

Bimonthly

# Pax Lumina

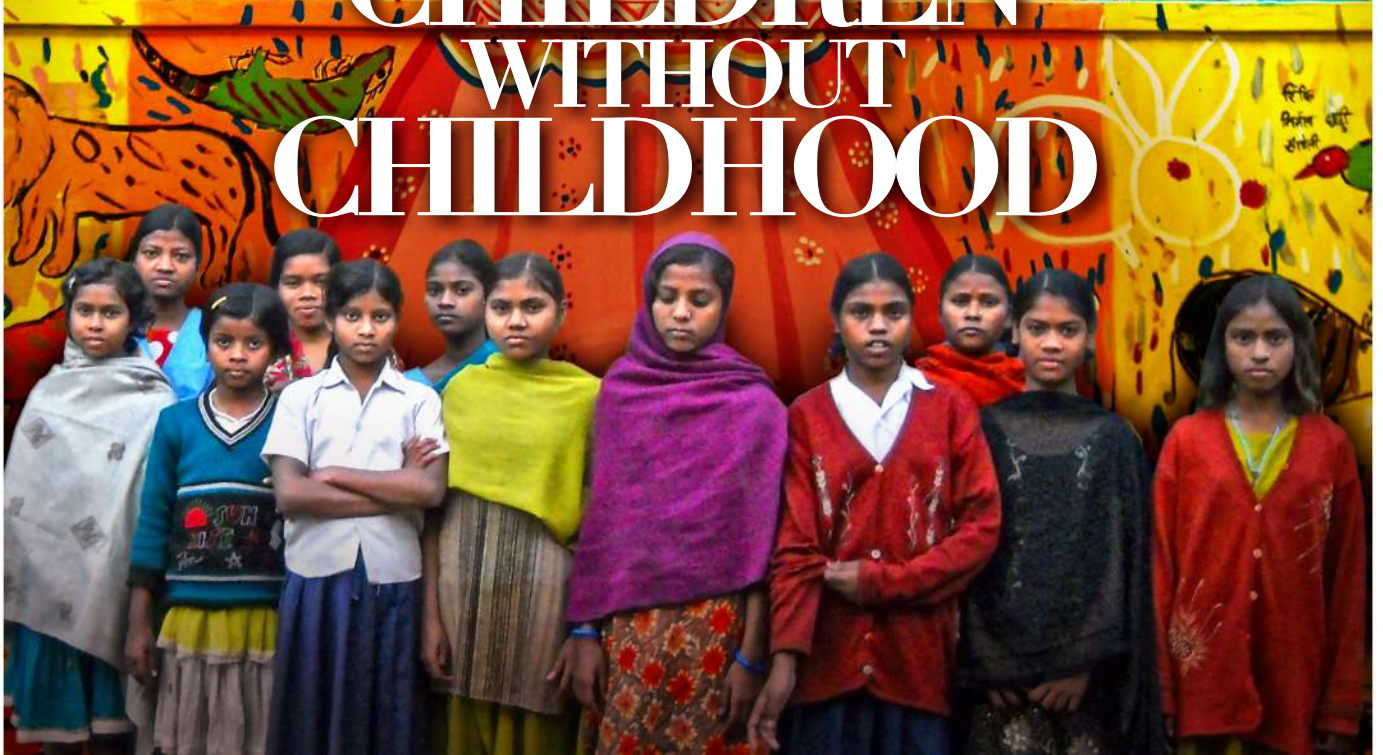


Vol. 2 | No. 2 | March 2021

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



## CHILDREN WITHOUT CHILDHOOD



# Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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# Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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Cover:  
Picture of Goddess Ma Sabari by children  
of Musahar Community, Patna, Bihar

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR



# Children without Childhood



## Editorial

*Pax Lumina in the last five issues has been featuring the excluded, the powerless and the disconnected sections of our society, raising concerns which normally get short-circuited before reaching the eyes and ears of the 'normal' people. True to our vocation, the focus this time, is children without childhood.*

*Childhood is lost to children because of a variety of reasons and this loss permeates all sections of the society cutting across class, caste, region, culture and any other categorization one can think of. Yes, the pain and trauma of the loss may differ, for example, from a child sex-worker to a young drug addict but comparisons in this case are not just irrational but immoral too. The structural faultlines of our society which cause the wretchedness of a large number of our fellow beings start right from birth of these children and eclipse the light of human rights all through their lives. In addition to this, children, being powerless and vulnerable physically and psychologically, irrespective of their position at birth are condemned to suffer the pollution of the world of adults. Here, simply it is adult vs. child and here at least unlike in the former case of structural violence there is no excuse for inaction. Alibi of deliberate passivity on the part of the adults is inadmissible.*

*And therefore, we present some cameos of this everyday tragedy. The veteran social worker and friend of Pax Lumina, Ravindranath Shanbhag, narrates the horrors of child-trafficking. If you think this is done only by some criminals or anti-social elements at the fringes of the society, you are mistaken. Torture of innocent children happens right in our midst, even in urban settings. The story of Sonia illustrates this. Shanbhag has been rescuing and rehabilitating such children for the last many years. So, action is not impossible. As he has shown, one requires to possess the moral outrage at injustice and the empathy for the victim. Pretending to be powerless like a child is not an option for the adult.*

*Udaya (rise or ascension) Colony was Andhakara (darkness) Colony, hardly a few kilometres from our office in Kochi, was a slum literally excluded and disconnected from the rest of the city before the Sisters of the Destitute reached there a few years back. The interview with Sr. Anisha SD, reveals how change is possible even in the heart of darkness. The Sisters pooled in resources from all possible sources including the government and built houses, provided avenues for non-formal education to children and adults and even started a music band which earns some income for the impoverished families.*



*Child abuse is a pervasive reality in the Democratic Republic of Congo, writes Eugene Basonota. He also outlines a host of steps to be taken by the State through effective legislation and by other non - governmental agencies through education and awareness creation. About Kenya, the pathetic state of child mothers is narrated by Augustine Bahemuka. How can the light of empathetic action penetrate the dark crevices of human depravation is a question all of us including the governments, NGO's and the international organisations should address. Lost childhood in the Middle East is the concern Cedric Prakash raises. It is clear that the suffering of children like the other pandemic is global. Each adult has to take action to mitigate it. Baby Chalil describes the state of children of the tribals of Wayanad and you can read about the life and work of Joel Urumpil, a nun and social activist working for the scheduled castes and tribes in Jharkhand and the problems she faces. Shiv Visvanathan, the eminent sociologist takes a historical and philosophical view of the missing childhoods and outlines the systemic causes of this problem.*

*In the international section, K.P. Fabian, the erudite and experienced diplomat, looks at the recent military coup in Myanmar and how the world is responding to it. Lot of what we have to report is grim and sad, but we also have good news. M. Nadarajah tells us about the 'Virtues in Movement' initiative aimed at 'mobilizing our conscience'. Well, if we can keep this priceless commodity, conscience, intact, we can find a way forward and our children a future. In the Art and Peace section, Blaise Joseph, an artist and art educator, tells us about the primacy of art in education. Our cover this time features a painting done by Musahar girls in one of the workshops conducted by him. In the Science and Peace section, Dr. Achuthsankar, the eminent scientist takes a look at how science and technology can foster peace. A report on the webinar on Science – Religion Dialogue is presented by Rosan Roy.*

*'Every Child Matters' by Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi is reviewed by Melisa Hilary in the Book Review section.*

*Dear readers, I wish you peaceful reading of this issue of Pax Lumina, and hope it provides you enough food for thought and action which the suffering children all over the world are crying for.*

**Jacob Thomas**  
Editor



# Children without Childhood

*Children are like  
buds in a garden  
and should be  
carefully and  
lovingly nurtured,  
as they are the  
future of the nation  
and the citizens of  
tomorrow.*

- Jawaharlal Nehru



## INTERVIEW

Sr. Anisha, SD / Nikhil George Joseph  
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# Regaining Childhood in a Slum

*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 09-13*

**A** *t a time when the mainstream society of Kerala could not have in its wildest dreams imagined nuns working outside their convents, two nuns, Sr. Redempta and Sr. Naveena, of the Sisters of the Destitute (SD), chose to take up the audacious task of living their religious commitment amidst a people known for their notoriety and ill-repute.*





*Sr. Anisha, SD*

**A**t a time when the mainstream society of Kerala could not have in its wildest dreams imagined nuns working outside their convents, two nuns, Sr. Redempta and Sr. Naveena, of the Sisters of the Destitute (SD), chose to take up the audacious task of living their religious commitment amidst a people known for their notoriety and ill-repute.

Currently, there are three sisters, Sr. Anjali Jose, Sr. Joselma and Sr. Anisha who are working on the mission that began 30 years ago. This is a story of bringing forth several generations of children from darkness to light.

### **? Looking at the present Udaya Colony, are there still children without normal childhood?**

We used to have such children earlier but not anymore. When we came here 30 years ago, there was not a single child who was regular at school. Today,

everyone goes to school. We spent the first ten years taking care of the needs of the children. Two of our sisters, Sr. Redempta and Sr. Naveena, after their retirement from school, began this mission. They started working for the children by admitting all of them to the nearby schools. Following that, we began a tuition centre for them. Consequently, we have no children who are lost in any way.

### **? How was the situation of the colony when you came?**

It was in a miserable state as there were many assailants and thugs. Children, like many adults, were selling single-digit illegal lottery tickets to survive. It was, indeed, a 'dark' colony. Some of the children were even misused as drug couriers and people referred to the colony as 'Andhakaara' (dark) colony and were fearful to come here.

### **? What were their parents then and how are they faring now?**

Most of the parents were daily-wage workers involved in construction works or selling lottery tickets. Parents often used their children to support them in their work. They were initially settled on the outskirts of Ernakulam South Railway station and the bus-station. Many of them had their legs or hands amputated. They said it was caused by either train or bus accidents.

The Greater Cochin Development Authority built single-room settlements for them and they were shifted to where they are now. These settlements were not strictly intended for them but they forcibly occupied them as they were about to be completed. Initially, there were only a few houses but more and more huts came up gradually. There are

roughly 125 houses. The people have got property rights now. Today, the parents are mostly employed by the Cochin Corporation to collect garbage from the houses allotted to them.

### ? Why did the sisters choose to take up this mission?

There were discussions among us about taking up missions in the slums. We happened to meet Bro. Mavarus CMI who had been working in this slum for five years. He recognised that the sisters may be able to reach out better to the people. And so, he was encouraging when Sr. Redempta and Sr. Naveena were ready to begin the mission. The sisters took up a house and stayed among the people. By living among them the people stopped using vulgar language and uncivilised lifestyles and eventually became better in their behaviour.

### ? What were some of the projects you could implement for the children?

Soon after they were admitted to the schools, we began tuitions for children. All the children came to the centre after school. We had employed teachers. During those times, we used to have more than 250 children. At the beginning, children did not come because they were enthusiastic about

learning but because we were giving milk, eggs, and biscuits. The parents could not afford tea and snacks for them in the evenings. However, now we do not give any more incentives but the parents want their children to have a good education, so they send them.

We used to conduct summer camps for children every year to prevent them from loitering around during their vacations. These camps could go on for one to two months during which they could go for outings which were made possible only with our coming here. Now, of course, they all get to travel by themselves but an exposure outside the colony was unaffordable then.

We also started a music band for boys who came just for the food although now they look for money as well. Today, they are a professional troupe just like any other. We also used to run scholarship programmes for children who showed an aptitude for studies with the help of Rogationists, Carmelites of Mary Immaculate(CMI) and our own SD congregation. Right now, we give scholarships to more than 15 children

**The sisters took up a house and stayed among the people. By living among them the people stopped using vulgar language and uncivilised lifestyles and eventually became better in their behaviour.**





Two of our students finished their engineering studies, and a few did get their BA, BEd, LLB and nursing degrees. **Among the band members, a few have joined the police band and some of them have got into the military as bandmasters and trainers.**

who are given bank accounts and all their study needs are met from the scholarships as the parents are incapable of taking care of the study-related needs.

Besides, we could rescue and rehabilitate many children entangled in the drug market, thus preventing them from police cases and confinement. We could also organise a club for the youth, namely, 'New Friends Club' which had been greatly effective at foiling all attempts of the drug dealers to ensnare children into their mafia. In essence, our efforts at preventing them from being lured by drug and violence have been largely successful.

**? We see a tremendous improvement in them but what were the hurdles you faced initially?**

This colony was infamous for all sorts of notorious activities like drug deals, looting and so on. People feared walking through the area. It is a connective road between two zones of Ernakulam but people rarely used this place. Even to us, it has been a huge challenge to get acclimatised to life here. But, within two years, we felt secure as the people became protective of us. They left their important property-related documents with us for safe-keeping.

**? What were some of the projects you executed for families?**

An important project we could materialise was house-building. During heavy rains, the houses used to get flooded. Hence, it was important to get to a safer place. The Prime Minister's Aavas Yojana project by the Central Government sanctioned Rs. 4 lakhs per house but it would be released only if the foundation was laid and basic structures were built. Seeing that the amount would not be sufficient many were hesitant at the beginning.

We encouraged them to begin the work and then we sought help from many people. Now we have 28 completed houses and there are 30 applications to build houses. People see it as a great accomplishment. Earlier, children couldn't find a place in their houses to study, but now they have a fairly comfortable space. Similarly, cooking was rarely done at home, but our predecessors were bold and courageous enough to chase them from the tea shops and force them to make food at home.



Earlier, they did not have any concept of family. When they came of age, they could choose some partner of their liking regardless of religion and live together. Arranged marriages began only recently. There are members belonging to different religions in many of the houses.

**? Among the children you have nurtured can you think of some who may have accomplished better living situations through jobs?**

Two of our students finished their engineering studies, and a few did get their BA, BEd, LLB and nursing degrees. Among the band members, a few have joined the police band and some of them have got into the military as bandmasters and trainers. One of them could contribute to the building of his house from the salary he got from the band. It gives us great joy of fulfilment and satisfaction at their achievements.

**? Do you have well-wishers who collaborate with you in this endeavour?**

We do not have any established groups to support us but a few people are working with us who are always generous enough to help us, like in the running of the tuition centre or giving food to children.

**? What are some of the future projects for the colony; can we dream of a time when they will be self-sufficient so that you can leave the place?**

When all the families have good houses that secure them from floods that would give them a sense of identity, worth and

belongingness. We will have to continue motivating the children. We have begun a few extension services as well which would cater to at least 210 similar colonies around Ernakulam. During the Covid pandemic, we visited 45 colonies along with volunteers from the Udaya colony under the theme of 'Focusing outreach by Udaya', and could deliver food and other necessities.

Earlier, we used to provide the Udaya colony with rice grains, medicines and other amenities every year. Now they have reached a degree of self-sufficiency that we don't need to provide anything. We have also stopped hotel and junk food from coming into the colony by demanding they should eat healthy food by cooking at home. They had taken loans for building their houses. All of them, we hope, will be able to repay the loans from the salary and earnings they get from work. Now, they have started to dream of beautifying and improving their houses. That is a sign of self-reliance and improvement.

*Interview by Nikhil George Joseph,  
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(Those who would like to support this project, kindly contact the author via email.)



**Diya Nayak**  
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**How a seven-year-old girl  
was rescued from the clutches  
of physical abuse**

# “Mujhe Maa Ke Paas Le Chalo”

*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 14-21*



**"Please Take Me  
to My Mother"**

**W**orking for the Human Rights Protection Foundation (HRPF) is immensely rewarding.

Constantly fighting for justice for the underprivileged and the oppressed sections of society might be jarring for the common man, but not for Dr Ravindranath Shanbhag and his dedicated team of volunteers. Day in and day out they work tirelessly, handling

numerous cases and answering hundreds of calls that report sensitive issues and requesting intervention. Thanks to HRPF's reputation as a selfless and helpful organisation, many people in dire straits from different places get in touch with them.

So, it was no surprise when at 6 a.m., on November 6, 1999, Dr Shanbhag received an anonymous call from a woman, claiming that a little girl in Mangalore was being tortured by her employers. Dr. Shanbhag receives several fake calls, but whenever the person does not identify himself, he tends to ignore the call. Realising that the call was being made from a public telephone booth, Dr. Shanbhag repeatedly asked for the identity of the caller.

The woman caller, a migrant labourer, said, "Sir, we are in the Kottara area of Mangalore. A young girl is being tortured by her employer day in and day out. They lock her up and go away. As soon as they leave the house, the girl starts begging for food. This has been happening for quite some time. Having read your heart-wrenching article on Pauline, I decided to contact you."

When Dr. Shanbhag asked her why she hadn't contacted the police, she said, "Sir, we cannot afford to go to the police station or the court. However, if you want, you can save this girl."



Initially, he was hesitant to act because of the numerous fake calls he receives daily. Nevertheless, Dr Shanbhag contacted Rita Noronha, a professor in a social science institute, and Francis Colaco, the convener of DK District Women's Forum in Mangalore, and requested them to assign five female volunteers. Dr Shanbhag gave the address where they had to reach, and if they found any such girl, he instructed them to inform the Urva police station.

The volunteers, from the Women's Forum and students from Roshni Nilaya School of Social Work, visited the house. The volunteers had to peep through the window. They saw a little girl mopping the floor. As soon as the girl saw the volunteers, she came near the window and, with tears in her eyes, "Mujhe Maa Ke Paas Le Chalo (Please take me to my mother)."

By this time Dr. Shanbhag had reached Mangalore.

### **Luring with promises**

Through a conversation with the girl, the volunteers understood her name was Sonia, aged 10 years, and she hailed from Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh.



**A**s soon as the girl saw the volunteers, she came near the window and, with tears in her eyes, **“Mujhe Maa Ke Paas Le Chalo” (Please take me to my mother).**



They discovered a lady who visited north Indian villages. In 1997, under the pretence of social service and the promise of a good education, she had brought Sonia to Mangalore. The girl's father, Rajendar, was told by the lady that the girl would be sent to school. After school, she needed to do small tasks like watering her host's garden. After much persuasion, he agreed to send the girl, hoping that she would be well taken care of by the family with whom she would be staying. With his meagre income, at a brick kiln, Rajendar could not afford to provide good education to his daughter.

Sonia was housed in a bungalow called 'Paradise', owned by a local doctor. Apart from the doctor, there was his wife, father and two children. According to Sonia, her initial days were pleasant. She was given three meals a day and was only asked to do small jobs like cleaning utensils and washing clothes. But she was not sent to school.



Over time, her tasks became more burdensome. She was made to get up early, handle all the household chores, and work until late hours. She was forced to wash the clothes of all the five members by hand, despite the availability of a washing machine. She was also made to mop, sweep, and wash the vessels every day, and grind masala by hand. Despite her small frame, Sonia was forced to wash her employer's car, too.

However, as months passed, Sonia realised she was being denied not only her education and pay, but also the basic freedom to just go out. She remembered leaving the house only once in the past three years.

Sonia was kept locked up inside the house, while the employers went out during the day. Additionally, the employer and his wife would thrash her for not doing the work properly. As the days passed, the torture became severe.

The employers initially used to hit Sonia with a wooden stick, if she showed disinterest or a reluctance to work. Later they started beating her with an iron wire. These methods of torture and other physical abuse left permanent scars on her body. She had callused and swollen palms – an indication of prolonged exposure to chemical cleaning agents.



## *Helping the other children*

*During her first conversation with the volunteers who approached her, Sonia had revealed that two more girls from her village had accompanied her to Mangalore. In an interesting turn of events, when the Women's Forum in Mangalore traced the other two girls who had accompanied Sonia, a whole new truth unfolded. According to them, 12 more girls had been brought by the same 'social worker' to Mangalore to work as domestic helps.*

*The volunteers from the Roshni Nilaya, School of Social Work along with the officials of the Department of Child Welfare found all these girls and enquired whether they wanted to pursue their education at Mangalore. The volunteers convinced their employers to send them to school. There was an opinion that all 15 should be sent back to their hometowns but HRPF was against it because they would be sold again. At the request of HRPF, many philanthropists came forward to sponsor their education. Ultimately, the Women's Forum saw to it that the girls left Mangalore only after they had graduated.*



She was underfed and was made to sleep on the kitchen floor.

The starvation and isolation took a toll on Sonia. She resorted to stretching out her arms through the front window to beg for food from people passing that way.

Sonia's cries for help were noticed by the neighbours. They knew that, given the influence and power of the employer, the doctor and his family would not be held accountable for their atrocities on Sonia. Hence, an anonymous call was made to Dr. Shanbhag.

### **Timely Assistance**

The HRPF sprung to action. On account of the sensitivity of the case, the police, and the State Department of Women and Child Welfare were put on high alert to demand the release and protection of Sonia. However, law enforcement authorities stated that they could not help, unless a formal written complaint was lodged.

Accordingly, a written complaint was made at the Urva Police Station on behalf of the DK District Women's Forum on November 7, 1999. The Sub

Inspector said, “This complaint is based on the information gathered from the neighbours, and unless and until you give details, we cannot take action.”

But the volunteers said, “There are any number of witnesses. But the protection of the child, without wasting any more time, is the need of the hour. After all, what is the technical hitch that prevents you from proceeding in the matter?”

The policeman said, “This is a delicate issue. If the house owner insists he is the custodian of the child, bringing her up and giving her education, don’t you think we will be left in a cul-de-sac? (a street or passage closed at one end).”



However, he gave in when the women convinced him that in such an event a record showing the admission of the girl to a school could be asked for. He now sent three constables with them. The lady of the house could not produce any proof of Sonia’s education. Initially, the woman did not agree to hand over the child on the plea that her husband was away but when the police insisted, she let the child go. Thus, Sonia was released.

Even after the rescue, the police were reluctant to cooperate with the HRPF. The constables refused to record Sonia’s statement and handed her over to the DK District Women’s Forum. On account of the affluent status of the employers, the police were instructed by ‘higher authorities’ to hand over Sonia to her employer’s brother, which was met with protests from the HRPF.

As per the law, every District should have a juvenile Welfare Board under the chairmanship of the District Collector. The HRPF wanted to meet every member of the Board and explain the case. Unfortunately, till then not a single meeting had been held and the Board was yet to be formed.

On November 8, the HRPF contacted District Collector, Dr. Ramana Reddy and explained to him the necessity of appointing the members of the Board



**The employers initially used to hit Sonia with a wooden stick, if she showed disinterest or a reluctance to work. Later they started beating her with an iron wire. These methods of torture and other physical abuse left permanent scars on her body. She had callused and swollen palms – an indication of prolonged exposure to chemical cleaning agents. She was underfed and was made to sleep on the kitchen floor.**



## *“Its Karma is to sting and my Dharma is to save it”*

*Almost eight months after Sonia was rescued, she was brought back to Mangalore for the trial. During the hearing, the Public Prosecutor asked her whether she had stated in her earlier statement to the police that she was tortured by her employers. To the shock of everyone assembled, she replied Dr. Shanbhag had tutored her to narrate the story of abuse by her employer. As luck would have it, Dr. Shanbhag had with him the report of the Magistrate enquiry held at Gorakhpur. This saved him from being punished.*

*However, this incident shocked the volunteers of HRPF. During their next monthly meeting, they suggested that Dr. Shanbhag desist from accepting such cases in future as the victim could accuse the activist of an ulterior motive.*

*To this Dr. Shanbhag narrated a parable attributed to the great Bengali saint Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa: A sadhu was bathing in the Ganga at Hardwar. He saw a scorpion getting caught in the swift current. Out of mercy, the sadhu picked it up barehanded, only to be stung. The pain of the sting caused the sadhu to drop the scorpion into the flowing river. He picked up the scorpion to save it from a watery grave, only to be stung again. After a few repetitions, when the bystanders asked the sadhu why he persisted with this foolishness, the Sadhu said, “It’s karma is to sting, my Dharma is to save it.”*

and to call a meeting. Dr. Reddy, in consultation with the Superintendent of Police (SP) Kamal Pant, called an emergency meeting which was attended by Assistant Commissioner of the Labour Department, Jinakallapa, along with a few officials of the Dept. of Women and Child Welfare. Dr. Shanbhag and the team were the special invitees.

The government machinery shed its lethargy and started moving. What could not have been accomplished in the past 24 hours was made possible in the next four hours. The officials of the Department of Child Welfare took the child to Wenlock Hospital and arranged for her medical check-up. The wounds on her back were recorded. The police

also recorded a statement in Hindi and Kannada.

Sonia was taken to the home she has been working, to recreate the incidents. She led the police to the washing machine and showed them the iron wire stashed away next to the machine that was used to beat her. The police seized it and filed an FIR on the same day. The SP had given orders to register a case under section 374 of the Indian Penal Code and Juvenile Labour (Prevention) Act.

Though there were positive developments, there was a constant back and forth between the police and the Department of Child Welfare, as both hesitated to take responsibility for

the child. In fact, the members of the Women's Forum were willing to take responsibility, but there was no provision under the Juvenile Labour (Prevention) Act to do so. As per the Act, the child should be placed under the care of the state machinery.

After several rounds of negotiation, Sonia was produced before the Magistrate who said the girl should be sent to a Remand Home and placed under the custody of a Probationary Officer.

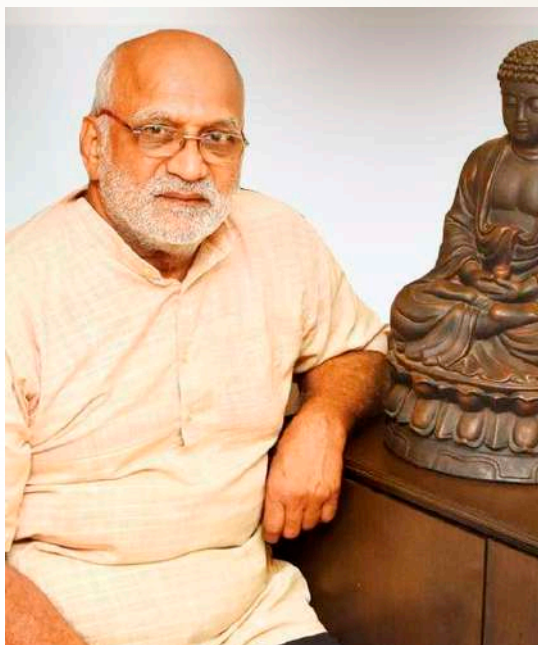
During the last week of December, 1999, Sonia disappeared from the Remand Home. Later, the HRPF discovered that her father Rajendar Singh had filed a petition to take custody of his daughter, which was against the Juvenile Labour

### **(Prevention) Act**

However, without the knowledge of Dr. Shanbhag and the DK Women's Welfare Board, a court order was issued to release Sonia to the custody of her father, despite the case being handled by the Juvenile Board.

Rajendar then took Sonia back to their village, after promising she would be produced in court, as and when required.

A petition was filed in the same court questioning the release of Sonia to the parents when there was no provision to do so under the Juvenile Labour (Prevention) Act. The court did not give any explanation. The rescue team and Dr. Shanbhag gave a press statement and brought this issue to the notice of the District Juvenile Board and insisted that action should be taken.



*Dr Ravindranath Shanbhag*

On April 24, 2000, Dr Reddy wrote a letter to the District Collector of Gorakhpur with a request to hold a magisterial enquiry and send the report. The district administration of Gorakhpur ordered an enquiry by an IAS officer, Aaradhana Patnaik.

The enquiry report (see box) confirmed that the employers of Sonia tortured the girl. The report also revealed that despite the promise of payment, neither Sonia nor her parents had received any monetary compensation for her work from her employer.

### **Legal battle continues**

After eight months, during the first week of August, 2000, things took an interesting turn when Sonia returned to Mangalore to be presented before a magistrate during the hearing of her case.

On his first appearance, Rajendar filed an affidavit in the Judicial Magistrate First Class Court in Mangalore, stating that his daughter told him that she had not been mistreated during her stay at

her employer's house. Sonia was brought before the court. During the hearing, the Public Prosecutor reminded her about the statement given by her to the police in which she had revealed that she was tortured by the employer. The Prosecutor also asked her why she gave such a statement.

She replied that she did so on the advice of Dr. Shanbhag and the members of the Women's Forum. When asked by the Public Prosecutor, she failed to identify either Dr. Shanbhag or a member of the Women's Forum who was present in the court.


The defence lawyer also tried his best to convince the court there was no torture of the child, despite her previously recorded statement and the medical report which showed proof of her abuse. The court also observed that Sonia was now being forced by the defence lawyer to say that this was a plot devised by the neighbours of her employer who were ill-disposed towards him.

This case received wide coverage in both State and national media, which brought laurels to Dr. Shanbhag and the HRPF in Udupi.


However, the people of Mangalore did not understand the significance. In fact, one person called Dr. Shanbhag and said, "Sir, these children don't have two square meals in their native place due to extreme poverty. If someone gives them food and shelter, why are you making a hue and cry under the pretence of Juvenile Labour Act?"

Dr. Shanbhag said, "Sir, do you have a female child in your house? If you have one, what will happen to her if you did not educate her?"

Dr. Shanbhag further explained, "We do not have any objection to making the



**H**RPF take up every case with enthusiasm, earnestness, and empathy. When asked about their motivation to work for the people Dr. Shanbhag said, **"Dharma is not a duty, it is a life mission."**



children do small tasks provided they are sent to school."

Despite the harsh and sensitive nature of the job, Dr Shanbhag and the HRPF are always sympathetic and empathetic. They use their resources to bring about a positive change in the community. They take up every case with enthusiasm, earnestness, and empathy. When asked about his motivation to work for his people he said, "Dharma is not a duty, it is a life mission."

After listening to the story of Sonia from Dr. Shanbhag, I wanted to know what was the decision of the court regarding punishment for the offender? He said, "It is not important for us what punishment he received. But we wanted to ensure that the victim was saved and given proper justice. I can confidently say we were successful in our mission. The victims were sent home after their graduation in Mangalore."

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*(Those who would like to support this project, kindly contact the author via email: [humanrights.udupi@gmail.com](mailto:humanrights.udupi@gmail.com))*

## INTERVIEW

Blaise Joseph

(blaise@kochimuzirisbiennale.org).

*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 22-29*

# Art as a Fundamental Right of Child

Interview with **Blaise Joseph**,  
the Programme Manager of 'Art by Children' (ABC)  
project of the **Kochi Biennale Foundation**



**W**hat have been your experiences with the Kochi Biennale 'Art by Children' (ABC) Programme with regard to creating awareness on art as well as generating enthusiasm for art amongst students?

'Art by Children' (ABC) is a programme of the Kochi Biennale Foundation, an initiative meant for facilitating children to engage with their creativity. I was appointed the Programme Manager of ABC in 2018. That year, the Art Room Project was the main

undertaking of the ABC Programme. I consider the Art Room Project as a continuation of my work in the realm of art and education over the last 12 years, partially developed in collaboration with my artist-partner, Atreyee Day.

I consider art as an expression of creativity that each of us carries within us. To me, this creativity is not only the basis of art but also of education. Art and creativity cannot be excluded from the process of learning although this is exactly what the modern educational system and institutions have been perpetuating. The ABC programme aims to integrate creativity into the learning process of children, much of which today takes place in schools. This is why we have



not only set up an Art Room at the Biennale site but also in a few schools in Ernakulam and Thrissur Districts of Kerala.

The Art Rooms are non-competitive and non-judgmental spaces where children do not have to fear about losing or winning but can think and engage freely. Creativity and art are the means to critique and deconstruct problematic notions such as winning, perfection and fear, which are deeply embedded in the contemporary system of learning. On the contrary, creativity and art are about building relationships and the broadening of minds and hearts.

The Art Room Project, which recognizes creativity as a fundamental need and right of children, was embraced by most participants - children, parents, teachers and artist-facilitators. Understanding creativity and art as an integral part of everyday life, the art activities are linked to our everyday reality and immediate context.





In this programme, the participants are encouraged to carefully examine details of **their surroundings and the interior spaces of their house that are often taken for granted, and translate their observations into images and stories.**



*Blaise Joseph*

One of the strengths of the programme is that the Art Rooms were also pushing the limits of the closed classrooms. Many of the activities in workshops were conducted in natural surroundings and outdoors. Besides, the exhibitions of the art works created in the Art Rooms were held in public spaces such as markets, Panchayath Bhavans and residential areas. For the participants, this was an enriching experience as it gave them the opportunity to share their works and interact with a much larger and diverse audience. The Art Room Project was received well, so that we actually planned to set up Art Rooms in more schools in those Districts. However, lack of funds and later the Pandemic have put this plan on halt, for now.

We tried to adapt to this unprecedented context and initiated an online programme, called Learning at Home, which basically tries to bring the Art Room to children and their families at home. This is particularly meaningful since education or learning is not an individual process but one that happens in a social setting, in which adults play a central role. Therefore, the Learning at Home project is designed as an inclusive

programme for both children and adults in families.

In this programme, the participants are encouraged to carefully examine details of their surroundings and the interior spaces of their house that are often taken for granted and translate their observations into images and stories. This process also includes that the participants explore the creative possibilities that lay within the materials available to them, for instance, creating colors out of natural materials such as soil, leaves and spices.

This approach and the way I conduct workshops are quite different from common art workshops. To this I owe to my exposure and experience of working with different learning communities throughout India for well over a decade.

### **How did you land up in Biennale?**

I came back to Kerala in 2018, when the State was hit by the great flood and landslide. The Chalakudy river-belt was one of the most affected areas and the children there were terribly traumatized. At the invitation of



## How can art be incorporated into the school curriculum in a more serious manner?

an environmental activist friend, I went to Chalakkudy to organize art workshops in different schools and villages as a voluntary initiative I had started, called Artists for Kerala. A few artists-friends also joined this initiative. Since we lacked funds, we began to explore natural materials available in their surroundings as media for creating art works. The results of this art experiments were outstanding. Vidya Shivadas, a leading art curator, shared these works with Riyas Komu, one of the Founding members of the Kochi Biennale, who invited me to discuss the ABC Programme and the Art Room Project. I was happy for this opportunity as the Biennale offered me a platform to reach out with my work as an artist and art educator to a much larger and diverse audience.

Art education in India is based on a very narrow understanding of art. The mainstream educational system neither seems to recognize art as the basis of education nor acknowledge children as fundamentally creative beings. Putting it bluntly, art is not given much significance, which shows in the fact that schools have reduced art to an extra-curricular activity.

Most of the children are suffocated as there is no adequate space for them to be themselves and to find expressions for their talents and creativity in the school educational framework. Art helps children to understand and experience reality in its wholeness whereas, the mainstream educational system compartmentalizes our world. Instead of being taught in this linear





In my workshops, I have not come across participants comparing themselves with others or trying to prove to be the best. **The workshops, thus, nurture communal bonding and an egalitarian perspective among the participants.**



approach, children should be given space for self-exploration. Ideally, this process would be accompanied by empathetic facilitators.

Therefore, I believe that arts need to be one of the primary components of the curriculum just as the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 discusses on pages 54-56.

### **How can art play an important role in creating a more peaceful atmosphere in schools and colleges?**

Peace and justice exist only where there is an egalitarian relationship. How can we expect peace in a competitive and individualistic environment that controls our schools and families? When we imagine peace and justice we tend to think in terms of larger contexts, such as that of conflicts between communities or States, but peace and justice begin much earlier, for instance, in the relationship between man and woman. A lot of violence happens between man and woman because of the lack of mutual respect, trust and understanding. This is also fostered by the ways we raise our

children not giving them space to interact with the other sex. In our workshops, we try to playfully and creatively address not only this relationship between boys and girls but also that between castes, ethnicities and religious groups by creating inclusive and non-judgmental work-spaces. We do so, for example, through non-competitive and inclusive games, body movements and visual art activities, individually as well as collectively.

Today, more so than ever, there is a great need to create such spaces. India is currently facing a lot of violence and injustice done to many people and communities. Our society is divided and fragmented and the powerful ruling class wants our society to be so. It is the divide and rule policy that underlies the design of the school curriculum. Fear and violence thrive in a society that is deprived of mutual understanding among its people. To my understanding, the disregard for arts in school curriculum is part of the design to keep children fragmented in their thinking process. All the subjects are fragmentations of the wholeness. Art is a binding factor that knits the fragments into wholeness.

Appreciation and acceptance are key elements to improve this situation. When each person is appreciated for the progress that they make at their own pace and

according to their ability, a deep sense of well-being and inner beauty takes roots. In my workshops, I have not come across participants comparing themselves with others or trying to prove to be the best. The workshops, thus, nurture communal bonding and an egalitarian perspective among the participants.

**Pax Lumina, in this issue, is covering the plight of children from disadvantaged sections of our society. How can art be used to bring some solace into their lives?**

Before talking about how art can bring solace, allow me to clarify my understanding of what being disadvantaged in the context of a child means. For me, a child's disadvantage is not related to economic circumstances alone - a child is disadvantaged when it is deprived of her/his childhood, which is the case with most children in today's world. A child's world is incredibly vast. Unlike adults' world, imagination, fantasy, playfulness, enquiry and creation are central to child's world. However, in the school life, that world is often reduced to

the restricted space within a classroom and further in the pages of a notebook. And, the child is often judged and critiqued on the basis of what s/he produces in those pages. Most children fail in these constant examinations which hinders children from evolving as persons. It would be much better if schools provide children both mental and physical spaces to engage creatively at individual level as well as collectively. This space should be empathetic to children to share and express their personal contexts, experiences, memories and stories. Art is the means to create such a space and to facilitate meaningful interactions.

**Violence can be direct or indirect, that is structurally based on class, caste, gender etc. How can art be employed to respond creatively to these forms of violence?**

I will share with you a concrete example of how I used art to deal with structurally based violence or suppressive social structures. From 2016 to 2018, I worked as an art-educator for an organization called Quest Alliance at a Government School in





**I**t would be much better if schools provide children both mental and physical spaces to engage creatively at individual level as well as collectively. **This space should be empathetic to children to share and express their personal contexts, experiences, memories and stories.**

**Art is the means to create such a space and to facilitate meaningful interactions.**



to the caste, class and gender. Therefore, the priority of the art in education project in this village was to take the learning process beyond classrooms and the school campus. Thus, the workshops were conducted in farm lands, market places, in the workshops of the craft people in the village who mostly belonged to lower castes.

The participating students, teachers as well as the community members crossed the existing social and physical boundaries through the art activities. For example, a basket weaver belonging to Mallah community was invited to facilitate a five-day workshop on understanding bamboo and weaving; a group of children from various caste and communities visited an elder from a lower caste community to document his memories of the village history and map the village through his memories. The exhibitions of the art works after every workshop were conducted both in the school premises as well as at the market place, thereby bridging the gap between the school and the community.

Kalaunjar, a village in Samastipur District of Bihar. The objective of the project was to engage with the learning community specific to that context comprising teachers, students, parents, school building and the natural environment and respond to that reality using art. Like many other villages in India, this village is extremely caste-ridden; the Upper Caste minority holds land and all the governing powers. The discriminatory interactions between different caste groups have kept the lower caste communities away from most social interactions. Beyond the caste and class division there is also a stark gender inequality. Considering the caste dynamics of the village context, it was difficult to talk about the caste and gender divides openly among the community. Art gives subtle tools to engage the community touching upon sensitive issues with regard



Every house in the village became a gallery space facilitating conversations between people of various castes, class and gender.

**What can the government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society, in general, do to make art an effective tool to create a more humane, caring and peaceful society?**

First of all, we need to rethink our understanding of art, especially with regard to its role in education. Already Gandhi and Tagore recognized the importance of art in the learning process of every child to become more humane, caring and peaceful. The Indian artist and art educator, Devi Prasad followed this concept. In his book, 'Art as the Basis of Education,' he discusses, in detail how crucial art is in the evolution of a child. Consequently, art should become the central subject in schools, and government and NGOs should ensure adequate infrastructure. All these educators reiterated the need for

decentralizing art curriculum and connect it to the daily life of the learners. We need more art educators who have reformed their perspectives on art and education to engage with the requirements of art in education. It would be good if Fine Arts colleges and other training institutions for training art teachers prepare holistic courses in art education.

**Future plans?**

I wish people realize art as a living reality. To do that, I would like to develop a holistic art programme for various schools and families in Kerala through the ABC Programme. I also envision formation of collectives of art-based learning communities, train art educators to become art facilitators and to bring art into the living contexts of people.

*Interview by Dr. Binoy Jacob  
& Dr. K.M. Mathew*



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# Child Abuse in the Democratic Republic of Congo

## **I**ntroduction

Child abuse is a pervasive reality in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The latest report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) underscores that violence, exploitation and abuse against children are widespread in various social settings, such as families, schools and communities.

However, the legal system comprises several legal texts meant to promote children's rights. Unfortunately, these texts have never come to fruition, as violations against children's rights spike more strenuously. The gap between the legal texts and relentless violations requires urgent attention and compelling action. Therefore, this article aims to identify the causes of that gap to suggest prospects for the improvement of children's rights.





This article is divided into five points, the first of which presents an overview of the Congolese corpus of children's rights. The second deals with the current situation of children's rights. The third point presents the causes of child abuse. The fourth presents avenues for the promotion of children's rights and the last deals with the governmental and non-governmental rehabilitation measures for children.

### **1. An overview of the corpus of children's rights**

The DRC ratified regional and international treaties on the rights of the child, notably the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. On March 28, 2001, the DRC ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Constitution also supports children's rights. Article 41 provides that 'the abandonment and maltreatment of children, in particular paedophilia, sexual abuse and the charge of engaging in witchcraft, are prohibited and punishable by law'. This article also emphasises that 'the public authorities should ensure the protection of children in a difficult situation and to bring the authors of acts of violence against children and their accomplices to justice'. Moreover, 'all other forms of exploitation of minors are severely punishable by law'.

Articles 43 and 45 emphasises that 'education is free'. Besides, 'primary education is compulsory and free in the public establishments'.

On January 10, 2001, Joseph Kabila, the President of the DRC, promulgated 'Law No. 09/001 on child protection'. This law specifies, on the one hand, the rights of the child, and on the other, the social and juridical protection of the child. This law stipulates that every child has the right to life, the right to have an identity, the right to education, the right to be protected from all forms of violence or exploitation, the right to live in a social setting whereby the material, moral and emotional needs of the child are met. This law prohibited child labour and all practices or traditions that hinder the pleasant growth of the child.

The aforementioned considerations make it clear that the legal texts comprise robust texts on children's rights. Did these texts come to fruition?

### **2. The day-to-day reality of children's rights**

The current situation of children's rights is chaotic. The latest statistics of UNICEF on child protection in the DRC are alarming: 27% of children aged 5-17 years are engaged in child labour, 82% of children, aged 1-14 years have experienced physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers.

**The fact remains that the best way to tackle the abuse of children's rights consists of identifying and addressing the causes of child abuse.**

The phenomenon of 'street children' is caused by various factors. According to the German Catholic Bishops' Organization for Development and Cooperation, the phenomenon of 'street children' is mostly caused by the extreme poverty of several families that are no longer able to provide their children with security and to satisfy their basic needs. Human Rights Watch underscores that street children are often victims of physical violence, extortion, sexual abuse, manipulation and arbitrary arrest.

On another note, the education of children needs to be improved. Last year, the government decreed that primary education was free. However, this decision was entirely political since the government did not provide public schools with the necessary means to realise this decision. The fact remains that the best way to tackle the abuse of children's rights consists of identifying and addressing the causes of child abuse.

Human Rights Watch reported that military groups use schools for child recruitment and military purposes in the eastern regions. It is vital to underscore that child soldiers are often subject to intense psychological trauma associated with their participation in or witnessing atrocities associated with combat.

Furthermore, there is an increasing number of street children in major cities. On September 22, 2019, the French news Agency Le Monde reported that there were more than 20,000 street children in the city of Kinshasa, the capital.

### **3. What are the causes of child abuse?**

The major violations of children's rights are caused by military conflicts and political instability. Military conflicts constitute a fertile ground for child abuse. Several military groups use children as a weapon to bring terror and social destabilisation to the Eastern regions.





Political instability is another major cause of children's rights abuses. From the time the DRC became independent, the country has undergone several political crises: on November 25, 1965, the regime of Joseph Kasa-vubu, the first president was overthrown by Joseph Mobutu. After thirty-two years of dictatorship, Mobutu was overthrown by Laurent-Désiré Kabila, who in turn, was assassinated in 2001. His death led the country into chaos as several rebellions sprang up. In short, the DPR has experienced political instability caused by coups, dictatorship, and civil wars. These often entail human rights abuses, such as the mass displacement of children, and the recruitment of child soldiers.

Furthermore, corruption overshadows the legal system to such an extent that the rich are generally acquitted, even in cases where they are at fault. Such a corrupt judiciary does not encourage the collaboration of child abuse victims. In some cases, child abuse victims are reluctant to file a complaint against their abusers for fear of victimisation. The reform of the judiciary is urgent and necessary. Such a reform would consist of eradicating corruption which hampers the proper functioning of justice.

Lack of information is another cause of abuse. Many victims are not well informed about their rights, particularly information regarding how to prosecute their abusers. An excellent way to combat abuse consists of raising awareness in communities about child protection and safeguarding.

The social and economic situation, namely poor governance and weak leadership, has driven the population into poverty. This poor governance is characterised by corruption, embezzlement, nepotism and tribalism. It also leads to unemployment, insecurity and misery. The extreme poverty of families results in juvenile delinquency because families are no longer able to fulfil their protective role regarding their children.

Finally, the media must contribute to the fight against child abuse and the violation of their rights. Olusola Oyero, the Head of Department of Mass Communication, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria said that African media often frames the child in stereotypical and patriarchal ways with the voice of the child being left out. Moreover, most of the child abuse stories reported by certain African media are found to lack depth, context and link to child rights. Therefore, African media, and Congolese media, in particular, should be trained on child rights reporting to play a significant role in sustaining child rights advocacy.

#### **4. How to promote children's rights?**

Promoting children's rights is highly essential, not only because of the dignity of children but also because the future of every society depends on the importance given to education and child protection. A society that neglects the rights of children sacrifices its future and causes its downfall.

The promotion of children's rights requires concrete actions:

- The first task consists of fighting corruption, which weakens public institutions. On the one hand, corruption prevents the judiciary from punishing the perpetrators of child abuse, and on the other, corruption prevents the government from carrying out projects meant to promote the well-being of children. Until the justice system is purged of corruption, it will be difficult to promote the rights of children. There is an urgent and necessary need to reform the judicial system.

- Moreover, the government should guarantee the safety of victims of child abuse, without which the cooperation of victims with the competent judicial authorities would be difficult or impossible. Furthermore, the perpetrators of child abuse must be punished by law, to drastically discourage abuse.



**The promotion of children's rights requires the reformation of the judicial system, the sensitisation of communities on children's rights, the improvement of children's education and a determined involvement of the government in promoting and sustaining children's rights.**



- The government should create a committee responsible for popularising children's rights in all regions. This committee should set up regional representations in each province. The purpose would be to fight against the ignorance of children's rights, and to denounce abuses and to prosecute the perpetrators.

- Good education is an effective means for promoting awareness of individual and collective rights. It is vital to facilitate access to good education, which can raise awareness and ensure respect for children's rights.

- Vigilance is one of the best weapons in the fight against child abuse. This vigilance is required both at the level of communities and at the level of individuals.

## **5. Governmental and non-governmental rehabilitation measures**

In 2018, with support from UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and UNFPA (The United Nations Population Fund), the government launched the Kitumaini Initiative. This is a project aimed to help vulnerable adolescent girls by providing them with education, professional skills as well as reproductive and sexual health information. As of August 6, 2020, the Kitumaini Initiative has allowed 60,000 adolescent girls to access quality healthcare and comprehensive sexual education. Moreover, the initiative has rehabilitated and equipped thirteen vocational centres for teen-aged mothers.

The MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) is one of the non-governmental agencies that strive to rehabilitate children in need of protection. In its report, on September 30, 2020, MONUSCO underlined that its continuous advocacy against the abuse of minors has begun to bear fruit: The commanders of two armed groups active in the Eastern part of the country, namely Apa Na Pale-Bilenge and Nyatura Jean-Marie, signed declarations to prevent and end child recruitment and other abuses.

These two agreements led to the voluntary release of 38 children from the two armed groups. As of August 2020, MONUSCO had succeeded to convince 33 armed groups to sign such commitments, and 2,007 children were voluntarily released by these groups.

The Society of Jesus, a Catholic religious congregation, is seriously involved in the rehabilitation of children in need of protection. Since 1997, the Jesuits have been working in the area of the reintegration of street children, through their Jesuit Centre MgrMunzihirwa. This centre welcomes several



street children and offers them accommodation, food, and vocational training before reintegrating them into society.

It is vital to mention that several Congolese are individually involved in the rehabilitation of children. This is the case of Denis Mukwege, a gynaecologist, who is involved in the medical support of women and adolescent girls who were raped by armed groups. In 2018, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his dedication to victims of rape in the eastern regions.

### Conclusion

This article has aimed to critically analyse the current situation of child abuse. Our inquiry has shown there is a gap between legal texts and reality. The reasons for this discrepancy include military conflicts, political instability, lack of a sustainable judiciary system, lack of information about children's rights and the worsening socio-economic situation. Therefore, the promotion of children's rights requires the reformation of the judicial system, the sensitisation of communities on children's rights, the improvement of children's education and a determined involvement of the government in promoting and sustaining children's rights.

*The author is studying theology at Hekima University College, Nairobi.*



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# LOST CHILDHOOD OF THE TEENAGE MOTHERS OF KENYA



“**H**ow can a 12-year-old girl become a mother?” asked a Kenyan government official. The problem of teenage pregnancies is of great concern to society particularly because of its impact on the lives of these girls, and equally on their children.

In June 2020, the media raised a country-wide alarm following reports that an estimated 4,000 teenage pregnancies have taken place, since the onset of the COVID-19 lockdown in Machakos County (north-eastern province, Kenya).



**R**oot drivers include pervasive poverty and a dearth of sex and health education. This renders those less capable of making good decisions regarding **their sex-lives and their family instable where children experience abusive, exploitative and violent parents.**



Some initiatives have been taken on their behalf. One such initiative was made by the African Institute for Development Policy, which stated that ‘the number of girls, aged 10-19 years, with pregnancy [in the period of] January-May 2019 and 2020 are not that different, and could lean more towards a decline in 2020’. Nevertheless, it proves that teenage pregnancy is a problem in Kenya.

### **Systematic drivers of teenage pregnancies**

The drivers of these early pregnancies can be categorised into two, namely structural and root drivers.

Structural drivers include cultural practices such as early marriages and patriarchal attitudes which prioritise the education of the boy-child over that of the girl. During the pandemic lockdown, the shutdown of

schools confined children at home for an unprecedentedly long period and ‘trapped’ them with predatory family members and neighbours.

Root drivers include pervasive poverty and a dearth of sex and health education. This renders those less capable of making good decisions regarding their sex-lives and their family instable where children experience abusive, exploitative and violent parents. The crisis of teenage pregnancies presents a much deeper existential problem -- a moral decadence as expounded by Pope Benedict XVI’s reflections on the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

### **Impact of pregnancies on teenage mothers**

The integral and holistic growth of children requires that they are raised in a stable and safe environment with the love, care and guidance of their parents and relatives. According to psychologists, if children do not enjoy their childhood, this may affect their lives later.

There are five ways in which teenage mothers may lose their childhood. One: many of these girls lose the opportunity of educational advancement, and hence can hardly pursue their dreams. Plan International, an international NGO, revealed that 98 percent of pregnant girls were not in school [and may not return after giving birth]. Education is key to the intellectual, social and psychological development of children; hence, dropping out of school has an enormous impact on the future of teenage mothers.

Two: teenage mothers face stigma and rejection from not only their parents, relatives and teachers but also from the men who are responsible for impregnating them. This affects their self-esteem. In fact, some have been disowned by their parents, which makes them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Academician Cheryl Hayes (1987) said young and inexperienced as they are, many teenage mothers are forced to adopt adult lifestyles to meet their basic needs and those of their children. This robs teenagers of their childhood. Those who are unable to find good job opportunities may become poor and dependent on their men. As a result, they become vulnerable to gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation through transactional sex, low wages and human trafficking.

Given that they are most probably younger than the fathers of their children, it creates a power imbalance where the mothers can hardly defend themselves against their abusers. Lastly, teenage motherhood may have a generational impact on the individuals, where the challenges faced by teen mothers are transferred to their children. That means, the children become intellectually inferior, have low academic advancement, poor social behaviour, and low self-control and esteem. This is more likely to happen if the mothers do not return to school after giving birth.

## The way forward

In his book, 'Let us Dream' (2020), Pope Francis exhorts readers to come out of a crisis as different and better people. How then can the problem of teenage pregnancies be averted, if at all it can? We need to establish support mechanisms and structures to ensure their safety. Parents should ensure their children return to school after they have given birth and deemed medically safe and fit.

However, education may require some modifications. The curriculum should be redesigned to not only meet their intellectual

**T**eenage pregnancy inevitably makes an impact on the childhood of teenagers. However, it should not mark the end of their lives. **There is always a second chance for them, which can only be attained if the teenagers are socially and morally supported.**



needs but also to ensure that they become a holistic person who knows how to care for their child.

**Bottom line:** Teenage pregnancy inevitably makes an impact on the childhood of teenagers. However, it should not mark the end of their lives. There is always a second chance for them, which can only be attained if the teenagers are socially and morally supported.

## INTERVIEW

*with the Author*

# “Give Teenage Mothers A Second Chance”



agreed to provide free pre and post-natal care to teen mothers and the continuation of their education.

**I**s there any system to take care of the rehabilitation of child mothers and their children in Kenya?

There is currently no government structure or system particularly focused on the rehabilitation of teen mothers. However, a Presidential directive to the Ministry of Education and Administrative Chiefs has

**Which are the agencies and organisations engaged in this work?**

We have myriad agencies and organisations involved in the rehabilitation and support of teenage mothers. The civil society organisations are, however, the most engaged, including faith-based and community-based organisations, local and international NGOs. These organisations work closely with the government and local authorities.



would encourage the parents to give their children a second chance.

**Support social systems also need to be put in place where distressed parents can reach out for counselling and encouragement.**



### **Has there been any action from the government regarding the prevention of this malaise and the rehabilitation of victims?**

The main initiative that has been taken by the government is to ensure that teenage mothers resume their education after they have delivered their babies and feel adequately safe and healthy. In July, 2020, President Uhuru Kenyatta gave a directive to the Administrative Chiefs countrywide to register all school-going pregnant teenagers and further announced free pre and post-natal care for all teenage mothers.

The President further warned the Administrative Chiefs that they would be held responsible for the teen pregnancies in their areas. “How do we allow people to go around impregnating small girls and we don't speak about it? We will wait for DNA results and you are the ones who will bear that burden,” he said. Chiefs were also tasked to ensure the identities of the men responsible for the pregnancies are revealed.

### **What has been the role of religious and cultural institutions in the prevention of childhood pregnancies?**

Religious institutions have played a major role in appealing to the moral consciousness of communities, especially families. Parents have been encouraged to teach their children morals and values. The Church believes that teenagers who are well instructed on moral sexuality are less likely to engage in early sexual behaviour. However, with traditional practices that encourage early marriages in some cultures, and pervasive poverty, the campaign against teenage pregnancies is compromised.

### **Are formal and informal educational institutions involved in preventing this social evil?**

Educational institutions, especially schools, discourage early involvement in sexual behaviour and go to different lengths to teach students of the adverse implications of early pregnancies. But even more commendable are schools that accept teen mothers to resume their education after giving birth.

Serene Haven Girls’ School in Nyeri County has been highly commended for giving second chances to teenage mothers. The education programmes offered there have been restructured and tailored to meet the needs of these young learners, and their babies’ with an underlying objective of forming holistic and responsible women in society. For instance, the girls take breaks during the day to breastfeed and bond with their babies. They also receive counselling and psycho-social support.

In the recent past, there has also been a national debate on the introduction of the controversial Comprehensive Sexual





Education (CSE) into the new curriculum. However, this has faced stern resistance from parents and religious leaders in Kenya. Bishop David Oginde, the presiding Bishop at Christ is the Answer Ministries, said, “With an almost obsessive focus on children obtaining sexual pleasure, CSE promotes promiscuity and high-risk sexual behaviour as healthy and normal.”

### **How can peace institutes, and workers tackle this evil?**

I would encourage the parents to give their children a second chance. Support social systems also need to be put in place where distressed parents can reach out for counselling and encouragement. This acceptance and reassurance from parents and guardians can be adequate for teen mothers to fight against stigma, and even for the stability of their health. This will result in a safe pregnancy. After all, dealing with the situation positively fosters far better results than scolding and rejecting teen mothers.

There is also a need to deal with the people responsible for impregnating teen girls. In some instances, it is their fellow students at schools, in which case the parents of the boy and girl can meet and find a way forward.

The point here is to make the boy accountable for a mistake he made, and not for the girl

to bear the consequences alone. Also, cases where the girls are victims of sexual abuse from relatives or other adult men in the neighbourhood, should be taken seriously by the authorities. The lurking ‘culture of silence’ should be broken.

### **Can you tell us more about the present condition of mothers and their children? How do they manage to survive?**

Some girls are fortunate enough to be accepted by their families where the parents or close relatives take care of them and the baby. Others receive support from NGOs and the agencies that operate in this field. However, these are only a few. The majority of teen mothers are unable to resume going to school after giving birth.

### **How can awareness of this menace be improved so that effective rehabilitation can take place?**

Parents and guardians should be encouraged to talk about this subject rather than leaving it to the teachers at school. The men who impregnate these girls should be held equally responsible and accountable. For instance, following the media reports on teen pregnancy in June, 2020, and President Uhuru’s directive to establish who are responsible for the 4000 teen pregnancies in the country, we have not had another nationwide report accounting for the men who impregnated these girls. This places the burden on the girls whose lives have changed, whereas, the boys or men responsible carry on with their normal lives.

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*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 42-44*

# Children of War: the Lost Childhood in the Middle East

A recent UNICEF Report (2020) states that “around the world, attacks on children continue unabated. The number of countries experiencing violent conflict is the highest it has been in the past 30 years. The result is that more than 30 million children have been displaced by conflict. Many of them are being enslaved, trafficked, abused and exploited. Many more are living in limbo, without official immigration status or access to education and healthcare. From Afghanistan to Mali, to South Sudan, Yemen and beyond, warring parties are flouting one of the most basic rules of war: the protection of children.”

The report goes on to emphasise that “Children have become frontline targets. This is a moral crisis of our age. We must never accept this as the ‘new normal’.”

‘New normal’ sounds strange indeed. The sad reality, however, is that today, there are innumerable stories of the suffering of children who are in the midst of war or are fleeing war and persecution. From Syria to Myanmar, from Congo to Colombia,



from Afghanistan to Sudan – the plight of migrant children labouring long hours in sweatshops, toiling in fields, begging on streets, trafficked, or just left to the vagaries of hostile environments could make the coldest hearts thaw.

The dead body of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian child, who was washed up on a beach in Turkey in September 2015, will forever be etched in the memory and conscience of anyone who cares.

Sometime ago The Guardian newspaper posted a one-and-a-half minute video, 'From War to Sweatshop for Syria's Child Refugees'. This video which went viral on social media, tells the story of Hamza who sits at a sewing machine in a gloomy warehouse in southern Turkey, where he works twelve hours a day, six days a week.

The Syrian could perform most of the roles on the assembly line. He knew how to mould leather into the shape of a shoe, or attach its sole with glue. In a short time, Hamza could thread its different parts together with the machine. "He can make 400 shoes a day," said the factory manager approvingly. "He's a real man."

Unfortunately, he is not.

Hamza is just thirteen years old – a child. And so are more than a third of the workers in this sweatshop.

Hamza is just one of millions of refugee children who have been affected by war and persecution across the globe. Pope Francis held a very moving meeting with hundreds of children in May, 2016 at the Vatican. He hugged Osayande, a Nigerian boy whose parents had drowned trying to flee. He told the children that refugees "are not dangerous, but in danger". Pope Francis showed the children an orange life jacket he was given by a Spanish rescuer working to save lives in the Mediterranean.

"He brought me this life jacket and, crying a little bit, he said, 'Father, I failed. There was a little girl in the sea and I wasn't able to save her. All I could reach was her lifejacket'," the Pope said, and continued, "What was her name? I don't know - a little girl without a name. She is in heaven now and watching us. Let us close our eyes, think about her and give her a name."

Some people truly understand the suffering of children who are victims of war. One such person is Randa Maghribi, a courageous woman from Syria who has braved all odds. She has experienced hunger and deprivation, bombardments and suffering, destruction



and death. Randa, however, is not one to be defeated. She has an indomitable spirit.

Today, from her new home in Baalbek, Lebanon she wants the children of the world to hear her story. Her story, written in Arabic, is a poignant one illustrated with her paintings and entitled 'Arragheef Alyabes' ('Dry Bread').

It reads like a fairy tale. In reality, however, it is the story of the suffering and deprivation that she and her family had gone through. After writing it, she read out the story to her two little sons, Akram (then 12 years old) and Hamza (then 6 years old). They loved it. In writing a story for her children, Randa wanted other children to be aware of the pangs of hunger, of what it means to

be a displaced person, desperately fleeing to a place of safety but often, with nowhere to go.

She hoped that her story would inspire many children. To help them realise that food is a basic right for all and they must ask for it. To help them care for and to share with others. To welcome and to accept a stranger. This children's story has a powerful message for adults too.

Randa remembers the death of her younger sister in childbirth; of how her nieces and nephews had to survive on 'cat's meat'; of how hunger can destroy the spirit of almost anyone. "For a hungry person, even 'dry bread' means survival, it means hope, and it can give new life," she said. There are several organisations and individuals in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and all over the Middle-East who are concerned about what is happening to these children. The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is one such organisation working among the refugees and the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the region.

The objective of the JRS is to accompany, serve and to advocate for the refugees and the IDPs. There is a particular focus on the children who are, without a doubt, the biggest and most seriously affected victims of man's inhumanity to man. The JRS has been running schools, recreational activities, doing counselling, and skill-training for these children. Over the years, thousands of children have benefitted from JRS programmes, but this is a drop in the ocean. What is needed is the political will to stop the war, to help children move towards some kind of normalcy by giving them acceptance, dignity and hope for a better tomorrow.

In 2018, a powerful Lebanese film, 'Capernaum', was screened in several theatres in Lebanon. Directed by Nadine Labaki, it stars Syrian refugee child actor Zain Al Rafeea as Zain El Hajj, a 12-year-old living in the slums of Beirut.



**We must listen, talk about their plight and help restore the simple joys of childhood.**

The film is told in flashback, focusing on Zain's life, including his encounter with an Ethiopian immigrant Rahil and her infant son Yonas, and leading up to his attempt to sue his parents for child neglect. It portrays the grim reality of a child brought up during war, suffering and neglect. It received critical acclaim and soon became the highest-grossing film Middle-Eastern film of all time.

"At the end of the day, children are paying a high price for our conflicts, our wars, our systems, our stupid decisions, and our governments," said Labaki. "I felt the need to talk about the problem, and I was thinking, 'if those children could talk, or could express themselves, what would they say? What would they tell us, this society that ignores them?'"

We must listen, talk about their plight and help restore the simple joys of childhood to these battered children.

*The author is a human rights, reconciliation and peace activist/writer. For three years he worked with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Jordan in advocacy and communications.*



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# The Pearls in the Shells

## The **Story** of the **Tribal Communities** of **Kerala**

**T**here are 38 Adivasi tribal communities in Kerala that constitute 1.45 percent of the total population, as per the 2011 census. Among the 14 Districts, Wayanad has the highest tribal concentration (17 percent). The majority are agricultural labourers and non-timber forest produce gatherers. They have inherited the practice of shifting cultivation, hunting and fishing. On account of the large-scale migration of non-tribals to Wayanad, at various stages of history, the tribals were forced to move

to the interior of the forests or become landless people living in colonies as coolies and bonded labourers to landowners.

Wayanad has 12 tribes: Adiyani, Wayanad Kaadar, Kaattunayakan, Kurichiyan, Malayarayan, Paniyar, Ulladan, Thachenadanmooppen, Karimpalan, Vettakurumba, Uralikurumba, and Mulla Kuruman. These tribes are rich in culture and tradition but are not recognised, as they should be.



Children of these tribes face many challenges but it is neither discussed nor is there an awareness that solutions are needed. The children have inborn talents in arts, sports, extra-curricular activities and even academics but these are not brought forth.

A child from the Thoongadi Ooru settlement said, "I have studied up to Class 9. I had issues with language especially when it came to learning Malayalam, English, and Hindi. I also faced discrimination from some students and teachers regarding punishment or homework. I had difficulty in studying mathematics, science, and like others, I did not get proper help. My only relief was my friends and when they stopped going to school I too stopped. I haven't regretted my decision."

The child's family consists of his father, mother, elder brother, younger brother and younger sister. His parents are daily wage workers. "My elder brother is also a daily wage worker and I go to work in a nearby bakery," he said. "I earn Rs. 400 a day. My younger siblings have studied till Class 6 and 7. Regarding my family, we struggle with problems related to water, electricity and proper housing. I had to face a lot of trouble in the mornings when I had to go to school. We have complained about this to the authorities but no action has been taken."

Another child from Cherukunnu Ooru said he had studied up to Class 7. He did not continue because he had seen his parents' struggle to send him to school. They did not have a proper house or facilities. "I have two siblings, one is studying and the other is a daily wage earner like me," the boy said. "We have faced many difficulties in finding a job. I have seen this discrimination in shops and hospitals. People do not accept us. This makes us scared so we stay away."

The educational scenario of tribals in Wayanad is highly deplorable. Most of the tribals drop out of school. The State



**The education scenario of tribals in Wayanad is highly deplorable. Most of the tribals drop out of school. The State Government's effort to make them continue in school has met with little success.**



Government's effort to make them continue in school has met with little success. Out of 3283 tribal children admitted to Class 1 in 2008-2009, 1828 children (55.5 percent) dropped out. Nearly 71 percent belong to the Paniya tribe.

Some of the other issues the tribals face include land alienation, atrocities against women, unwed mothers, a high rate of infant mortality and school drop-outs, acute poverty, anti-tribal welfare schemes and development programmes, displacement due to various government-sponsored projects, the anti-tribal intervention of political parties and bureaucratic bodies, and exploitation by the landlords as well as detribalisation.

**Some of the issues are highlighted below:**

### **Economic reasons**

Economic backwardness leads to poverty, malnutrition and instability. Parents find it difficult to meet the expenses. Children are exploited in many ways.

- Child labour, especially seasonal work., is a common phenomenon among tribal families.



- The drop-out issue is due to poverty. Though there are Government projects for the development of the children, these are misused by the officials which results in the children being denied basic facilities for their education.
- Since the parents are out working, children are left to themselves. There is no one to look after them.
- On account of poverty, the students accompany their parents for daily work in the fields of the local landlords.
- The tribal students prefer to go for celebrations such as festivals, family ceremonies or other occasions because they get free food and can enjoy various forms of entertainment.
- During the monsoon season, daily work is not available for the parents. So, there is no income. As a result, the students cannot afford to buy study materials, and hence they stop going to school.

### **Exploitative reasons**

- Young girls are sexually exploited by people in the neighbourhood. There are many young unwed mothers among the students. This hinders their education. Some of these girl children are daughters of single mothers who

have no other way but to take the help of their children to support their family.

- Young tribal boys are exploited by the landlords and local political leaders for their selfish needs, like working in their fields for cheaper wages, attending gatherings of political parties for which they will get free transportation, free food, free tickets for movies and many other benefits. Some tribal students like this kind of outing because it enables them to go to the big city which is normally not possible.
- Children are lured to take alcohol and drugs by the rich landlords, local political leaders and other anti-social people for their vested interests.

### **Psychological reasons**

Though the caste system has been abolished there exists clear-cut social discrimination in the public sphere. This is seen in the school environment, too. The tribal children are cornered in many ways by mainstream society.

- They are generally introverts and do not like to be challenged, questioned or being stared at. For these reasons, many children do not answer the teachers' questions and appear to be stupid in

front of non-tribal students. In fact, some of them are smarter than the other students, but because of their psychological inhibitions, they keep quiet and let themselves be bullied by the other students. This causes them to drop out of school.

- Generally, tribal students are afraid of strangers. This is due to their lack of exposure to the outside world and from their own previous experience of being exploited by outsiders.
- They are mostly black. This often makes them feel inferior.


## Cultural reasons

The language issue as well as a negative attitude towards tribal culture have also added to this backwardness. There exists a tension between traditional and modern values because of the influence of Information Technology.

- Their mother tongue is different from other people's language. Each tribe has got its particular dialect. It is an oral tradition. Very often, they do not understand 70 percent of what other people speak. This happens even in the classrooms. So, they do not understand most of what the teachers teach in the class. As per the directives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP-2007), the elementary education for the tribal students has to be in their mother tongue. However, this directive has not come into effect in the educational system of Kerala. Therefore, every tribal child who enters the school becomes uncomfortable due to the language used.
- Their way of life is often depicted as something inferior to modernity. The culture of the mainstream society presented through television and



**Good education is an effective means for promoting awareness of individual and collective rights. It is vital to facilitate access to good education, which can raise awareness and ensure respect for children's rights.**



newspapers causes an inferiority complex. There is nothing much included in the syllabus concerning their history, identity, culture and traditions, of which the tribal students are very proud. Very often, they are compelled to learn non-tribal culture and civilisation.

- Some tribals join a particular sect of Christianity. This results in their losing their culture and tradition. They do not realise that their culture, lifestyle, dressing and unique dialect are a great legacy handed down by their ancestors.

As per the Cultural Deprivation Theory by linguist William Labov this can be applied to tribal children. The theory states that people of lower social classes experience cultural deprivation compared with those above. This causes a disadvantage. As a result, the gap between the classes increases. According to the theory, the middle-class gains cultural capital as the result of primary socialisation, while the lower classes do not. Cultural capital helps the middle-class to succeed in society because their norms and values facilitate educational achievement and subsequent employability. Lower class



members that lack cultural capital do not pass it on to their children, perpetuating the class system. Hence, middle-class children's cultural capital allows them to communicate with their teachers more effectively than lower-class children and this contributes to social inequality.

The Tribal Unity for Development Initiatives (TUDI) is a socio-cultural movement of tribals in Wayanad towards their development. In its 25th year, it aims at a sustainable developed tribal society where indigenous culture and participatory living are promoted. It started in Eachome, a remote village in Panamaram Panchayath in 1996 under the leadership of the Kerala Jesuit Society. To address the various issues of tribal children TUDI initiated many tribal-friendly interventions.

■ Tribal Folk School (Tudikoottam), Nursery School and Children's library (Kurinjipookal), Tribal Boarding and Learning Center (Arivuda), Folkarts Group (TUDI Kalasangam), Research Library and Ethno Folk Museum (Keni), Tribal Festival (Adivasi Gramotsavam), Herbarium (Pachamarunukoottam), Group Farming (Panikoottam), Cultural

Research and Language Studies, Education Empowerment Programmes, Social Empowerment Programmes, TUDI Publication and Production Centre and Career Guidance Cell. TUDI also worked along with CHILD FUND INDIA during the 2018-2019 Kerala floods by giving humanitarian assistance to children and families. TUDI also provides support to the tribals by working along with the Caritas India Project (livelihood restoration of the most marginalised flood and landslide affected communities in Wayanad).

■ TUDI also works with Lok Manch: development and access to entitlements of the marginalised communities, by capacitating them to become informed citizens, using access to entitlements as a tool, and also providing help in providing food, cleanliness, solving the drinking water scarcity and attending to the health and gender-related issues. The government gives uniforms, money and necessary rations to these children. Other organisations like clubs encourage children to take part in sports by sponsoring their kits.

As per UNDRIP article 11, 12 and 13 indigenous people have the right to practise





*TUDI, Wayanad*

and revitalise their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their culture, spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies.

Many have benefited. Appu T. N. said TUDI has made a great contribution in his life. “I feel overwhelmed,” he said. “Years ago I entered the threshold of TUDI as a fragile kid, but today I stand as a man of dignity with dual credits: a post-graduate degree and a name as an established folk artist. This achievement is, indeed, a matter of great joy for me. Through the cultural and folklore developmental initiatives of TUDI, I gained entry into the public arena. This experience is an invaluable asset. I feel proud of it. My humble wish is that this initiative should be an inspiration for the coming generations too.”

Srikrishna K is an inmate of Arivuda Tribal Learning Centre and is doing a second-year degree in Mohiniyattam dance. He joined TUDI with the support of his parents and elder sibling. “It is TUDI, which has paved the way for me to learn and to make use of the chances,” he said. “TUDI has a weekly study centre, which promotes extracurricular activities. Some of our elder sisters took

charge of teaching and helped us to develop our talents and give training in new skills too.”

For this purpose, TUDI organises camps, seminars, folksong training sessions, gramostavam, and skits at different times. “Besides these skill development sessions, we have been privileged to be looked after by our elder brothers and sisters in the Centre,” said Srikrishna. “This loving atmosphere has taught us to conduct ourselves with maturity and politeness.”

TUDI motivates the tribes and gives the training to preserve their legacy and folklore. It has been successful in changing the attitudes of parents regarding cleanliness and hygiene. TUDI has always been successful in boosting their self-esteem and motivating them.

Over the years TUDI has become the promoter of socio-cultural and educational developmental activities and a centre that promotes extracurricular activities among Adivasis.

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# GIVE CHILDHOOD A CHANCE



**S**r. Joel Urumpil is a social activist working for the upliftment of the poorest of the poor and the most exploited group of the scheduled caste/tribe in Jharkhand, North India. She has been living with them for well over three decades. When PAX LUMINA contacted her for a conversation, she was engaged in an agitation along with 2000 scheduled men and women of twenty villages for defending their land of 1200 acres.

The upper caste landlords, by bribing the officials of the Revenue Department and fabricating false records, took away their

ownership on the ground that these people do not have proper title deeds. Finally, she succeeded in securing title deeds for all of them who have been living in huts for years.

This is the great saga of a woman from South India who went to Patna, to become a nurse and later turned into a renowned social activist. Soon after completing her nursing course, she joined the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth (SCN) who owned and managed the nursing college there.

Though a nurse by profession, a transformation took place in her outlook and life after she

attended a training programme at the Indian Social Institute, Bangalore in 1988 under the leadership of Fr Stan Lourdeswamy who, unfortunately, is in jail now.

She was inspired by Fr Stan's vision of structural change for justice. Since then she has stayed in the Chathra District of Jharkhand among the people in the lowest strata of society.

Currently, she is engaged with a project of empowering the girl children by providing residential education for one year and admitting them to schools. It is a project mainly for girls of the rural village, children of the Bhuia Dalit group and for the primitive tribal communities who, for many reasons, have been marginalised by mainstream society.

Her team is catering especially to girls who are dropouts or destitute. Gender discrimination and illiteracy are rampant among them. In fact, they started a project in the 1990s. Initially, it was an informal class under the shade of trees or in the open ground. Later, in 1993, it was officially registered as Chetna Bharati, a voluntary organisation with its residential educational programme. Today, the children are trained in basic languages, social skills and technical skills like sewing, knitting, and the culinary arts.

At the beginning, the project was misunderstood by the government and the Naxalite groups. The government branded them as Naxalites whereas, the Naxalites labelled them as agents of the government. Hence, they had to go for registration as an NGO.

Children are provided with two meals a day. But malnutrition and starvation are widespread. They can accommodate only 60 children a year due to scarcity of funds. Though the government has initiated the Anganwadi (Child Development Centres), the public distribution system for supplying provisions is highly corrupt.



According to Joel, the major problems, in this area, are child trafficking, child labour and child marriage. The main reason for child marriage is the insecurity of the children. So the parents are constrained to conduct their marriages. Likewise, due to poverty, they are highly vulnerable to child labour and trafficking. Most children are taken to work in hotels. Recently, they could rescue 60 children with the support of Childline, an agency of the government.

Today Joel, in her 70s, enjoys a great sense of satisfaction for having done substantial service among the marginalised which included the prevention of mining, opium cultivation, and bringing about a positive change in the policy related to girls' education. Her team was at the forefront in securing title deeds for their farmlands.

She regards the coming up of the second line of leadership from among the local people as highly rewarding. However, her dreams include a corruption-free public distribution system, education for all children, removal of poverty and streamlining the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme which would ensure employment and income to the rural poor.

*Interview by Pax Lumina.*

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*(Those who would like to support this project in Jharkhand, kindly contact the author via email)*

# THE IMPACT OF INTERNET ON CHILDREN

Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 53-54

## Three Forms of Risk

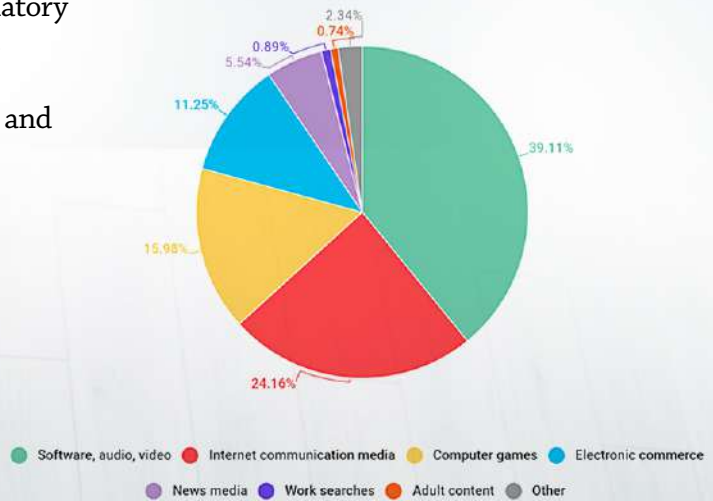
Researchers organize the wide range of risks encountered online into three categories - content, contact and conduct risks.

**Content risks:** Where a child is exposed to unwelcome and inappropriate content. This can include sexual pornographic and violent images, some forms of advertising, racist, discriminatory or hate-speech material; and websites advocating unhealthy or dangerous behaviours, such as self harm, suicide and anorexia.

**Contact risks:** Where a child participates in risky communication, such as with an adult seeking inappropriate contact or soliciting a child for sexual purposes, or with individuals attempting to radicalize a child or persuade him or her to take part in unhealthy or dangerous behaviours.

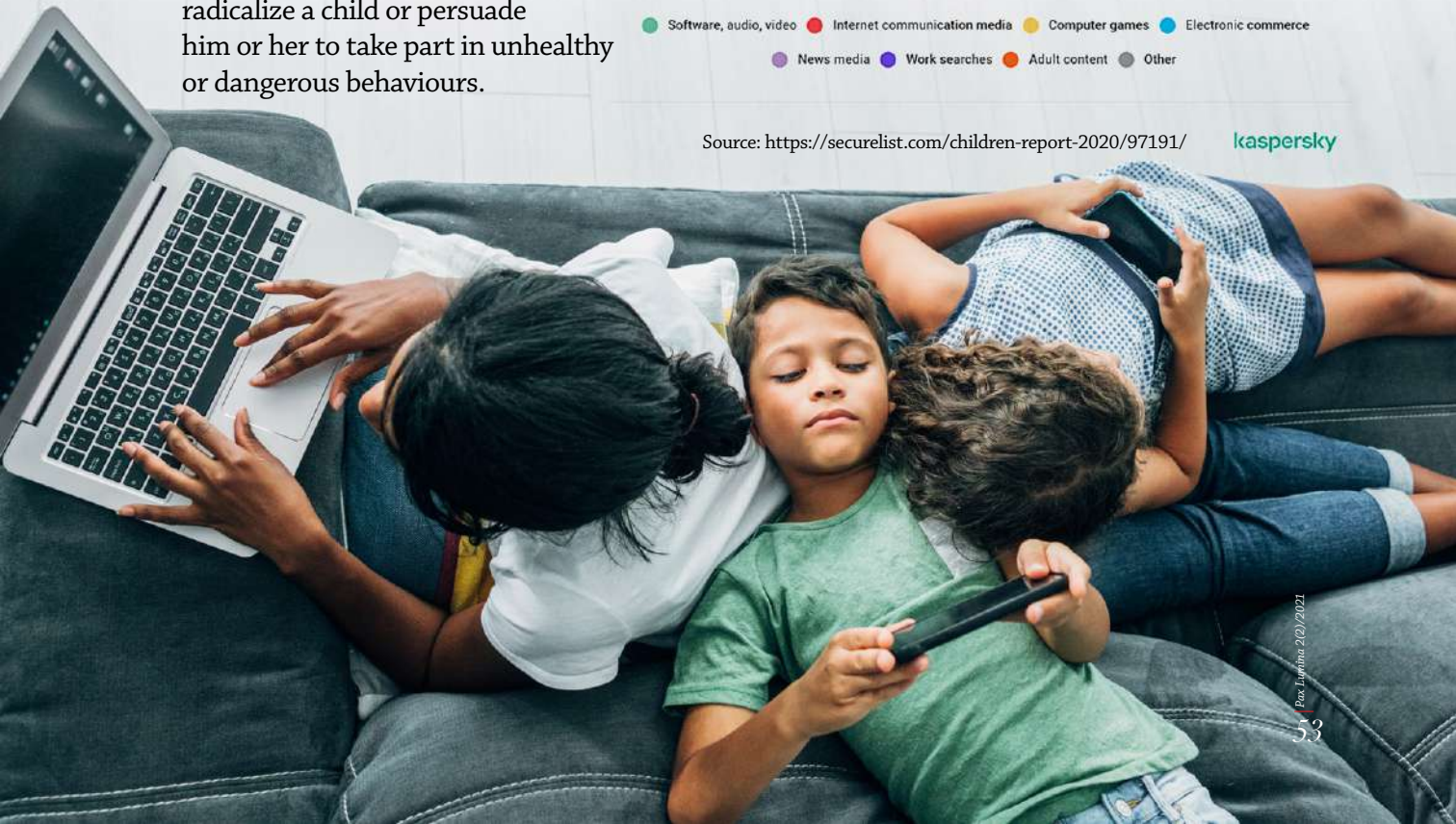
**Conduct risks:** Where a child behaves in a way that contributes to risky content or contact. This may include children writing or creating hateful materials about other children, inciting racism or posting or distributing sexual images, including material they have produced themselves.

### Global Impact

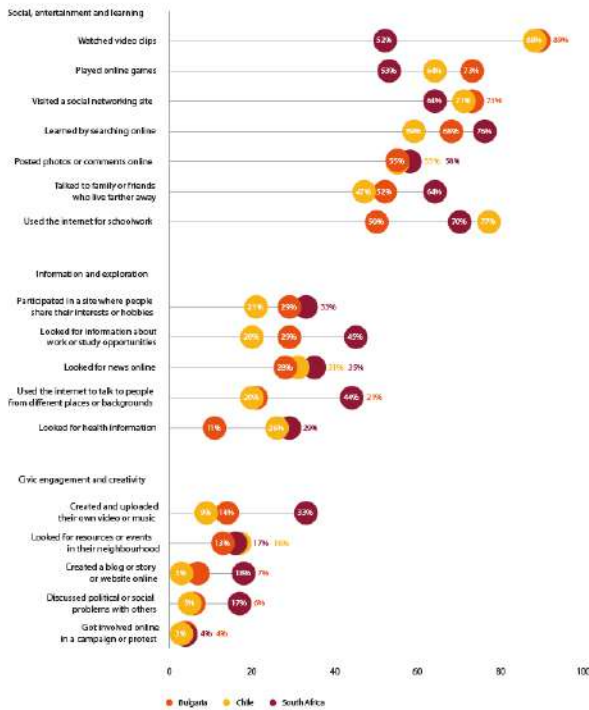


Source: <https://securelist.com/children-report-2020/97191/>

kaspersky



WHAT ARE CHILDREN DOING ONLINE?  
PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN AGED 9-17 REPORTING INVOLVEMENT IN ONLINE ACTIVITIES / UNICEF



Source: Global Kids Online partner countries 2016-2017, aggregated by UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti.



## INTERNET - RELATED HARMS

	<b>Content</b> Child as recipient	<b>Contact</b> Child as participant in adult-initiated activity	<b>Conduct</b> Child as victim/actor
Aggression and violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-abuse and self-harm</li> <li>Suicidal content</li> <li>Discrimination</li> <li>Exposure to extremist/violent/gory content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Radicalization</li> <li>Ideological persuasion</li> <li>Hate speech</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cyberbullying, stalking and harassment</li> <li>Hostile and violent peer activity</li> </ul>
Sexual abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unwanted/harmful exposure to pornographic content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sexual harassment</li> <li>Sexual solicitation</li> <li>Sexual grooming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child sexual abuse</li> <li>Production and consumption of child abuse material</li> <li>Child-produced indecent images</li> </ul>
Commercial exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embedded marketing</li> <li>Online gambling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Violation and misuse of personal data</li> <li>Hacking</li> <li>Fraud and theft</li> <li>Sexual extortion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Live streaming of child sexual abuse</li> <li>Sexual exploitation of children</li> <li>Trafficking for the purpose of sexual</li> <li>Sexual exploitation of children in travelling &amp; Tourism</li> </ul>

Source: Burton, Patrick, Brian O'Neill and Monica Bulger, A Global Review of Evidence of What Works in Preventing ICT-related Violence, Abuse and Exploitation of Children and in Promoting Digital Citizenship, forthcoming.



# “Children are Never a Mistake”

*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 55*

**P**ope Francis has been rightly called the children’s Pope. During his visit to Manila (2015), the children swamped him in large numbers. He was deeply moved when two children, rescued from a life on the streets, poignantly narrated the exploitation and suffering they had undergone at the hands of heartless and cruel people.

At the weekly general audience on 8th April 2015, the Pope reflected on the role of children in family: “Today we continue our reflection on children, the greatest blessing which God has bestowed on man and woman. I wish to focus our attention on the suffering which many children are experiencing. From the first moments of their lives, some are rejected, abandoned, and robbed of their infancy and future. There are those who say it is a mistake to bring these children into the world, due to their fragility, and the hunger and poverty they suffer. But children are never a mistake, and their sufferings are only reasons for us to love them even more.”

The Pope goes on to describe various types of suffering children are subjected to: “Every child who begs on the streets, who is denied an education or medical care is a cry to God. Too often, these children become prey to criminals, who exploit them for commerce or violence. Even in wealthy countries, they suffer due to family crises and living conditions which are at times inhumane, in every case; their childhood is violated in body and soul. In his opinion, we all need to renew our commitment especially families, to protect the dignity of every boy and girl and to offer them the opportunity to grow in a healthy environment.

On the World Day against Child Labour (12 June 2020), the Pope appealed the international community to protect the numerous boys and girls who are deprived of their childhood as they are forced into child labour. To the Pope, we are all responsible for the scourge of child labour.

*Prepared by Dr Mathew Kurisummoottil.*



# National



*If you want peace,  
work for justice.*

– Pope John Paul II.

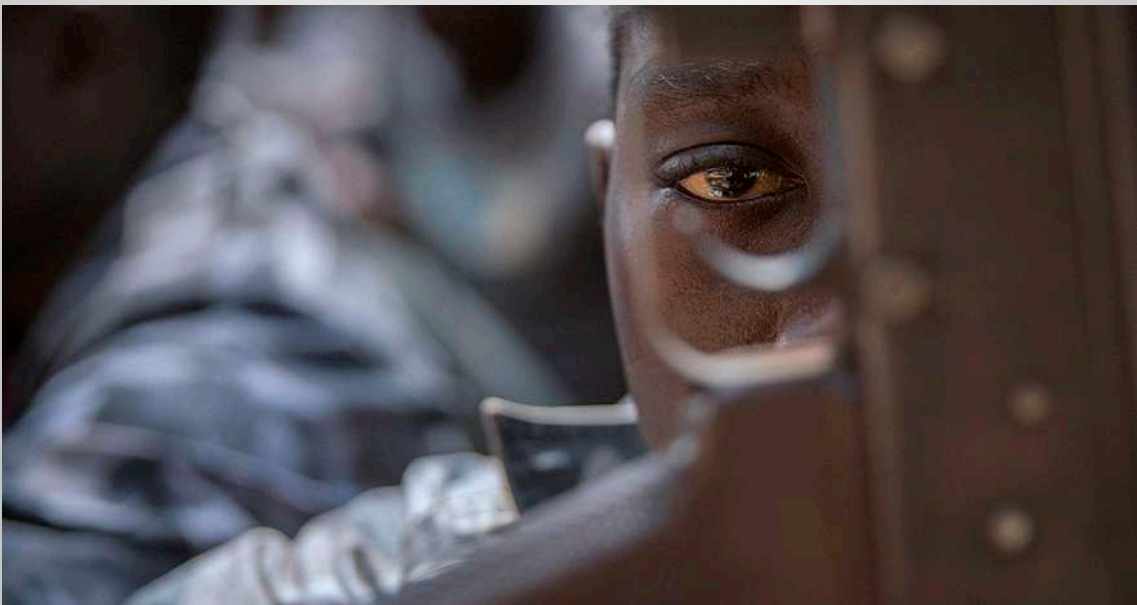




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*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 57-60*

# THE SADNESS OF LOST CHILDHOODS



**P**hilip Aries, the French historian, in his 'Centuries of Childhood' shows that childhood is a social invention, a construct going beyond the facts of biology. The poignant notes of Aries reveal that childhood was still nascent in the Industrial Revolution and that families would exchange children to do their dangerous work. This

is how the idea of the 'Chimney Sweeper' was born. It is the 'Chimney Sweeper' that poet William Blake immortalises in his work on the Industrial Revolution.

The idea of the industrial revolution has not received a full study as a way of thought. Social science has got caught in the facticity of the factory and the

## What childhood needed was a sense of the sacred, and an ontology of its special being.

One has to see childhood as a fragment beyond liminality, or a rite of passage.

It has to be constructed as a world of its own.



political economy of capitalism. We applied the notions of capitalism and obsolescence to the worker but hardly looked at what industrialisation did to childhood, and marginal groups. When the mentalities of industrialisation were extended to childhood, the child became a commodity, an object subject to obsolescence, dispensable, erasable without any claim to rights, being or dwelling. What industrialisation, through its ideas of speed and obsolescence did to childhood needs a separate discourse and a different narrative of storytelling.

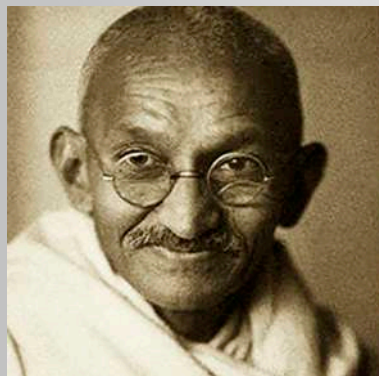
Industrialisation and capitalism argued for the dispensability of the labouring body as an object of exploitation. The

battle for rights and the work of social movements focused more on adulthood, the male adult in particular. As a result, while the worker retained some sense of humanity, women and children had to fight a separate battle for status and rights. The battle for industrialism is a struggle over how one defines the body and here old age and childhood have been unstated casualties. The secular language of the political economy does not help. One needs semiotics of the body as propounded by anthropologists like Mary Douglas.

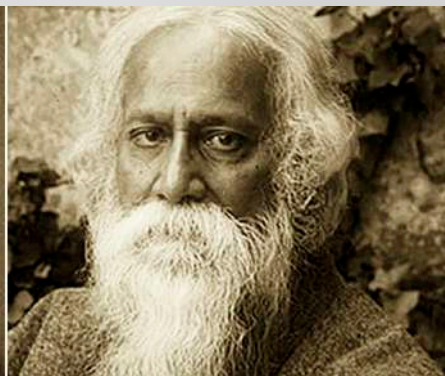
The industrial-scientific body was an animated corpse. What childhood needed was a sense of the sacred, and an ontology of its special being. One has to see childhood as a fragment beyond liminality, or a rite of passage. It has to be constructed as a world of its own. Ironically, we forget today the Indian national movement was concerned more with childhood than the invention of the State. Childhood was the only feasible utopia India had to offer.

We see it in the Theosophist idea of childhood in the construction of the Boy Scout. We see it in the positing of the Occult child, which led to the invention of the spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurthi. We record it in the words of the educationist, Maria Montessori, who served as a prisoner in India during World War I. Writer Rabindranath Tagore and leader Mahatma Gandhi

*Mahatma Gandhi*



*Rabindranath Tagore*



*Maria Montessori*



This, of course, raises a second question, which is not so frequent in India but traumatises Africa.

The question of the child soldier; the idea of involving children in war.

**The sadness today is that these children find their identity in violence and are not able to return to the normalcy of peace.**



added to the dreams of childhood. Yet, the advent of the nation-state discarded these civilisational concerns and became obsessed with industrialisation. The body becomes the target for this obsession and the fate of the body succumbs to the fate of industrialisation.

The body as an entity lacked rights and the body of childhood was even more deprived. It was status-less. It could be associated with impurity and stigma. Dirt and childhood became coterminous in two ways. The child was used as a sex worker with less respect than a disposable condom. In fact, beyond trafficking, the level of child-abuse in India is frightening.

People engage in it with impunity knowing there is little to fear. The child as scavenger serves as a twin to the child as a sex worker. The Dalit child suffers twice as Dalit and child. It is not child labour we are looking at. It is the death of childhood as an idea, as a body without statuses. Social work and psychiatry are not going to cure the problem, nor is the idea of the current welfare State. We need to reinvent childhood, surround it with a different

set of creation myths the way Tagore and Montessori tried. Mere myths are bare, one needs a second coating of care to protect the naked vulnerability of a child.

This, of course, raises a second question, which is not so frequent in India but traumatises Africa. The question of the child soldier; the idea of involving children in war. The sadness today is that these children find their identity in violence and are not able to return to the normalcy of peace. We need to mark the epidemic of lost childhoods over this century on the Atlas of the world. The child virtually suspends the expectations of childhood during insurgency or war. The incidents in Kashmir and Manipur reveal the brutalisation of childhood during the internal war.

To redress this, one has to begin with language and its symptoms of violence. The very idea of the child as a useful employable entity brutalises the child and negates childhood to the dustbin.





Current notions of institutional disciplining led to the enclosure and the panopticon. In the name of discipline, they create devious restrictions of freedom that become difficult to unravel.

A theory of peace has to encounter the metaphor of childhood. Childhood has to be reinvented around the idea of play. The play emphasises joy and irrelevance, and a different sense of reverence. Playfulness sustains childhood and fortifies adulthood. Play goes beyond the world of use. This is not to say that a child cannot learn about the other through care or trusteeship.

Consider if each school voluntarily took over the trusteeship of one disappearing language, one dying craft, or one almost extinct species. The revival of play can challenge the dismal sciences of education and industry imposed on childhood today.

Yet childhood, which has to be constructed as a rite of passage into adulthood needs creative rethinking. The idea of non-violence has to challenge not only security and the nation-state but the ideas of socialisation and pedagogy the nation-state is fostering. The conventional ideas of middle-class citizenship which are indifferent to the

marginal and the minority have to read then not only as vulnerabilities but as seeds of an alternative imagination.

Peace is becoming a search for alternative paradigms persuasively and inventively arrived at. Peace, in that sense, is not a shadow of the security discourse but a new way of discovering the dreams of childhood. Peace, in many ways, is childhood as a utopia extended to new domains seeking a neighbourhood with new others.

The challenge today is for knowledge systems and social movements to discover themselves in this new world of anticipation. The new peace needs new constitutionalism to realise play, and childhood in the cities of adulthood. We have to realise that non-violence is not a paradigm but the very ontology of being, the preferred form of dwelling for the future, for democracy to reinvent itself around new dissenting and plural imaginations.

The sadness is the regime has turned democracy, rights, and dissent into a dismal world. Pretending authoritarianism is the norm of the day. The Argumentative Indian must return as climate activists and urban Naxals to protect the rights of the planet and the fate of marginals, items of little concern to the present ruling class. The very fate of dissent has become an early warning signal about the illiteracy of the regime. Dissent as pedagogic dialogic politics has to reinvent the tired imagination of Indian democracy today. A wonderful place to begin is a theatre called childhood.

*The author is an Indian academician who is known for his contributions to developing the field of science and technology studies (STS), and for the concept of cognitive justice a term he coined. He is currently Professor at O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana.*





# International



*If you want to  
make peace  
with your enemy,  
you have to work  
with your enemy.  
Then he becomes  
your partner.”*

~ Nelson Mandela



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*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 62-65*

# THE MILITARY COUP IN MYANMMAR

**T**he military coup carried out on February 1, 2021, is deeply shocking, but hardly surprising. Some pundits spoke of the sad end to a 'fledgling democracy'. Reflection will show that though Daw Aung San Sui Kyi (DASSK) was projected as the democratically elected leader, the fact is the military-controlled the key levers of power. The military made use of her and she, unfortunately, danced to the military's tune. She went to the International Court of Justice and defended the calculated atrocities on the Rohingyas which amounted to genocide. Therefore, any talk of a 'fledgling democracy' is misleading.

To understand why there was a coup we need to dig into history. In 1885, the year the Indian National Congress was founded, the British Government in India completed the conquest of Burma and it was administered as part of the Indian Empire. In 1937, Burma



was separated, and when World War II broke out Aung San, the father of DASSK, initially joined the Japanese as Subash Chandra Bose did, and fought against the British.

Once he realised Japan was going to lose the war, Aung San got in touch with Lord Louis Mountbatten and joined the British in the last battles of the war against Japan. By early 1947, Britain had agreed to grant independence. Aung San took the lead to establish a constitution that provided the option of separation to the ethnicities who felt threatened by the majority ethnic group of Barmans after whom the land was called Burma.

Unfortunately, Aung San and his colleagues were killed by his opponents in July 1947, and independent Burma had a violent birth. U Nu took over as Prime Minister. The administration was inefficient and unpopular, and in 1958, U Nu asked General Ne Win to take over. Ne Win took over and arranged for an election in 1960 which was won by U Nu who came back as

Prime Minister. However, in 1962 Ne Win staged a coup and ever since the military has held power.

DASSK, who fought the military, adopting Gandhian methods in what is known as the 8888 campaign as it started on 8th August 1988, became an international celebrity. Though her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) won the 1990 general election, the military refused to hand over power. While in prison, she was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. She has already spent 15 years in prison over a period of 21 years.

DASSK won the 2015 general election, and the military reluctantly agreed to her forming a government. However, the military made it clear that it intended to hold on to the key levers of power. The idea was to project to the world that the country was entering a democratic phase.

There are three ways of looking at the arrangement.

One, it was a Faustian bargain when DSSAK agreed to the military's terms to accede to political power. Two, she acted pragmatically, hoping to take Myanmar towards democracy, however difficult the beginning of the journey was. Three, both were Machiavellian, and each wanted to use the other for a while.

By 2016, the military started a genocidal campaign against the 1.1 million Rohingyas, in the Rakhine State. They had come to Burma centuries ago and had representation in parliament. The military asserted without evidence that they were foreigners unless they produced proof of nationality. In all fairness, DSSAK should have stood up for what is right and if the military refused to change their





India has carefully weighed its words. It reiterated the need for 'upholding of rule of law and the democratic transition'. **India needs cooperation from Myanmar to deal with the insurgency in the north-east.**



stand, she should have resigned. Instead, she supported the military's atrocities against the Rohingyas and even went to the International Court of Justice to defend their genocidal acts.

The international community was shocked and wondered whether her adoption of Gandhian principles was a convenient political strategy. Going back to the deal in 2015, it looked painfully clear that she had agreed to a Faustian bargain.

In the election held in November 2020, DSSAK's party won by a landslide. The other party, supported by the military fared badly and claimed there were irregularities. However, the Election Commission which looked into the allegations declared the

election was in order. The military tried to get the opening of the new parliament postponed and DSSAK refused. The military struck on the day the parliament was to meet.

We do not know why the two sides could not find a compromise. It is reported that China was consulted by the military before the coup was staged. The argument that the army chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing is to retire by July, 2021 at the age of 65, and that he needed to be holding office to prevent judicial action against him for the atrocities against the Rohingyas is not fully convincing. DSSAK might have agreed to her remaining as Head of State without executive power. A more likely explanation is that the military wants to hold on to power at any cost and sees DSSAK as a credible threat.

Let us look at the response of the people to the coup. Shedding their fear of the military which banned public gatherings, the people have demonstrated their disapproval of the coup and expressed their support for DSSAK. Doctors, engineers, and other professionals, including government servants have struck work and taken part in large demonstrations. The military resorted to shooting and so far the toll is more than twenty. The population appears to be unintimidated. Yet, we cannot rule out a scenario where the military resorts to shooting right and left and the demonstrations will gradually die down.

The people fighting the military need support from the outside world. President Biden's Administration took the lead. On February 1, 2021, the day the world came to learn of the coup, Washington spoke out. "The US is alarmed by reports that the Burmese military has taken steps to undermine



the country's democratic transition, including the arrest of State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other civilian officials in Burma. President Biden has been briefed by NSA," White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.



Later, the US imposed sanctions on the leading generals. However, China and Russia will stand in the way of any action by the Security Council under chapter 7. ASEAN may or may not put serious diplomatic pressure. Indonesia is trying to resolve the crisis, but we do not know whether ASEAN as a whole will ask the military to step back.

The response of the ten-member ASEAN of which Myanmar is a member has been most disappointing, but not surprising. Indonesia has resorted to shuttle diplomacy, so far in vain. Peaceful transfer of power following an election has happened only in three

ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines). China has supported the military. Russia too. These two will prevent any action in the Security Council against the military. The sanctions by U.S. and European Union will hurt the military, but will not change their behaviour.

India has carefully weighed its words. It reiterated the need for 'upholding of rule of law and the democratic transition'. India needs cooperation from Myanmar to deal with the insurgency in the north-east. It is too soon to say when the crisis will be resolved and in what manner. We cannot rule out disobedience on the part of the ordinary men in the police and the army refusing to shoot at their brothers and sisters. But for that to happen, there is need for a fearless leadership a la Gandhi. Will Myanmar produce one?

Ambassador KP Fabian served in the Indian Foreign Service between 1964 and 2000. He retired as Ambassador to Italy and Permanent Representative to U.N. in Rome. He is currently Professor at Symbiosis University.z

**The population appears to be unintimidated. Yet, we cannot rule out a scenario where the military resorts to shooting right and left and the demonstrations will gradually die down.**





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With Sanghamitra Dubey (India),  
Nirmal Khadri (Nepal), Sandra Estrada (Mexico)  
and Deepak Pandiaraj (India),

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# The ‘Virtues in Movement’ Initiative: Mobilising Our Conscience



**I**n the mid-2020, at the peak of the pandemic, an initiative on vices, virtues, values and the search for a meaningful life was planned by the Loyola Institute of Peace and International Relations, Indian Social Institute and the Xavier Centre for New Humanities and Compassion Studies, Xavier University Bhubaneswar.

The original effort was started by the Xavier Centre for New Humanities and Compassion Studies as part of its planned ‘core curriculum’ at Xavier University to be offered to all students entering the university. It was meant to be an onsite course for young people to critically question, explore and discover themselves.

It was an attempt to reach out to their conscience in whatever they did so that they may consciously serve the Common Good.

The pandemic changed the method of development and delivery of the effort. And, with the coming together of the Indian Social Institute and Loyola Institute of Peace and International Relations as active partners in the context of the pandemic, the learning methodology changed and the effort became online and global. The Virtues in Movement initiative gave birth to Mobilising Our Conscience, as a deep learning encounter and wide opportunities to act.



**T**he Virtues in Movement (VIM) initiative is an attempt at revisiting the difficult and contested reality of our conscience.

To begin with, the initiative addressed key challenges before us.

Some Critical Concerns and Questions before Us

- “How come with so many religions, social and political philosophies, so many inspiring constitutions, international/global peace and well-being charters and accords, vision-mission-values documents, thousands of universities, including faith-based ones, offering thousands of courses - including ones on virtues and values - promising wholesome careers, hundreds of civil society efforts and movements, local and global events after events, and a growing number of research initiatives and reports after reports, humanity is still in a big mess? We are in the midst of an eco-socio-spiritual emergency. Everything we want - peace, sustainability and compassion - are so far from the reach of so many amongst us, including children. How come? What is that we are not getting right?”

- “Why are so many good people - ordinary folks, men, women, youth, professionals, scientists, politicians, priests, teachers, and parliamentarians

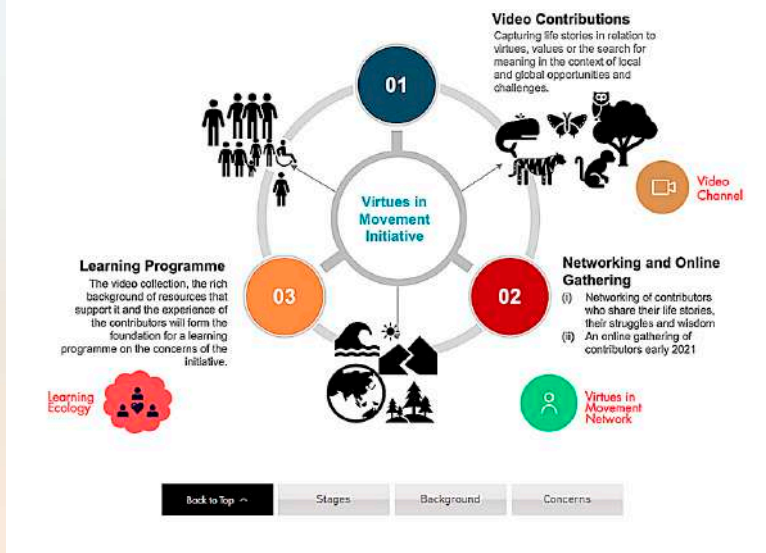
- divided by politics, religion, ideology, caste, and class, and are overtly or covertly, individually or collectively, being cruel or hurting, one another?”

- “Where do we look for answers or solutions? How do we create and disseminate democratic and diversity-sensitive narratives? Can we recover ‘narratives of conscience’ for peace, inclusivity, sustainability and compassion by reaching out to the human and non-human worlds? Do we look just at society (as in the ‘external’) or self (as in the ‘internal’), or both?” Or, should we just give up, gravitate to the powerful, right or wrong? What pathways of actions do we have? How do we act “good” in an environment of blatant “ungoodness”? Can we build critical narratives of hope through self and social transformation?”

## Generating the Rich ‘Narratives of Conscience’

The above questions and concerns led to reaching out to people and recovering the stories of their life journey in the service of the common good. We reached out to persons who had a story to share. We reached out

## Three Stages of the Initiative



creating a sound basis for the development of a 'course' on mobilising our conscience. The course content will come from the ground'.

## Reaching Out

To build an active resource on the 'narratives of conscience', we began the process of getting

persons to share their journey and their story in the form of a video recording of about 10 minutes. We reached out to all kinds of people, young to the old, covering different kinds of experiences. It was also an attempt to create a borderless classroom where people are sharing their life journey and having an asynchronous conversation.

Recovering people's struggles, concerns, failures, contradictions, compromises, triumphs and their contributions to peace, sustainability and compassion formed the foundation of the initiative. This is a major learning resource that can alert, educate and inspire others. We have now over 45 video titles and over 40 contributors from over eight countries. And it is growing.

## Stages of the Virtues in Movement Initiative

(Also See: <https://amanibana.wixsite.com/virtues/initiative-stages>)

**Stage 1:** Setting up of an international team: <https://amanibana.wixsite.com/virtues/team>

**Stage 2:** Setting up the website of the initiative: <https://amanibana.wixsite.com/virtues>

to people who were struggling to serve the common good. In doing this, we were not just interested in what a person has done as much as how the person reached the point of doing whatever that was being done.

The recovery of a journey to the common good would give us inputs that can alert, educate or inspire others. We were not interested in any particular issue with which a person was involved but rather why did the person take that up in any area of concern or action. For instance, what made a person take up human rights issues although it could be dangerous to one's safety and well-being. A person's choices and decisions to become a human rights activist would be a great learning resource for others.

We started to consider making a collection of peoples' reflections on their life journey and sharing it (as a story). We have come to call this 'narratives of conscience'. In the long term, building this collection would result in



**Stage 3:** Reaching out to people to consider contributing a video. Setting up a YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDt7Ju2LG-iZqZR2PaYOKQg/videos>

Asynchronous, borderless classroom: <https://amanibana.wixsite.com/virtues/contributions>

**Stage 4:** Creating the video collection in phases. (The first phase covering October to December 2020 is over.) See here: <https://amanibana.wixsite.com/vim-network/collections>

**Stage 5:** Building a network of contributors: the VIM network: <https://amanibana.wixsite.com/vim-network>

**Stage 6:** Organising an online event of contributors: the Virtual Campfire (30th and 31st January 2021, covering poetry reading, songs, documentary screening, heart-to-heart exchange, short students/youth sessions on raising concerns, and critical conversations on relevant themes): <https://amanibana.wixsite.com/vim-network/virtual-campfire>

**Stage 7:** Evaluation and production of content for the initiative websites and social media (Sites above as well as our Instagram site: <https://www.instagram.com/virtuesinmovement/>)

**Stage 8:** Resuming the video collection effort for March to May 2021 (in progress)

**Stage 9:** Organising 'virtual bonfires' (three-hour critical conversations) and 'virtual campfires' (In progress)

**Stage 10:** Planning and developing a course ("Learning Journey") on "Mobilising Our Conscience" by exploring the rich themes covered or elaborated in the video contributions (in Progress)

## Conclusion

The Virtues in Movement (VIM) initiative is an attempt at revisiting the difficult and contested reality of our conscience. Can we - in whichever field we are - mobilise our conscience individually or collectively to face the eco-socio-spiritual crises we are in the midst of and contribute to a nurturing, inclusive, common good? Can we live up to the humane virtues and values we have been taught and live a meaningful and authentic life, in grace and gratitude without hurting or harming another? Can we build and live in a compassionate world? The VIM seeks to initiate deep self and social transformation.

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Conversation with **Prof. Achuthsankar**,  
Head of the Department of Computational Biology and  
Bio-informatics, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.

# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR BUILDING PEACE

*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 70-73*

**W**hat are the recent  
developments  
in science and  
technology which will  
have an impact on people's lives?

Today, many technologies are teaming up into different applications. For example, about 100 innovative technologies make up the mobile phone. Machine Learning (ML) and Bio-technology (BT) will have a great impact. ML has already started entering our daily lives. It can recognise your face and voice, read your emotions, and translate what you write; it can even tell you a story (the upcoming GPT3 is a technology to watch).

Machines have become very intelligent, like driverless cars and smart farming. We will have huge vertical farms inside air-conditioned buildings where water and minerals will be supplied based on sensors. This is going to change the face of the earth.

Likewise, BT has come up with new applications. In India, we have an ongoing debate on cow slaughter. A large number of people consider the cow as sacred, but for many cow meat is a favourite food. People are fighting one another on account of the cow. BT will provide a solution, like 'vegetarian beef'. It would be 'ahimsa beef', meat which comes without killing the cow. But it will be beef with the same taste and quality but is grown in laboratories. There is no cow but you get beef. Isn't it amazing?

## **? Is science and technology an effective means for building peace?**

Peace is not an absence of war. It is directly connected with the welfare of the people. Science and technology have helped in enhancing the life-span of human beings and in relieving them from inhuman jobs like collecting human waste and pulling people in rickshaws.

Recently, in a book I wrote about my hometown, Vanchiyoor in Thiruvananthapuram, I discussed a man, in khaki trousers, who smoked a beedi while cleaning human waste. My father told me that this man smoked a beedi not because he wanted to, but to escape from the foul smell that he has to breathe on a day-to-day basis. And now in many places, cleaning sewage, opening manholes and entering it is done by robots. Satellites provide us with information on the condition of the forests, the fishing resources in the ocean, and the likely agricultural production. In short, science and technology has substantially helped in improving the quality of life and thereby building peace.

On the other side, science and technology have caused many issues which threaten a peaceful world. For example, nuclear weapons. Similarly, advances in sciences and technology with its innumerable applications have caused various lifestyle diseases. Writer Yuval Noah Harari said, 'Today sugar is more dangerous than gun powder.'

## **? What are the responsibilities of a scientist doing research in areas which will have unpredictable negative consequences?**

Whatever we do will have some unintended consequences. It does not mean we do not take up such issues or activities. We have to use our intellect to foresee some of these. Science is a product of the intellect and intellect is a gift of nature, so science is natural. We don't

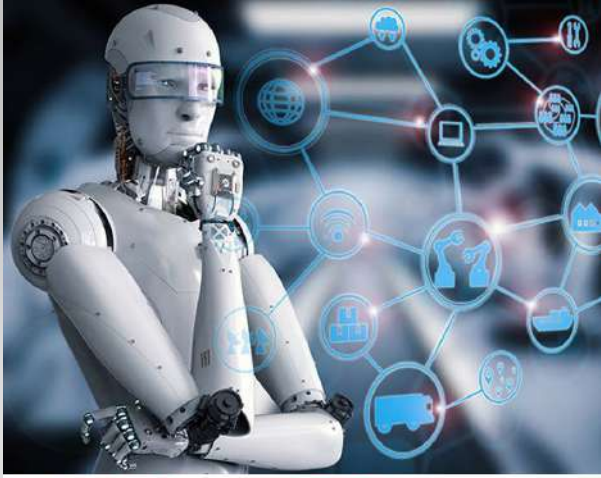
need to look at science as something against God. Because nature is the gift of God and science the gift of nature, so it is divine.

Naturally, we may ask, if science is divine, why is science causing bad things? The intellect is given by God and you can use it for positive or negative things. And your intellect is capable of debating what is good and bad. The value judgment is also left to us. What is important is that we must make use of our critical and ethical consciousness. We must look at science and technology with an open mind, not with fear or prejudice.

Let us critically examine our concept of 'development.' Any development will have some adverse effect on nature. The debate is about the extent we can go. You cannot say that science and technology are causing damage to nature, and so we don't need to



*Achuthsankar*



use it. I don't buy this argument. For example, someone decides not to eat meat and plants but to drink water only, to be kind to nature. But we could ask, 'How do you drink water, which is full of microbes? If you drink it, the temperature in your body will kill them.' So, you cannot drink water either. This thought process tells that you are a part of nature and you cannot keep not affecting it. You need to have reasonable interactions with nature.

**What are the precautions scientists, policy-makers, governments, civil society members and organisations should take?**

We have to approach these sectors differently. The scientists may not be too bothered about the long-term implications of the knowledge they are generating. Because the scientist is in pursuit of truth. If the scientist is worried about the consequences, the great enjoyment of the journey of knowledge will be destroyed. For e.g., Albert Einstein brought out many new theories and in his mind, the application of it was not there. But many applications have come out of it and unfortunately one of these was the atom bomb.

**As for the government, policy-makers and civil society, they must critically look at science and technology for its adoption. They should not be blind believers of science and technology, and that it will always do wonderful things. I will cite an example. One of the contributions of science and technology are big buildings and bridges. For this, we need to use a quarry. Today, quarrying has become a huge environmental issue. We must ask ourselves: should we use the most modern construction methods and technologies everywhere?**

Consider the bus stops in the city of Thiruvananthapuram. How do we construct them? Do we require modern technologies? Why don't we cut coconut wood and make it in Kerala style along with tiles? Avoid steel, aluminium and plastics.

Look at the compound walls in Kerala. The stone used to build them would be equal to the number of stones used for the construction of the houses. Do we need them? Instead, can't we use Kayyaala (the traditional way of making walls using mud). My point is that the government, policymakers and civil society must decide where science and technology can be applied. We should not be a slave to science and technology and it should not be applied everywhere.





**C**ome to the government, policymakers and civil society, they must critically look at science and technology for its adoption. **They should not be just blind believers of science and technology that they will always do wonderful things.**



**? How can the public become more aware of the dangers of technologies and products which will have a widespread ecological and climatic impact?**

Let us be aware of the beauty of traditional and indigenous solutions, which are still applicable in some areas. Only in sectors where such solutions do not seem to be desirable, we must go for an alternative technology. An intermediate technology -- a mix of traditional and modern technology could be used.

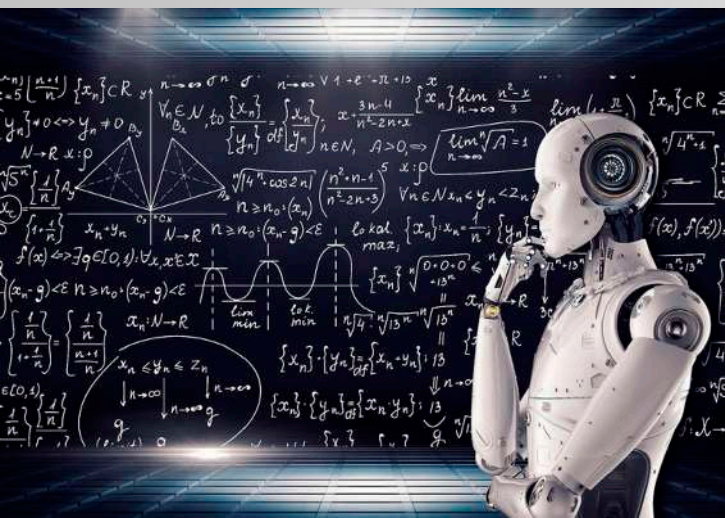
Let me explain with an example. Kerala is named after coconut trees. But, in the shops, you will see brooms made of plastic. Here, we pay disrespect to the coconut tree, and we reduce the value of its product. Besides, we cause damage to nature by using plastic and producing waste. There are many small things that we could do instead. Every country has its simple solutions for many problems of day-to-day life.

**? You have a PhD in music. How does music help the scientist in you to experience peace and harmony?**

A musician is in search of ultimate beauty and happiness, while a scientist is in search of the fundamental truth. For artists, life becomes sublime when they come across something beautiful such as a poem, painting or music. Whereas, scientists would hit on beauty and happiness when they come across truth through scientific discoveries. Most of this would uplift their soul. To me, both science and music help experiencing the sublime. But, the sublime feelings of the scientist and the artist/musician in me are different.

A scientist may speak about improving life, reducing misery and increasing luxuries. A sense of achievement is derived when useful new knowledge is developed. An artist derives joy and fulfilment by experiencing nature (for instance, the softness, freshness and organic nature of a plantain leaf along with the rich memory of one's mother serving rice on it) and reflecting it through his/her creativity. Both are required for the welfare of society. When I sing, I am an uplifted soul, mind you, just when I sing. Before and after, I am an imperfect person!

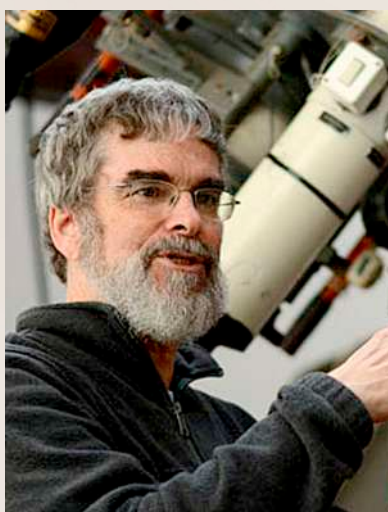
*Interviewed by Paxlumina*



# INTERFACING SCIENCE & RELIGION

*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 74-79*

The three-day seminar on Science and Religion organised by Jnana Deepa Centre for Science and Religious Studies was an attempt to bring together scientific insights and religious wisdom for the benefit of humanity. Three eminent scholars, Br. Guy Consolmagno SJ, the Director of the Vatican Observatory, Dr. Miguel Farias, a former lecturer at Oxford and the Director of the Brain, Belief, and Behaviour Lab at Coventry University, and Dr. Ted Peters, Professor of Systematic Theology, Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California opened up new avenues for dialogical wisdom to foster faith, creativity and reason.



*Brother Guy Consolmagno*

## COSMOLOGY: MAKING SENSE OF THE UNIVERSE (Brother Guy Consolmagno SJ)

What is cosmology? And, how does it affect the way we look at our universe? Although

these questions seem clichéd when it comes to the dialogue between science and religion, they could induce a fall into the rabbit's hole, and at the end of the trail, there awaits an intersection of multiple worlds! What seemed 'apparent' and 'taken-for-granted' are, in fact, points of greater concern that affect our day-to-day interaction with the world.

We need to clarify the term 'cosmology' before we can plunge into the details. Cosmology is the answer to the question, 'How does the universe work?' or 'What is the nature of the universe?' As long as humans have been

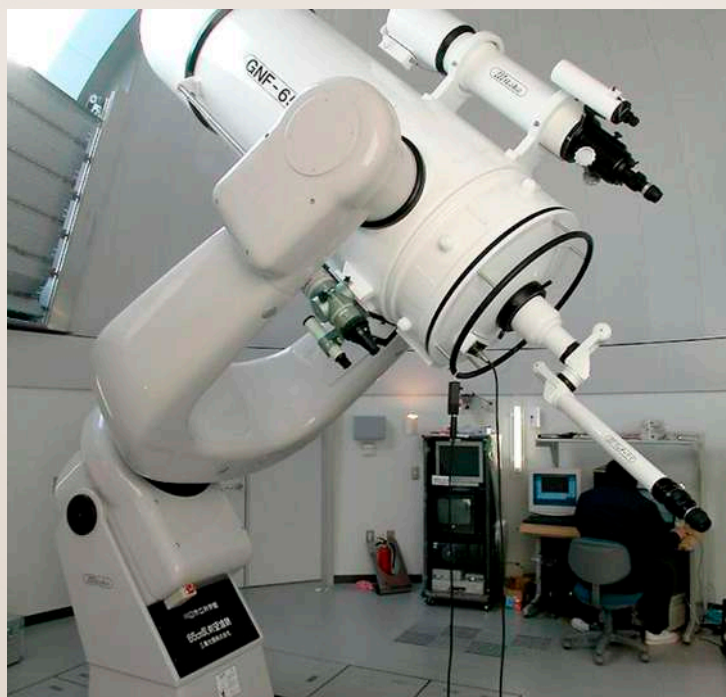
trying to make sense of the universe, they have been proposing cosmological theories. Early cosmologies varied from attributing the cosmic order to supernatural beings to proposing theories of a self-regulated cyclic universe. According to most monotheistic religions, God is the sole creator and sustainer of the universe.

Cosmology has been, for a long time, the product of a culture. Later religions have borrowed such narratives to communicate their ideas. This is a dynamic interaction in the case of most religions. Consequently, we find several cosmological narrations in sacred scriptures and traditions. Even the monotheistic religions are not devoid of multiple cosmologies.

For instance, we are all familiar with the creation story of Semitic religions. The first book of the Bible provides a rather picturesque narration of this story. In the same book, there are two distinct and at times contradictory accounts. The writers have borrowed heavily from the ancient near-east cosmologies and tried to make a coherent chronicle. In the same Bible, one can also find dashing descriptions of a multi-level universe borrowed from the Colossian culture in Paul's letters.

Even the Indian traditions, particularly the Hindu traditions possess one of the richest and most continually evolving cosmologies in global culture. The earliest Vedic traditions speak of the cosmos as Father Sky (Dyaus Pitṛ) and Earth (Pṛthivī). In other texts, the cosmos is divided into three realms: bhūr (earth), bhuvā (air), and sva (heaven). The Upanishads, on the other hand, proposes Brahman as the primal cause of the universe. Brahman was described as the power behind every living thing and every element in the universe. Brahman is "the Whole" (Brihadāranyaka Upanishad 2:5) and transcends even the gods. Much of the Hindu cosmological terms are our day-to-day jargons such as kali yuga, rāhu kāla, punarbhāva and, of course, karmic retribution.

Be that as it may, the last one hundred years have seen a different sort of cosmology: a scientific cosmology. Mathematics is the language of such cosmologies. Modern science tries to build upon the existing scientific knowledge and propose mathematically formalisable and physically testable predictions. Much of it is still at the hypothetical level and requires formal empirical verification. Relativistic cosmology, Big Bang theory, Plasma cosmology, Modified Newtonian Dynamics are a few of such theories.



Having portrayed the different pictures of the universe, Brother Guy Consolmagno SJ asks a simple yet profound question: Can any of these fully describe the universe? The answer is a big NO. That is because each cosmology has a purpose, that is to project the world as a meaningful reality to the audience. Meaningfulness is not another word for verifiability. Meaningfulness is a dynamic process - a process that borrows extensively from all sources of human knowledge.

"I am here to say that different pictures exist," said Guy. "I am not

here to say that we should go back to medieval times because we can live in a universe of cause and effect where I can understand things and even predict how to cure pandemics or build aeroplanes that won't fall. But I am also here to remind you that our assumptions about the universe change and that there are things that hold constant -- faith, hope and love."

Perhaps this is the wisdom of Christian cosmology that the Pope's astronomer tries to highlight, that despite the speckled appearances of truth, the important point of our truth is that which remains constant even if our cosmologies change. Guy further said, "And to me, that is the essential point of understanding what cosmology is."

Quoting the writer Chesterton, Guy concludes: "Fairy tales are more than true, not because they tell us dragons exist but because they tell us dragons can be beaten!"

## MEDITATION AS SCIENCE AND RELIGION

*Dr. Miguel Farias*

Meditation has become a very influential topic not just in medicine and psychology, but also in popular culture. The more complex and stressful modern life becomes, the greater the

*Dr. Miguel Farias*



relevance of 'mindfulness'. People meditate to get greater focus, tranquillity and to experience transcendence.

In this conference, Dr. Miguel Farias focused on the intersectionality of meditation across religions and the interconnectedness between meditation as a science and religion. There have been modern attempts to secularise meditation from religious interests; its consequence was the emphasis on 'harmony or balance' devoid of its spiritual interests.

Are meditation and mindfulness a sham? The attempts of Farias and his peers of experimental psychiatrists were to ascertain the claims of meditation practitioners empirically. In a paper published in *Science* (March 27, 1970) researcher Robert Keith Wallace produced the experimental result that transcendental meditation seems to produce a state of consciousness that is distinct from wakefulness, sleep and hypnosis. This finding paved the way for the Science of Meditation.

Speaking of the neural correlates of meditation, a recent study (Fox & Cahn, 2019) using functional magnetic resonance imaging showed different meditation techniques focused on different brain activities; however, there is a broad commonality in the activation and deactivation of the insular areas -- both in the medial and anterior insula. This is the area that regulates intersection -- the awareness of one's internal bodily states. This would include the awareness of our bodies and emotions, and how they interact to create our perception of the present moment.

Can meditation uniquely benefit our mental health? The answer is no. A meta-analysis published (*JAMA Inter Med.*, 174(3)) in 2014 showed that there was no effect of meditation programmes on a positive mood, attention, substance use, eating habits, sleep, and weight. There is hardly any evidence to suggest that



The studies that have so far been discussed have an excessive focus on the benefits one draws from mindfulness techniques but hardly any attention given to the social interactions of mindfulness. This, as Farias believes, is due to the excessive secularisation of meditation. “Mindfulness is now becoming a quasi-religious or pseudo-religious replacement!,” said Dr. Farias. Perhaps a revisit to the religious values of mindfulness has now become imperative. Hence the role of a healthy science-religion intersection.

meditation programmes were better than exercise, behavioural therapy and so on.

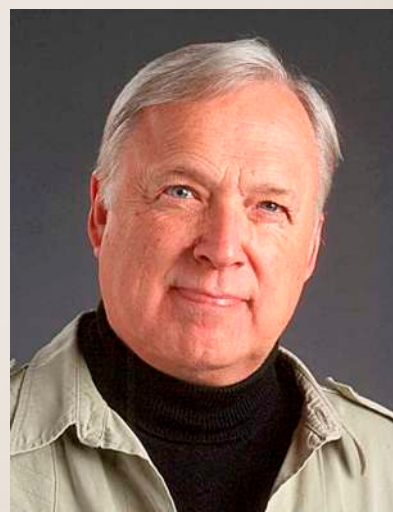
What about the negative effects of meditation? Early accounts of ‘meditation sickness’ date back to the 5th century CE. The Indian Buddhist Dharmatrāta Meditation Scripture reports that if meditation is not carried out properly, the mind can become unstable, restless or confused, and the meditator feels dull, confused and sunken. The Christian literature also has accounts of difficulties arising from meditation (Dark Night of the Soul, 14th cent.). A meta-analysis of 55 studies since 1970 has shown that the total prevalence of adverse events was 8.3 percent (Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavia, August 2020). A total of 1073 participants experienced at least one adverse event. This prevalence is similar to that reported for psychotherapy practices (between 5-10 percent).

The classical model with which the experimental psychiatrists have been working is a ‘gym model’. It assumes that just as we do habitual bodily actions such as brushing the teeth or morning exercises as a way of protecting our physical health, mindfulness techniques are to develop mental fitness and resilience. It is high time that we looked for other models.

## SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY WARFARE OR PEACEFUL COOPERATION?

Dr. Ted Peters

Having seen the necessity of a fruitful science-religion cooperation at least in two areas namely cosmology and meditation, we now come to a



Dr. Ted Peters

broader region of ‘Models of Science-Religion’ interaction. The veteran ‘scientific’ theologian Dr. Ted Peters presents 10 models of dialogue

between science and religion with his critical analysis of each.

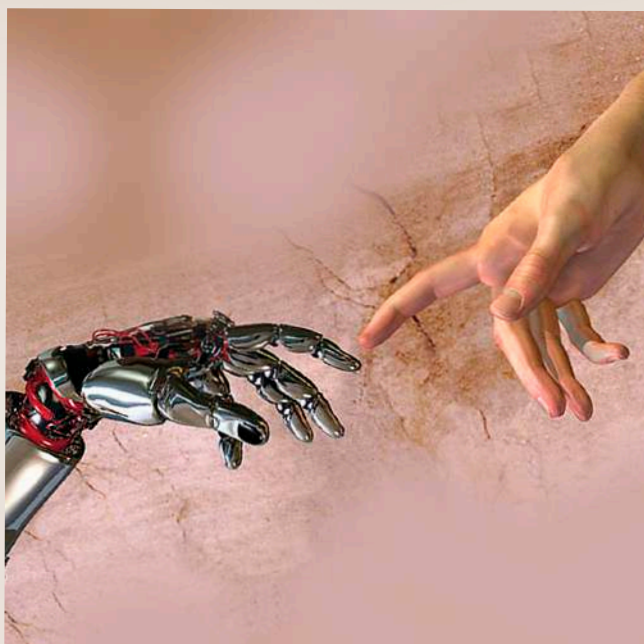
He divides them into two categories: Warfare and Non-Warfare Models.

Warfare Models are aimed at establishing the absolute authority of one over the other. There are four models under this category: Scientism, Scientific Imperialism, Ecclesiastical Authoritarianism and Evolution Controversy.

Scientism is an ideology based on the dictum, 'Science is the only path to understanding'. The basic assumption is that both science and religion have opposing views and hence at war. The champions of scientism such as Dr. Peter Atkins, and Richard Dawkins want science to win and religion to lose. There are organisations, ideologies and countries, for that matter, that subscribe to scientism. China is the best example. The question of how a small kingdom, Great Britain could control the vast empire of China prompted the Chinese ideologists and politicians to pledge allegiance to Scientism and denounce Confucianism.

Scientific Imperialism believes that there is something good in religion. But they are unhappy with the religious narratives. The proponents of this ideology believe that science can answer any question -- even if it is on the meaning of life and existence.

"Science has advanced to the point where, what were formerly religious questions, can be seriously tackled by the new physics," said Dr. Paul Davies, an English physicist and broadcaster at Arizona University. For instance, the Scientific Investigation of the Doctrine of Original Sin' is a few attempts in this line.



In the middle of the 19th century, the Vatican felt like it was under siege due to the advancements of science and technology, the industrial revolution, the establishment of the public school system and so on. Pope Pius IX then came forward with the Syllabus of Errors, saying it was an error for science and philosophy to withdraw from ecclesiastical authority.

This paved the way for Ecclesiastical Authoritarianism. The Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et Spes*, 59) partly reverted this stand saying, "the natural sciences should be free from ecclesiastical authority". Islam too shares similar sentiments of the Syllabus. "Islam refuses to accept the legitimacy of any science that would study the cosmos in forgetfulness of God as revealed in the Qur'an," said Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Professor of Islamic studies at George Washington University.

The Evolution Controversy to many conservative Christians certainly seemed like warfare. Does evolution represent all of science or only one science? Ted observes that it represents only one science and "creationists are not opposing all sciences, just evolution alone". There are at least five contending forces when it comes to the 'theory of natural selection' namely

Biblical creationism, Intelligent Design theory, Evolutionary Biology, pure Materialism, and Theistic Evolution.

Before moving onto the non-warfare models it is good to reflect on the real enemies of science. Fake news, pseudo-science, anti-Vaxers, anti-climate change warriors, Islamic theocracies, Creationism and Postmodernism are opposing views to science.

‘The Two Books’ model is based on the idea that scientists read nature as priests read the Scriptures. Scientists interpret the divine revelation in nature. The ‘Two Languages’ model states that science answers “how?” and religion answers “why?”. Stephen Jay Gould, the famous evolutionary biologist, at Harvard said, “We get the age of the rocks, and religion gets the rock of the ages; we study how the heavens go, and they determine how to go to heaven” suggesting the Nonoverlapping Magisteria of science and religion. The famous quote of Albert Einstein, “Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind” best explains this situation.

The ‘Ethical Alliance’ model looks forward to the healthy collaboration between science and religion in matters like an ecological crisis, genetics and medicine. “We believe that science and religion, working together, have an essential contribution to take forward any significant mitigation and resolution of the world environmental crisis.” It proposes in the Declaration of the ‘Mission to Washington’,

1992 -- a joint appeal by religion and science for the environment.

Even Hinduism advocates such an alliance, as observed by Prof. Kuruvila Pandikattu, “an advaitic relationship is one where there is an integration between two terms, a holistic movement, an organic growth, a tendency toward harmony, and mutual enrichment. It is a synthesis which does not negate the individual elements but transcends them”.

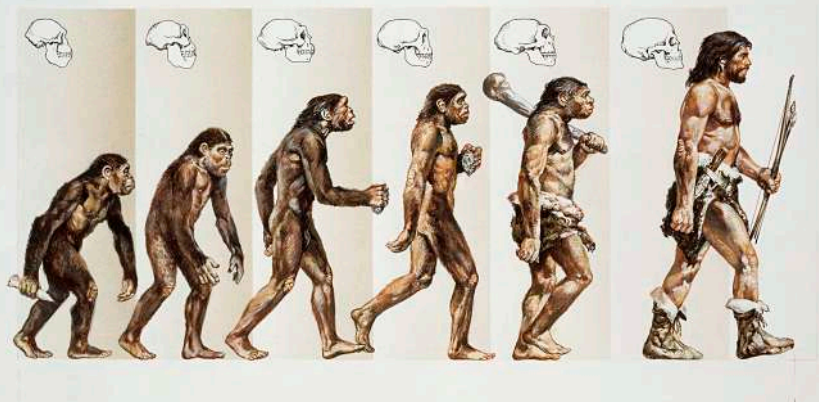
Pope Francis proposes the ‘Dialogue Model’. “Science and Religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both” (Laudato Si, 62). This model is an invitation for creative mutual interaction between science and religion. “Not that we have total harmony between scientific and religious worldviews, rather dialogue could lead to props, so that scientists and theologians could go back to their work with new directions”, said Ted.

The last two non-warfare models are Naturalism and Theology of Nature. Naturalism works on the principle ‘nature is reality, and science is its prophet. Theology of Nature, on the other hand, identifies that theology derives from the special revelation in scripture, understanding of nature from science, but the meaning of nature is found in scripture, not in science.

Having laid down the ten models, the real question is where do you stand? Of course, these ten models are neither exhaustive nor comprehensive of the existing relationship

between science and religion. There could be other models as well – perhaps ‘complementary models’ as suggested by Prof. Job Kozhamthadam. The search for Truth is the intersectional point and any healthy means to reach there is desirable.

*Prepared by Rosan Roy,  
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**BOOK  
REVIEW**

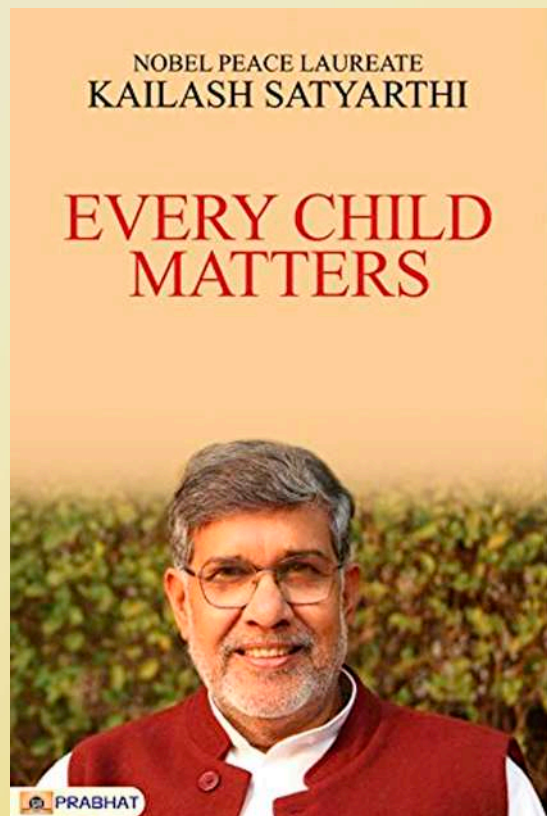
# ‘Every Child Matters’

By Kailash Satyarthi

**“The Key Lies in Globalising Compassion”**

*Pax Lumina 2(6) / 2021 / 80-83*

**D**uring her first public speech after being injured in a Taliban attack in Pakistan, Malala Yousafzai said, “I raise my voice – not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard.” Her words echo the spirit of every advocate of child rights. Though the world is affected by formidable environmental damage, societal and communal conflicts, and the colossal impact caused by the corona pandemic, some questions need to be asked about the injustice and bigotry being inflicted upon the voiceless sections of society. Child rights activists from around the world persevere in their fight to delimit, if not eradicate, the atrocities and abuses meted out on children by society.





Though from different countries and religious denominations, the driving force of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, Kailash Satyarthi and Yousafzai, is the zeal to free the children of the world from all kinds of oppression and injustice and to lead them towards a healthy and secure life. Satyarthi and Yousafzai have strived to meet their objectives through peaceful means and by living up to their principles.

In India, the term 'child right activism' is used synonymously with Satyarthi. In his Nobel Prize citation, he was praised "for the struggle against the suppression of children and young people and the right of all children to education."

Inspired by an incident during his childhood that made the author aware that not all children his age or younger or older receive the same opportunities as he does, Satyarthi sought to find solutions to make the world a better place for every child. The same passion inspired him to leave the engineering profession, which offered a steady and safe future and to unearth the reasons behind child persecution, even as the nation proclaimed its independence on August 15, 1947.

While growing up in the Vidisha District of Madhya Pradesh, Satyarthi and his friends tried to provide educational materials and other necessities for the children of the underprivileged communities in their localities. When he realised that the privileges he enjoyed as a child were due to his high caste, he gave up the caste name 'Sharma' to give himself the eponym 'Satyarthi', meaning 'seeker of truth'.

In 1980, he founded Bachpan Bachao Andolan or Save Childhood Movement which is the largest and most extensive initiative in

India with the mission to "identify, release, rehabilitate and educate children in servitude through prevention, direct intervention, coalition-building, mass mobilisation and legal action to create a child-friendly society."

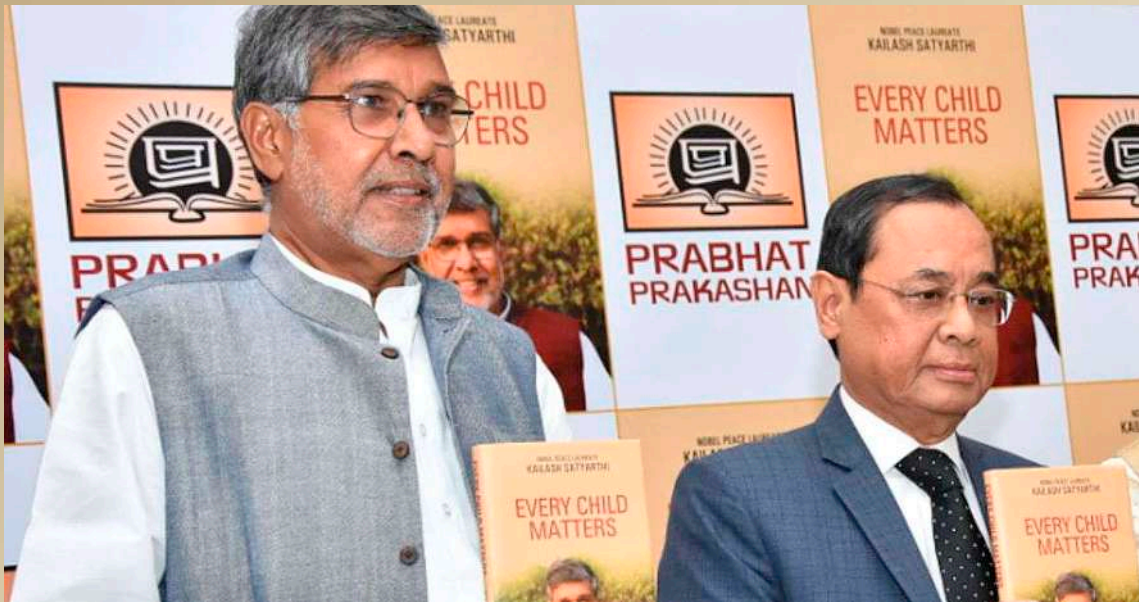
Among the various establishments he has founded, there is the first-of-its-kind civil society-business coalition, Rugmark, to certify and monitor the carpet-weaving industry that does not employ child labour; the Global Campaign for Education, which is for the right to free and quality public education; 'Parliamentarians without Borders', a platform to bring together Nobel Laureates and leaders for children's causes and so on.

The innovative approaches adopted by Bachpan Bachao Andolan, like the Bal Mitra Ashram and Mukti Ashram in various States of India, have captured the attention globally. He advocated Bharat Yatra in 2017, which was a pan-India movement covering 22 States and Union Territories and spanning 11,000 kms, "to raise mass awareness about the growing menace of child sexual abuse and child trafficking," under the theme of 'Surakshit Bachpan, Surakshit Bharat' (Safe Childhood, Safe India).

Through his indefatigable enthusiasm and earnest operations, he has rescued more than 90,000 children from abuse and oppression. His battle for children's rights still goes on relentlessly.

Satyarthi's book, *Every Child Matters*, which was published in 2017, is a compilation of articles and interviews that recounts the struggle that he and his compatriots have undergone to raise the conscience of the nation to the responsibility of protecting its children.

The articles are verified experiences of the author's hard-won fight against the atrocities inflicted on children. Each article has a soulful thirst as well as a desire to redeem every oppressed child and grant them a safe and healthy childhood.



His observations not only pertain to the debilitating conditions of child safety but also capture the courageous actions taken by citizens and law enforcement authorities against the menace.

The book has two parts. In the first, he writes about his observations and ruminations about child rights protection. In his columns, Satyarthi elucidates the exploitation of children all around the world, and the need to address the issue not just on the socio-economic level, but also at a cultural level.

The world, with all its wealth and burgeoning accomplishments, is causing new forms of abusing and exploiting children. According to Satyarthi, children are the worst sufferers despite all this progress that we have made as a civilisation. The struggles that our freedom fighters bravely encountered to win over independence will go in vain if the children cannot obtain the basic freedom and rights they ought to enjoy.

There are horrifying accounts where the dreams and aspirations of the children are crushed by the inadequacies in the social, economic, political and legal systems. Apart from the fact that millions of under-age children are forced to do child labour, almost none of them received the wages they deserve.

Satyarthi's works have also revealed many disturbing truths behind child trafficking. As reported by him in many of his articles and interviews, "when a girl is trafficked from Assam, usually for Rs. 10,000-Rs. 15,000, and brought to Delhi or Haryana to be sold as a child bride, Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 1.5 lakh changes hands. If she has been brought in by placement agencies for domestic labour, she is sold for Rs. 40,000-Rs. 50,000. All of this is black money." Therefore, Satyarthi calls not just the philanthropists but all the citizens to be freedom fighters and save the children.

He doesn't forget to acknowledge the services of grassroots activists and on-ground workers in elevating the status of underprivileged and persecuted children. In one of his articles, Satyarthi reminisces on his journey for conceptualising "an international law for the abolition of modern forms of slavery, sale and trafficking of children, forced labour and the use of children in conflict, for pornography and for procuring and doing other illicit activities, such as drug trafficking", which resulted in the ratification of the International Labour Organisation Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and Convention 138 on Minimum Age of Employment by the Government of India in 1999.

**H**aving laid down the ten models, the real question is where do you stand? **Of course, these ten models are neither exhaustive nor comprehensive of the existing relationship between science and religion.**



Hence, though the terrifying escalations in child abuse are disheartening, Satyarthi points out that the future is not entirely devoid of hope, as exhibited by “tantalising glimpses of our ability to nurture greatness against all odds”. His narratives are imbued with admiration towards the cadence and perseverance exhibited by the children during Bharat Yatra in 2017 and Global March against Child Labour organised in 1998.

Satyarthi’s words are fearless in his appraisal of the government and judiciary. For instance, Children’s Day, which is observed and celebrated throughout the nation every year shouldn’t be a rhetorical or ritualistic display but should be a collective platform for child empowerment.

He advocates the collaboration of civil society and the corporate world as equal stakeholders to build ‘business with compassionate intelligence’ and contributes his opinions on the possibilities of the compassion model to individual countries including India.

Satyarthi refutes any reforms or laws regressive to children and their rights and addresses the areas of discrepancies in budgetary allocations for children.

The book also contains various interviews with Satyarthi which had been published earlier in the printed as well as visual media. He said that his objectives are not confined to India alone, but to have a global reach.

He addresses topics such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, a gathering of Nobel laureates to fight for children’s rights, his national and international projects, the effectiveness of the Child Labour Bill, the need for a National Children’s Tribunal for timely intervention in crimes against children, the importance of education, and the campaign, ‘Hundred Million for Hundred Million’. He substantiates in the interviews that one of the main objectives in assembling Nobel prize laureates has been to uphold collective morality. He exhibits a nonpartisan attitude towards the political economy.

His writings are anecdotal and reflect on the impact that each step he has made in the course of peaceful belligerence to demolish the appanage that society and government prescribe for certain sections of society, and instead obtain the fundamental rights that every child has the right to enjoy.

It is an illuminating discourse, offering much scope for introspection into the rights and needs of the children, their aspirations, and the conditions and the system that force them to be exploited. In short, he exalts a movement for the globalisation of compassion, seeking the true essence of each virtue that exists in the value system.

“No doubt, humanity faces many dangers caused by ecological damage, civil wars, conflicts and geo-political challenges, but together, we can overcome them and leave a safer world for our children. The key lies in globalising compassion,” Satyarthi wrote in the preface.

*Author is Assistant Professor in English,  
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## INTERVIEW

with **Dr. Yousif Thomas Mirikis O.P.**

(Archbishop of Kirkuk and Sulaimanyah, Iraq)

Sr.(Dr.) Anna George, CMC

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# POPE FRANCIS' HISTORIC VISIT TO IRAQ

*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 84-87*

## **W**hy do you think Pope Francis' visit to Iraq a historic event?

Yes, it is, indeed, a historic event. In fact, it is for the first time a Pope visits this region of Mesopotamia, since the beginning of Christianity. Never did a Pope come here before. Mesopotamia has been neglected by Christianity for long. Maybe because, they went western rather than Eastern. I think, the Pope's visit opens up a new way of looking at Christianity in general and Catholicism in Iraq in particular.

## **W**hat are the Pope's important messages?

For me, the most important message for our wounded country is the message of peace. The last three words he uttered in Arabic during the Mass were 'Salam, Salam, and Salam'. I think, the Pope wanted us to hear the word of peace as never before, because for the last seventy years, since the foundation of Israel, we have not experienced peace. This region, I believe, cannot have peace without accepting peace as an essential value. As the various denominations in this country were busy taking revenge on 'their enemies', no one believed in peace. They thought they could achieve their rights by violent means. This has been embedded in their psychic make-up for decades. It is in this context that Pope Francis visited us as a prophet of peace.

*Dr. Yousif Thomas Mirikis O.P.  
(Archbishop of Kirkuk and Sulaimanyah, Iraq)*



## **D**id the Pope say anything about terrorism?

Yes, he did. Any form of terrorism takes away peace. Terrorism is a complex mix of money, weapon and revenge. This is the dynamics of terrorism wherever it prevails. In Pope's view, nothing can be gained by war and weapons. This message of peace is applicable everywhere including our neighbouring country, Iran, which is right now involved in making nuclear bomb.

## **H**ow did the government and people take up his message?

I am not sure to what extent the government is aware of the significance of the message of Pope. But I appreciate the government in offering the Pope a formal and cordial welcome. It seems, they respect and admire the goodness of the Pope. But carrying out his message is a matter altogether different. I think, the public, especially the youth, have appreciated the message of the Pope rather than the government. It was clear in their manifestations both in Baghdad and Southern Iraq.

## **D**o you think that the Pope's visit will be an impetus for inter-religious dialogue in general and Muslim - Christian dialogue in particular?

Sure. I think the Muslim-Muslim dialogue must be given priority over Muslim-Christian dialogue because of the existing serious conflict between Shia and Sunni factions in Islam where Shias are in majority. With the dialogue between Pope Francis and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the spiritual leader of Shia Muslims, it has been proved that dialogue is possible among Muslims and Christians. However, I reiterate that priority must be given for reconciliation between Shia and Sunni factions which has often led to insurgence and civil war.

With regard to Christian –Muslim dialogue, a highly valuable message has been given. I believe, dialogue is a process. Now, the stage is set for an ongoing dialogue. In short, Christians are not a threat for Muslims in Iraq. If the conflict that prevails between Muslim factions is resolved, that will lead to peaceful coexistence. Consequently, the relationship with Christians will also be fostered which, in turn, will ensure the integral growth of the country. To me, the Pope focused mostly on promoting inter-religious dialogue and harmony. He warned that, religions should not be made use of as weapons which normally force the persecuted to migrate into other countries.

*Pope Francis and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani*



## **What are the ramifications of Pope's visit and his message of peace, justice and coexistence to the Middle East and to the rest of the world ?**

This is a very significant question. It is all the more important for a federal, democratic, parliamentary republic. The denial of democracy is dictatorship. Dictatorship is centred around power. This has been repeatedly proved in history and a clear example is that of Saddam Hussain who ruled well over 35 years.

The ramification of Pope's visit to the world is both peace and justice. Like peace, the word justice is also important for us. Justice means accepting the other, cutting across all denominational differences. Justice underlines equality for all. The major problem here is the lack of acceptance of the other, especially the minority. Very often, this narrow mentality results in religious fundamentalism which might further exclude and eliminate the minority. Pope Francis called for coexistence and for celebrating differences. He appealed not to treat others as slaves. If Iraq accepts this message, that would be wonderful.

## **Can we be hopeful that the Pope's visit will be instrumental in eliminating terrorism in the Middle East, at least in the near future?**

A difficult question because terrorism in the Middle East has deep roots. In order to uproot terrorism, we need a government with strong will. Unfortunately, we don't have such a government. Terrorists take advantage of this weakness of the government. So there are more terrorists in Iraq than in many other countries. I cannot say how much is going to be the impact

of Pope's visit on these terrorists. For them, Pope's visit could be something peripheral. The government must take up the Pope's message and must come up with adequate measures to do away with terrorism.

## **How do the religious leaders respond to the Pope and his ideas?**

It is true that the Pope had a great dialogue with leaders like Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. That does not mean that all other leaders are friendly and hospitable like him. There are many religious leaders with army and weapons, who support terrorism. They are not different from other terrorists. They have not yet responded to the Pope's visit.

## **How do you appreciate Pope Francis as a Peacemaker?**

Popes, in general, are messengers of peace. Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI belong to this category. Pope Francis is the latest link in that great tradition. They were all prophets of peace during the World Wars and civil wars. The Popes and their teachings have highlighted the need for peace and justice from time to time. Vatican Council II has even described all religions as sister religions.

Pope Francis' visit was something unique. He communicated the message of peace for Iraq and for the whole world. He called for the stoppage of arms race, killing and assassination. The way for peace is not taking revenge but accepting the other.

*Interviewed by Sr.(Dr.) Anna George, CMC,  
Principal, International School, Sekaniyan, Iraq*

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

*Pax Lumina 2(2) / 2021 / 88-89*



**D**ear Editor,

*My heartiest appreciation for the deep & reflective reading experience that was the Pax Lumina January issue!*

*The selection of subjects, alternative views on the same topic and interviews with practitioners were solid! Views on the farm laws by Joe Scaria were especially thought-provoking for me.*

*I am intrigued by your focus on the issue of human trafficking and appreciate that you focused on trafficking for labour as well. What prompted it?*

*I happen to work with an organisation who is involved with ground level interventions in similar cases of labour and sexual exploitation and would be interested in learning more about a wide variety of approaches from law enforcement side to community-based work.*

*All in all, really proud that Pax Lumina is the kind of team that it is.*

**Princy Joseph**

*Bangalore.*

**D**ear Editor,

*Pax Lumina January 2021 provided from cover-to-cover stimulating reading. The cover-topic has been covered in adequate depth & width touching upon topics such as modus operandi and also with real-life stories, interviews, facts & figures etc. calling for the immediate attention*

*to the seriousness of the issue often passed over as an age old profession.*

*Other current issues of national & international relevance for peace & reconciliation have also been well-covered. It is also extremely nice & awakening to hear illustrious persons like Dr. S Ignacimuthu.*

**K.A. Joseph**, Kochi

**D**ear Editor,

*The title of the issue is a troubling one- Sex Workers. Your editorial too is speaking of sex workers. Most women who end up in selling their bodies have been taken there through tricks and desperation. There is a lobby and women from the brothels to support selling of bodies, which is violation of their human rights, into sex work. It is a way to get the police off their back, but it will open the floodgates for increased demands and violence against women. It is against the dignity of the human person. The pimps and brothel owners can continue to exploit them without the constraints of the law. At the international level big corporations are funding some groups who advocate sex work to be made legal.*

**Teresa Kotturan**

*NGO Representative at the UN*



**D**ear Editor,

The January issue of PaxLumina was very solid and relevant with articles of wide variety of fields. Plight of the sex workers was very well depicted. The article by Fr. Jinu Eapen was impressive with real pictures of the persons in the red light area. Sruti Sreenivasan's case study with the photos of the real victim was very touching. The statistics of global trafficking was also impressive. The farmers' problems were presented with its ramifications. The opinions of the experts given separately were useful, though an in-depth analysis of the farmers' issues was missing. Three farmer's laws with analysis will be useful for the international readers. The articles of Carlos and Ted Peters gave a good analysis of the international scenario of peace. The presentation of the issue was very attractive with beautiful pictures and appealing reading. Congratulations to the Editors.

**Dr. Mathew Aerthayil**

AADI (Attappadi Adivasi Development Initiatives).

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**D**ear Editor,

As always, this edition is not only a good-read, but also a very effective thought initiator. I really admire the effort your team takes up in bringing out such good articles. My congratulations to every one who has worked behind the scenes and my sincere thanks to the contributors of the articles for touching upon all the important facts.

I must say it was a good move to categorise each write-up under national, international, science, arts etc.

Looking forward to reading more!

**Shruthi H.**

Thiruvananthapuram

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**D**ear Editor,

Thank you for sharing the January edition of Pax Lumina.

The initial articles have captured the plight of the women very well.

Similarly, the articles and opinion columns regarding the farmer and farm laws are also brought out well.

**Owen Chourappa**

Director, Legal Cell for Human Rights (LCHR),  
Guwahati, Assam

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**D**ear Editor,

With reference to the article (Pax Lumina 1(5) / 2021 / 45-46) *Aftermath of the Bomb Blast in Bamyán*, I wish to clarify that Jesuit Refugee Service, following WHO guidelines, does not recommend the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) technique as an early intervention after exposure to trauma. Research studies show that CISD is not only ineffective but could be counterproductive.

**Stan Fernandes SJ,**

Country Director, Jesuit Refugee Service  
Afghanistan.

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**D**ear Editor,

Pax Lumina highlights important issues, national and international, which are so relevant and important for building a peaceful civil society.

**Dr. Diya Dutt**

Deputy Director, United States-India Educational  
Foundation, Fulbright Commission in India

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**LIPI**

Suggestions and feedback  
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Letters to the Editor should  
contain full postal address,  
telephone number and email id.

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