffered during past many centuries.

become prosaic statistical statements without any power to move human hearts. And such stories of atrocities make very little impact on us and we continue to move about in our day-to-day comfort zones. Hence, to wake up the human consciousness in such situations needs willpower, efforts and advocacy beyond our imagination. "The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against the Islamic State" by Nadia Murad, a survival memoir, unravels the shocking experience and haunting fears of the Yazidi community of Northern Iraq when they fell prey to the most barbaric and shameful atrocities of the IS militants. It also reveals the incredible audacity and heroic resistance of the author when faced with the monstrous terror unleashed by IS extremists.

Nadia Murad in her book, "The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against the Islamic State" narrates the grisly and heinous massacre and violence perpetrated by IS militants in the Yazidi village of Kocho in the Sinjar region of Iraq, and the plight of the girls captured as sex-slaves. The villagers in the Kocho earned their livelihood mainly from farming and looking after the sheep. The story begins in Kocho, a village, where Nadia and her family lived peacefully in spite of their poverty and hardships. The black clad IS militants surrounded the Kocho village in 2014 and it was the beginning of the most frightening episode in their life. When the IS people started stealing chicken and sheep, the villagers never realised that it was a warning indicating the fate of the villagers.

Nadia Murad belongs to a religious minority called Yazidis. Yazidism originated, according to some scholars, in the 8th century in Kurdistan and their numbers increased in the 13th and 14th centuries. It has taken elements from religions such as, Islam, ancient Iranian religions, Judaism and Nestorian Christianity and, some say, it is an example for religious syncretism. Members of this religious minority are found in Turkey, Syria and Northern Iraq. They have their own unique belief systems and practices. Yazidis

When the IS surrounded Kocho village in 2014, The Peshmerga (Kurdish Fighters of Northern Iraq) fled and other forces also abandoned the Yazidis. All the villagers were driven out to Sinjar mountains. Finally, they were forced to gather in a schoolyard. Hundreds of men who refused to convert were massacred and petrifying fear seized them all. The villagers were segregated into different groups so that men could be shot dead and young women could be taken as *sabiyya* (a sex-slave) and

young boys and women could be kidnapped. In spite of their desperate attempts, nobody came to their rescue and they felt completely abandoned by everyone. Soon, young girls were forced into trucks to be taken to slave-trading centres from where they would be sold to different people as sex-slaves.

The journey in the truck was a nightmare. The girls in the bus, in which Nadia was travelling, were all exhausted and frightened and one militant started molesting them. Before reaching their final destination, they were taken to different slave-trade centres and had to undergo very cruel treatment, abuse and rape. Somebody told them “ You are an infidel, a *sabiyya*, you belong to Islamic State”. Soon, they realised that they were in a trap and escape was impossible”. Thousands of Yazidi girls were captured and they ended their life as sex-slaves. In the house of a Militant called Hajji Salman, in Mosul, Nadia was brutally tortured and raped many times. She also contemplated committing suicide. Finally, risking her life Nadia escaped from there into the frightening loneliness of an unknown place under the control of the IS. She was continuously haunted the by the fear of being arrested again.

After walking for some time secretly, taking great risk, she knocked at the door of a house without knowing what kind of people lived there. It was the family of an old man called Hisham and they protected her and made arrangement for her escape into Kurdistan on a fake ID card. The eldest son of the family risked his life to help her escape and he accompanied her to Kurdistan. The thrilling and incredible escape plan was meticulously planned and executed and she reached a refugee camp as a destitute, devoid of everything. The great relief of the escape soon paved the way for unfathomable grief. She became a completely





**The book will remain forever as a source of perennial inspiration not only for the human rights activists and philanthropists, but for all. The power of narration will hold us breathless from the beginning to the end.**



shattered and broken person without knowing whether her siblings are alive or dead. She really feared whether her community would accept her on account of losing her virginity. The thoughts about her mother and relatives haunted her. At last she realised that her six brothers and mother had been killed. The family was completely broken and destroyed. But, without losing hope she started to build up everything again from scratch. Finally, she managed to escape to Germany. It was the beginning of another episode of legal battle and advocacy against the IS.

When Nadia narrates how the vicissitudes, little joys and sorrows of village life suddenly escalated into deadly experience, her language becomes poignant. She is looking at her experience through the magnifying glass of the village life and relationships. The book gives amazing insights into the personal and grass root level impact of violence in the world. She tells us how the dreams and aspirations of the people suddenly evaporated into nothingness. The book very well reveals the fear and shock when people see their dear ones are marched into death. The language is powerful and simple and she is able to take

the readers for an intensive journey along with her sharing her experience. She shows us the abysmal and shameless depth to which human morality can stoop. We can also see the sparks of hope, brilliance of courage and depth of suffering and pains when we move through the pages of the book. She portrays the amazing courage and faith of the people which helped them bounce back when faced with setbacks. Nadia also reveals how she was metamorphosed from the state of a passive victim to a votary of justice. She has changed the stories of IS atrocities from a stale piece of news to a touching and challenging narrative capable of moving the hearts of people. Her story is actually the story of thousands of Yazidi girls.

The book also throws light into the deep faith, philosophy and the unique practices and customs of the Yazidi community and we are able to look at their experience from their perspective and life situation. The author shows amazing skill in depicting the inner conflict and turmoil of the people. The natural surroundings such as, fields, mountains and the landscapes turn into a powerful backdrop in front of which the story unfurls. Mount Sinjar becomes a source of solace and succour when they are chased to death by cruel human beings.

The book will remain forever as a source of perennial inspiration not only for the human rights activists and philanthropists, but also for all. The power of narration will hold us breathless from the beginning to the end. If she had not written this book, the world would have remained ignorant about the deeper dimensions of the organised and systematic crime perpetrated by IS upon a small minority called Yazidis. Let this book continue to shed light as flame of hope amidst the darkness of human brokenness and sinfulness.

*(Author: Principal, St. Michael's Anglo-Indian HSS, Kannur, Kerala)*





## Francois Laborde, SJ

### The Iconic Character in the *City of Joy*



**Fr.** Francois Laborde (93), a Jesuit priest who was the primary inspiration behind the iconic character of Fr. Stephan Kovalski- the ‘Polish priest’ who lived and worked in the slums of Calcutta- in Dominique Lapierre’s City of Joy, passed away on 25 December, 2020. He spent well over five decades in the City of Kolkota, silently serving the poor and the physically challenged.

Fr. Laborde had come to India from France in 1965 and got involved in projects to improve the living conditions of the residents of slums in Howrah. He built an inspiring social enterprise by setting up schools and rehabilitation homes for the less privileged and by providing medical facilities and healthcare programmes for the marginalized people in Bengal. He found joy in working together with Hindus, Muslims and Christians for the upliftment of the deprived. He is the founder of the non-profit organization namely, Howrah South Point Association for the underprivileged.

Fr. Laborde believed that God lives among the poor. The only way for humans to become really human is to take care of the disadvantaged. He was conferred the Legion of Honour, France’s highest civilian award for the second time in 2019. The life of Fr. Laborde is a witness that Perfect characters also exist in the real world. Kovalski is not just a fantasy figure in Lapierre’s imagination. Fr. Laborde is regarded the France-born ‘Mother Teresa-and more’ of Howrah.

(Prepared by **Prof. Dr. K.M. Mathew**)

Dear Editor,

The overwhelming majority of people working as 'manual scavengers' are women. Much of this work entails cleaning shit from dry latrines. Most of the people cleaning shit from railway tracks are also women. Yet, every photograph in the latest issue of Pax Lumina, as well as in our article in *The Wire*, features only men. Perhaps this is a conscious decision, in order to protect the little dignity that is left to women workers, but it makes women manual scavengers invisible to a public that is already criminal in its uncaring attitude. The first image that should strike us when we hear or read about manual scavenging is women cleaning shit with a broom and a basket, for that is, indeed, the overwhelming reality.

**Shiva Shankar**

Visiting Professor, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai.

Dear Editor,

Thanks a ton for the e copy of PAX LUMINA, NOVEMBER 2020. The articles are very enriching, helpful and fruitful. The pictures and paintings are very apt and catchy. Many articles were arresting and I simply could not stop reading it. The article on Manual Scavenging and Human Rights by Elsa Muttathu, PBVM was really an eye-opener for me. The problems faced by them are unexplainable, very dehumanising and distressing. Though we are in the 21st century, we still could not put a "full stop" for this inhuman activity. The time has come for a real introspection of how we really treat the poor, the downtrodden, the marginalized, the excluded and the needy!

**Emmanul Akilan**

Pune

Dear Editor,

Team Pax Lumina deserves special appreciation for highlighting issues like manual scavenging, which hardly appears in the public discourse. Among the articles and interviews on the perils of this inhuman practice, I was touched by the interview with Bazwada Wilson, whose work among those involved in manual scavenging earned him the prestigious Magsaysay Award.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Pax Lumina 1(4) / 2020 / 66



It is a pity that despite the enactment of an act banning manual scavenging, it continues to exist in our society. However, good souls like Mr Wilson offer us a ray of hope towards the restoration of the lost dignity of our less privileged brethren. One can only hope that the Central government and the State governments would take concerted actions to implement the existing laws effectively so as to rid our society of this dehumanising practice. Until such time, our society falls short of the justice, equality and fraternity espoused in the Constitution.

**Ivin Tomy,**

Masters in Public Policy, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai

Dear Editor,

The November 2020 issue of PAX LUMINA discussing the plight of the manual scavengers was an absolute eye-opener. I greatly appreciate the efforts and commitment put forth in bringing one of the most debated topics into the limelight. Rather than reinstating the facts, the magazine was successful in incorporating all the dimensions of the matter concerned to the forefront. However, it would have been well-grounded if you could have included an audio transcript or interview of the people working in these fields. I am looking forward to seeing the upcoming issue and I hope PAX LUMINA will be fruitful in bringing out many more prominent socio-political problems to the public eye.

**Meera George,**

Economics Post Graduate, Loyola College, Chennai





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