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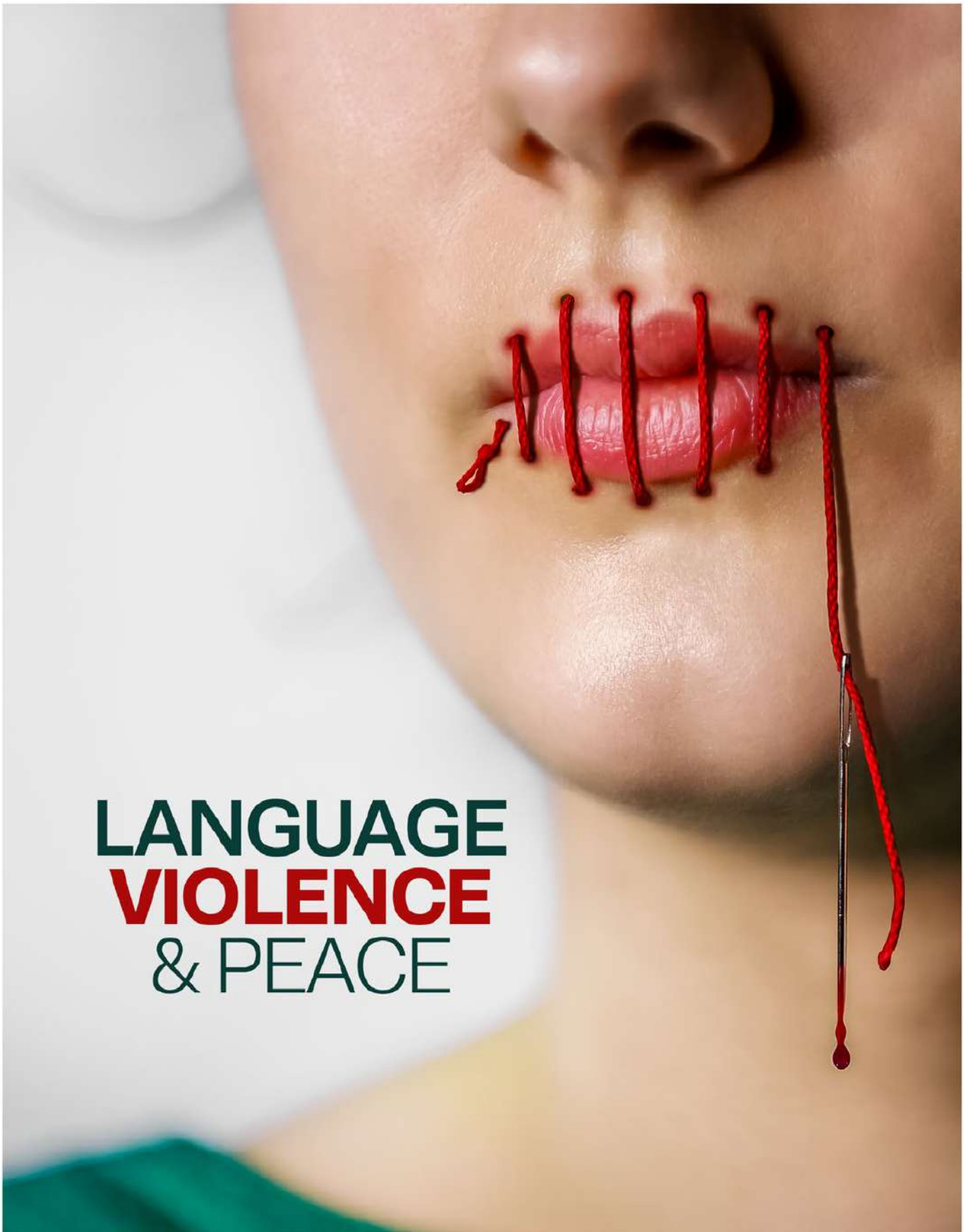
A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



LANGUAGE VIOLENCE & PEACE

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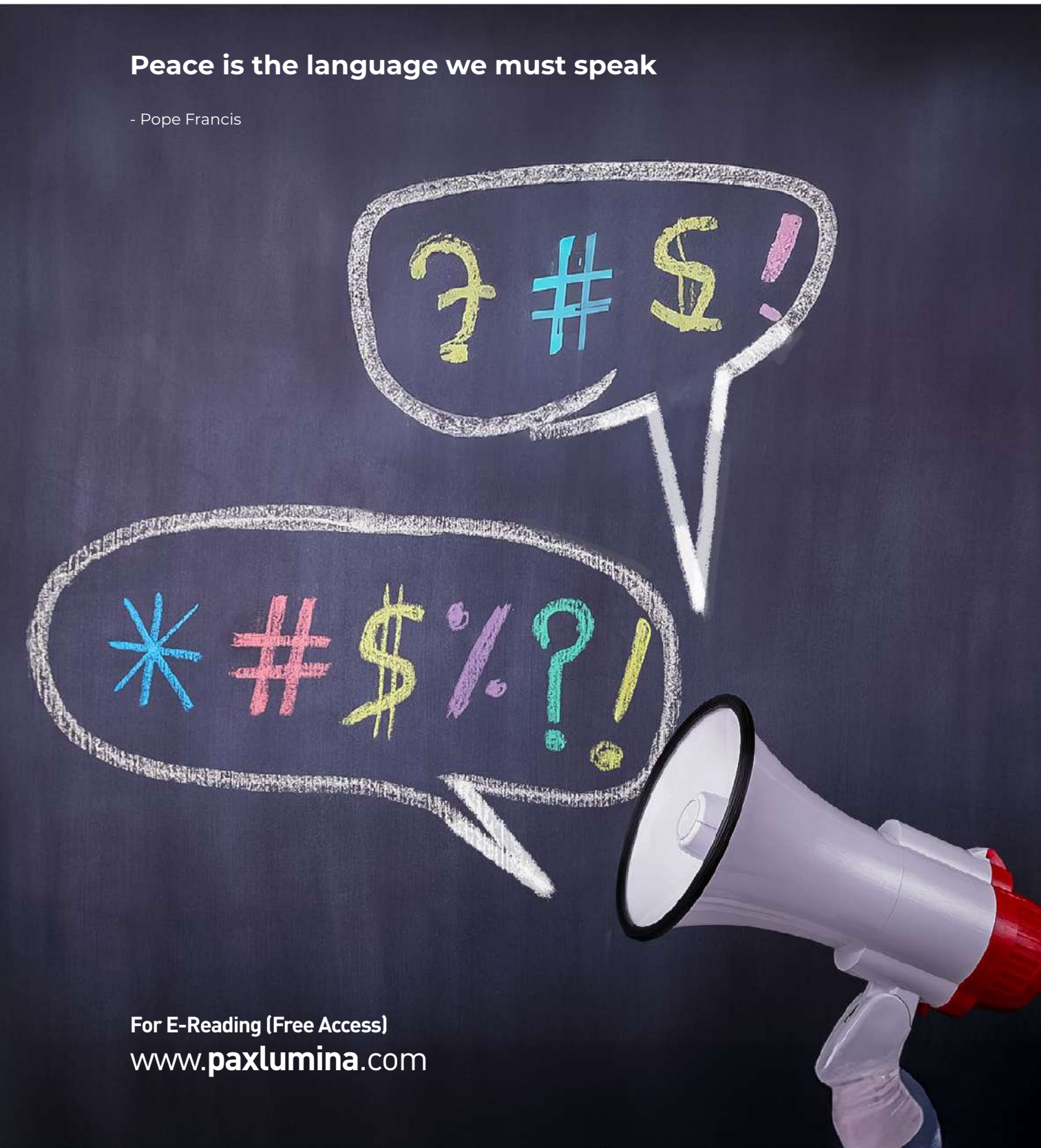
A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

Peace is the language we must speak

- Pope Francis



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Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

Pax Lumina

An Initiative of Peace and Reconciliation Network

Jesuit Conference of South Asia (JCSA)

Vision

Promotion of Peace and Reconciliation The Nodal Platform for Peace and Reconciliation Network of JCSA aims at fostering peace with a multi-pronged approach.

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Ponoth Road, Kaloor, Kochi - 682 017
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24 Benson Road, Benson Town
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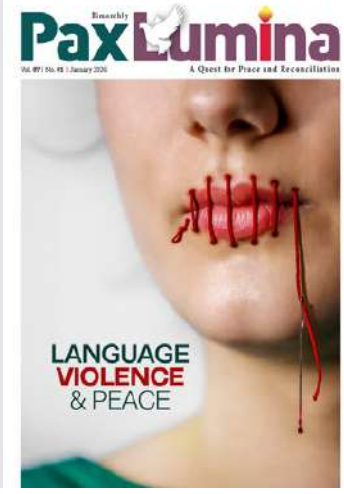

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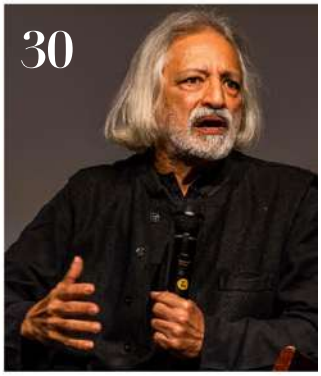

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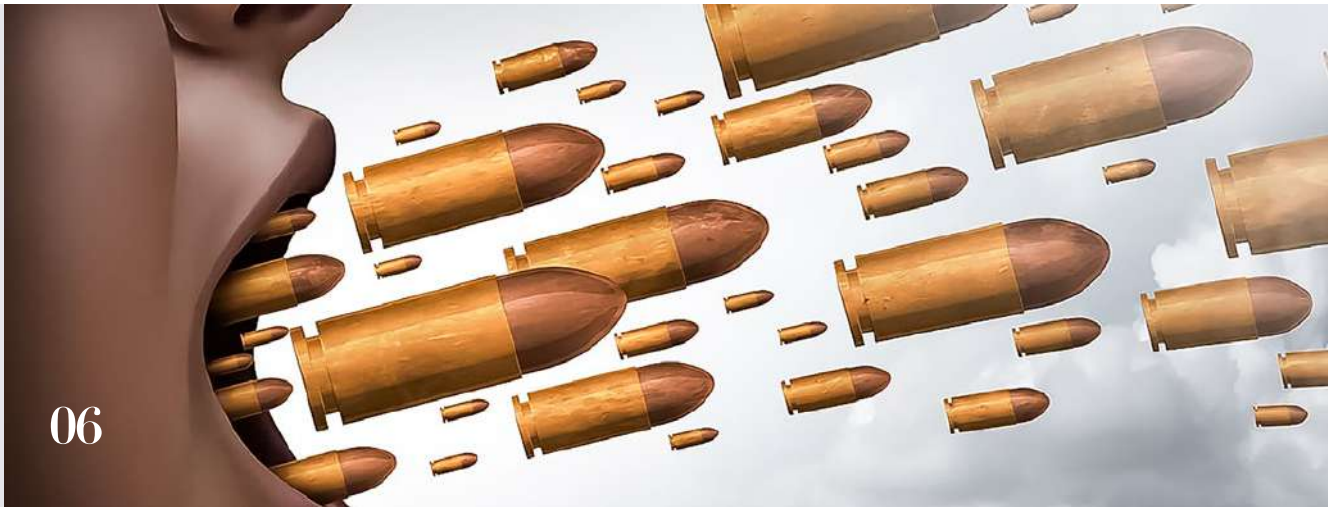


BOOK REVIEW

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LANGUAGE AND PEACE

Editorial

"A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It's all embodied in a language," observed Noam Chomsky. Languages are as old as human civilization itself. Language is, in essence, comparable to mother, earth, air and water, which is fundamental to our existence and identity. Languages have birthed civilizations and shaped their destinies when used as a tool for love, and equally, for hate.

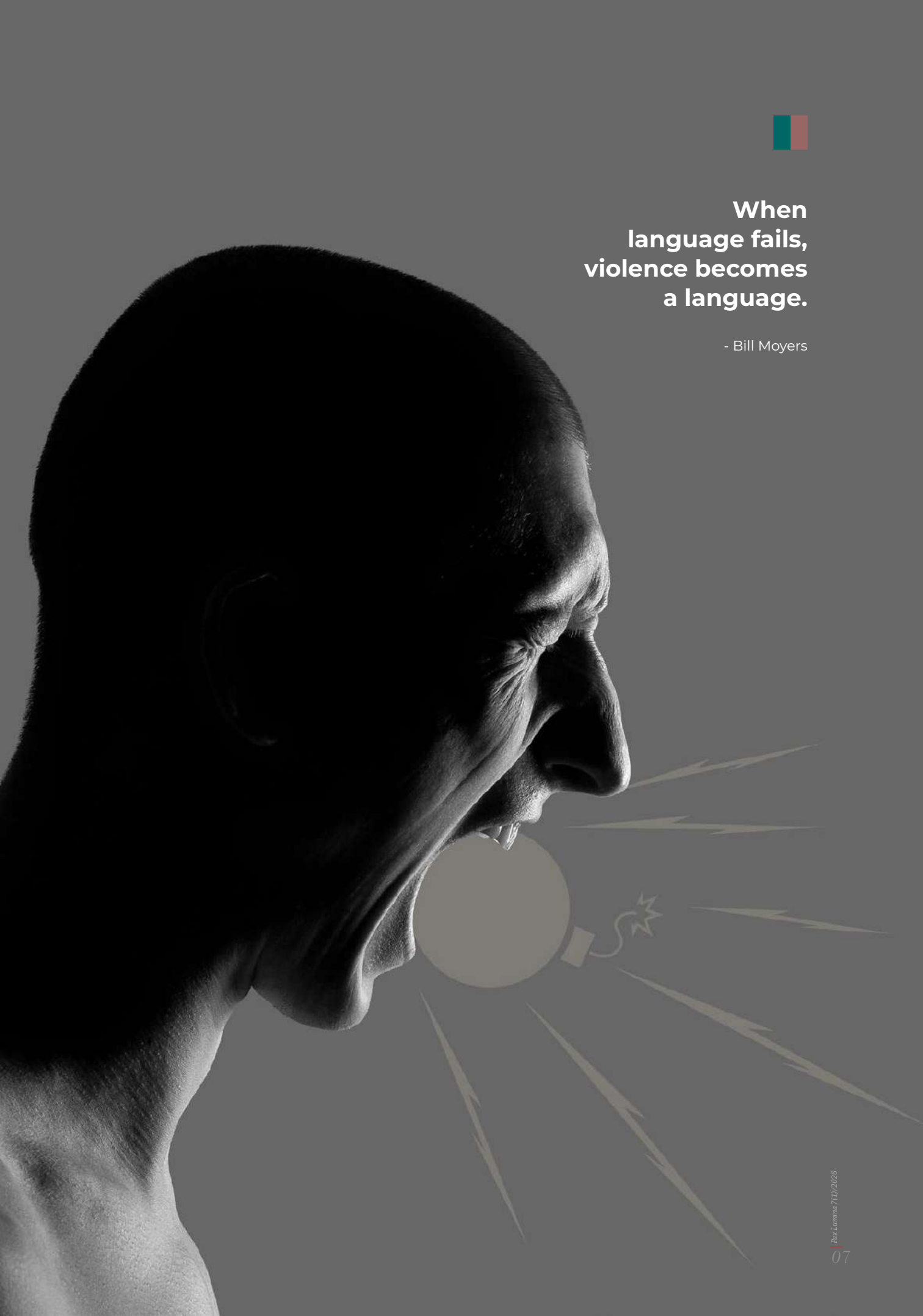
When a baby is born, he/she listens to the words coming from his/her mother. It adopts the language spoken by the mother, and that language becomes his/her mother tongue. It is not just a tool for communication; it is an emotion, a bond that connects generations, a repository of collective memory and wisdom. Wars have been fought for it. People have sacrificed their lives defending their right to speak in their own tongue. Like any tool, languages can be used, abused, and misused. Languages have been weaponized to commit violence against people. Conversely, violence has been committed against languages too, as we have seen instances of groups suppressing them, banning them and attempting to erase them from public life. But languages don't fight back, for they are also the epitome of tolerance and peace, absorbing influences, evolving, yet persisting.

In India, languages have been an emotional issue. When one group of people wanted Urdu as the Official Language as opposed to Hindi in Devnagari script, the country was led to Partition. The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution provides recognition to 22 Languages. Several public upsurges have been witnessed against imposition of languages on the people. The Constitution of India protects freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution. The freedom of press, the freedom of expression find their place in Article 19 of the Constitution. Of course, they are subject to reasonable restrictions as provided in Article 19(2). India is a country where freedom of speech is guaranteed, but is there freedom after speech? We have witnessed instances where protests by students have been met with criminal actions, professors voicing opinions have been sanctioned, journalists are locked up for doing their job.

Speech is a coin having two sides – free speech and hate speech. Violence does not begin with the first stone thrown or the first blow struck. It begins much earlier, in the quiet accumulation of words that teach us whom to fear, whom to hate, and whom to exclude. The systematic misuse of language through hate speech, propaganda, misinformation, and coded exclusion are mostly the root cause for structural violence long before eruption of violence in physical or material form.

We should endeavour to cultivate a culture of language that spreads love, humanity, mutual respect and care. A mature democracy is ultimately judged not by the loudness of its voices, but by the wisdom, restraint, and humanity with which its languages are spoken, protected, and passed on to future generations.

Justice Kurian Joseph
Honarary Editor



When language fails, violence becomes a language.

- Bill Moyers

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Kumkum Roy
kumkumroy@gmail.com

LANGUAGE LIGHTS UP THE WORLD

Tagore wrote prolifically, primarily in Bengali – around 2500 songs, poems, plays, essays, novels, and short stories; he was also a painter. He used several registers of Bengali, ranging from the formal to the colloquial. Living through two World Wars, and the most dramatic decades of the nationalist movement, he was deeply invested in a vision of an alternative world, which he tried to realise in Shantiniketan.

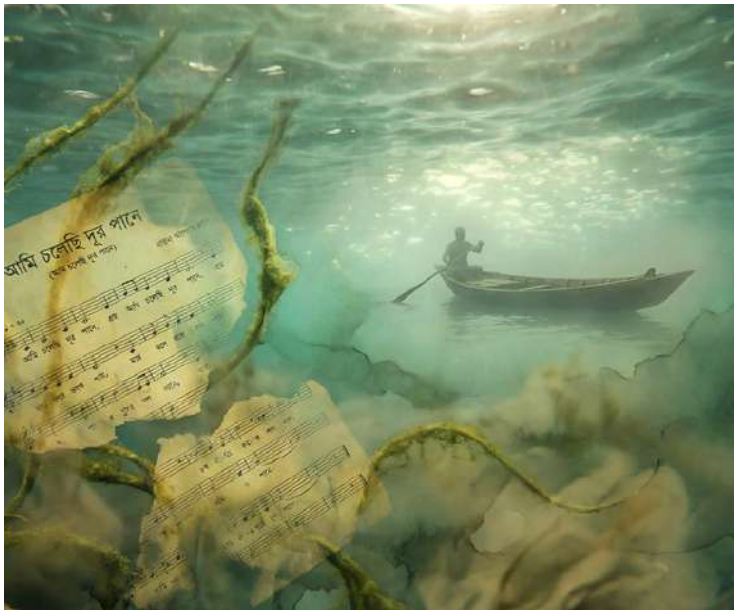
More than a decade ago, the philosopher Mrinal Miri observed:

> ...this remark, made by St Augustine... remains one of the most penetrating things said about language. Language lights up the world, because it is only through language that one becomes aware of, can sharpen one's awareness, of the great diversity that makes up our world — its minute particularities, its subtle unities, its surprises and its magnificence. Without language, without the ability to articulate, the world would be for most part, a chaotic mass.

Equally, in our everyday lives, language is inextricably implicated in relationships of power. As John B. Thompson points out:

> We are experts in the innumerable and subtle strategies by which words can be used as instruments of coercion and constraint, as tools of intimidation and abuse, as signs of politeness, condescension and contempt.

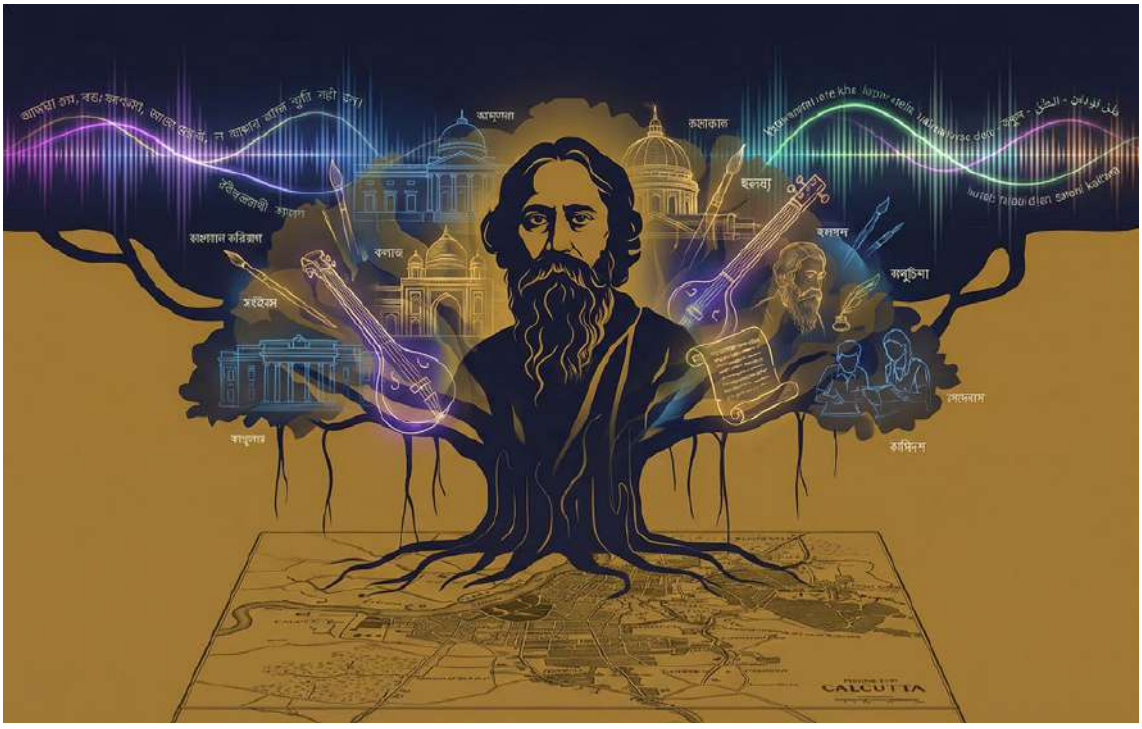
In what follows, I will try to illustrate some of the uses of language by drawing on the songs of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Tagore wrote prolifically, primarily in Bengali – around 2500 songs, poems, plays, essays, novels, and short stories; he was also a painter. He used several registers of Bengali, ranging from the formal to the colloquial. Living through two World Wars, and the most dramatic decades of the nationalist movement, he was deeply invested in a vision of an alternative world, which he tried to realise in Shantiniketan. And within and beyond this, was an intense spiritual quest.



In a song composed in 1923 *(Gaan guli mor shaibaaleri dawl)* Tagore wrote:

> My songs drift away like moss
> Losing their way in the turbulent flood,
> Unrestrained and restless...
>
> Drawn to the distant, they draw me along,
> from home to the song of the way,
> Afloat on a long-forgotten stream.

Initially composed for a relatively small group of friends and relatives, part of an elite world in late 19th century Bengal, the songs acquired widespread popularity from first half of the 20th century, when new modes of dissemination, including recording, were used effectively by some of the most well-known artistes of the time, including Pankaj Kumar Mullick and Hemanta Kumar Mukherjee. They have also been translated and sung in several Indian and other languages.



Tagore himself perhaps anticipated, and certainly hoped that his songs and their message would outlive him, and this has, to some extent, been fulfilled. The songs, now generally known as Rabindrasangeet, continue to circulate, popularised by generations of artistes. Anthologized in a sprawling text, *Gitabitan*, they are loosely grouped into those pertaining to worship/spiritual ideas (puja), patriotism *(swadesh),* love *(prem),* nature *(prakriti),* and diverse themes *(bichitra),* even as most practitioners acknowledge that these categories often overlap.

Some compositions, especially those in *Bichitra,* are playful. This song *(Haay, haay, haay,* 1924) was an invitation to the staff at Shantiniketan to join a tea-drinking session:

> Alas, alas, alas, the days alas they pass.
>
> All you parched birds, thirsting for tea,
> come, come, along this way.
>
> The water in the kettle is heated and
> steams, it froths, hisses, boils, and leaps!
>
> The easterly winds from the Chinese skies
> bring the dark refreshing streams that
> flow here,
>
> And may you who have gathered enjoy
> these ambrosial showers in the rains!

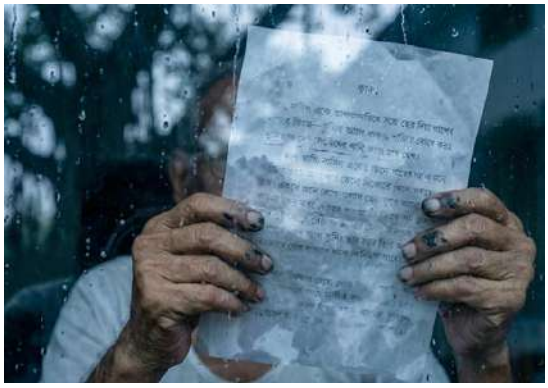
Those who were invited included the grammarian, described as 'slave of manuscripts, ...our guiding star', the mathematician, poet, geologist, geographer, 'And you, with tearful eyes, terrified accountant, struggling to match profit and loss.' Also invited were the musician, painter, 'And you, indefatigable in argument, the adornment of constitutional law, As well as you who are rudderless, escapees from committees, those who have murdered the law.'

Other compositions, especially those anthologized in Puja, articulate a very different level of human experience, as, for instance, in the song *Baani tawbo dhaay* (1899):

> Your message flows through
> the boundless skies and worlds,
> The planets, moon, brilliant sun and stars.
>
> Sorrow and joy are your message, as are
> birth and death.
>
> Your message is in the depths of the
> hearts of the devout,
> Flowing as a stream of peace.

Here, the poet captures the immensity of a wordless message that pervades the universe, simultaneously coursing through the most fundamental and inescapable human experiences.

Tagore himself perhaps anticipated, and certainly hoped that his songs and their message would outlive him, and this has, to some extent, been fulfilled. The songs, now generally known as Rabindrasangeet, continue to circulate, popularised by generations of artistes. Anthologized in a sprawling text, *Gitabitan*, they are loosely grouped into those pertaining to worship/ spiritual ideas *(puja)*, patriotism *(swadesh)*, love *(prem)*, nature *(prakriti)*, and diverse themes *(bichitra)*, even as most practitioners acknowledge that these categories often overlap.



Yet, this translation of a universal message into the human world is never easy – differences of doctrine and practice often rudely disrupt our understanding – creating virtually insurmountable barriers in communication. The limitation of words is acknowledged, paradoxically, through the words of another song *(Jaaraa kawthaa diye,* 1918):

> They build barriers between sect and sect
> Praising you through webs of words,
> And no one understands
> What the other says,
> Words weigh down more heavily
> with each attempt to explain.
>
> But those who give up words
> and just play a melody,
> Drawn by the music, they unite,
> all who are near and far,
> And whether they realise or not
> Their sorrows touch your feet.

At the same time, words allow us to express the intimacy of one of the deepest human emotions, love. *Aaji tomaay aabaar,* composed in 1939, when the poet was 78 years old, bears testimony to the gentle, evocative power of words:

> Today I long to repeat the words
> That I shared with you time and again.
>
> Words that resonate through my soul
> With the incessant rains.
>
> Do not ask why, nor what they mean.
>
> They bear the burden of pain awakened
> Through the symbol of my song.
>
> I will whisper the words ringing through
> my dreams and mind
> In the darkness of the rains.

This composition, incidentally, is categorized as *Prakriti* (nature) rather than *Prem* (love), a reminder of the futility of compartmentalisation – and of the immense potential of language to bind, to connect, to enable us to share.

[All translations mine.]

Kumkum Roy is former Professor of Ancient Indian History at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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Chancy Mterera
chancy.ntelela@hekima.ac.ke

THE VICTIM AND THE WORD

LAMENT AS A LANGUAGE OF PEACEBUILDING

This article argues that sustainable peacebuilding in Congo requires more than institutional reform or conflict management; **further it demands the recovery of the victim's voice as a central moral and theological category.**

Introduction

Across many African traditions, language is understood as generative rather than merely descriptive. The Chewa proverb *mau amalenga* ("words create") expresses a conviction that speech shapes morality, relationships, and political possibilities. This insight is particularly urgent in contexts of protracted violence, where language determines what is acknowledged and what is rendered invisible.

In conflict-affected societies such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, dominant political and military discourses tend to interpret violence through strategic, institutional, or statistical frameworks. While important, such approaches frequently marginalise lived experience and, in doing so, undermine the moral agency of victims.

This article argues that sustainable peacebuilding in Congo requires more than institutional reform or conflict management; further, it demands the recovery of the victim's voice as a central moral and theological category. Drawing on Emmanuel Katongole's political theology, particularly *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa,* the article contends that lament functions as a distinctive "theological practice: a way to name what is going on, to stand, to hope, and to engage God in the midst of ruins" (Katongole, 2017, p. 45). By foregrounding the victim's word, lament disrupts imposed silence, resists despair, and opens moral space for reconciliation and the reimagining of communal life beyond violence.

Violence in Congo and the Book of Lamentations

Katongole employs the Democratic Republic of Congo as a paradigmatic lens through which postcolonial violence in Africa may be interpreted. While recognising Congo's particular historical trajectory, he argues that "in many ways, Congo is a mirror of the violence in postcolonial Africa" (Katongole, 2017, p. 4). Over the past twenty-five years, successive wars have resulted in more than 5.4 million deaths, mass displacement, widespread sexual violence, and extreme impoverishment (Katongole, 2017, p. 3). The involvement of regional states, armed groups, and international actors reveals both the complexity of the conflict and the diffusion of responsibility.

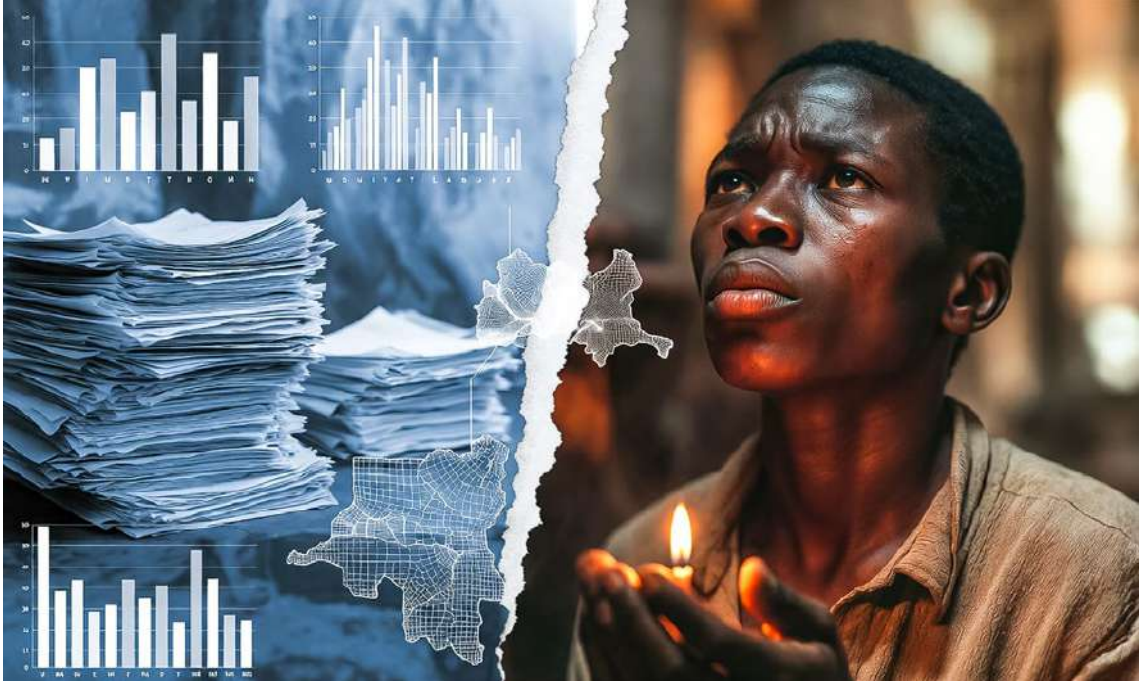
Statistical and analytical accounts often abstract from lived experience, reducing victims to numbers and suffering to explanatory categories.
The individual who has lost land, community, leadership, and dignity disappears behind technocratic language. It is against this silencing that lament emerges as a theological and political resource.

There is a profound moral dimension to the Congo wars. Rooted in what he describes as the postcolonial "politics of the belly", violence has become normalised as a mode of survival and power (Katongole, 2017, pp. 5-7). Death has lost its moral gravity, and killing has become "pathological, without any moral compass" (Katongole, 2017, p. 13). Congolese voices describe the country as a vast graveyard in which people live "on top of the dead", signalling the collapse of land, community, and humanity itself (Katongole, 2017, p. 11).

This is reinforced by dominant narratives of violence. Statistical and analytical accounts often abstract from lived experience, reducing victims to numbers and suffering to explanatory categories. The individual who has lost land, community, leadership, and dignity disappears behind technocratic language. It is against this silencing that lament emerges as a theological and political resource.

Katongole turns to the Book of Lamentations as a counter-narrative in which the victim's voice occupies the centre of theological and political reflection. Written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, Lamentations gives voice to survivors of imperial violence (Katongole, 2017, p. 42). Rather than resolving suffering, the text dwells within grief and loss. Israel mourns land, kingship, and temple, revealing that hope in God arises not after healing, but amid devastation.

"Speaking from within trauma," Israel acknowledges judgement and communal guilt while still daring to address God and demand a response (Katongole, 2017, p. 49). Yet, "[this] ability to … voice pain is in itself a form of hope," therefore of agency (Katongole, 2017, pp. 52, 220). Israel's words acknowledge responsibility and loss while refusing to accept suffering as final. Lament thus becomes a disciplined form



of hope, enacted through turning towards God (Katongole, 2017, pp. 57-59). In this way, the victim's voice remains present within suffering while oriented towards a future renewed by God, shaping moral imagination and action towards justice and peace.

Lament in the Great Lakes Context

This theological language of lament also emerges within the lived practices of communities in the Great Lakes region. Katongole shows how people in Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda express lament through music, poetry, and art. These practices resist both imposed silence and violent retaliation. They articulate suffering while sustaining hope rooted in God's future. In contexts of ongoing violence, lament enables victims to remain morally present and communally engaged, generating agency amid devastation.

Figures such as David Kasali and Maggy Barankitse embody the transformative power of the victim's word. Both experienced war, loss, and social fragmentation, and both discerned their vocation not after violence ended but within it (Katongole, 2017, pp. 204, 208, 229). In lament, they "felt God's call" to pursue peace and reconstruction (Katongole, 2017, pp. 207, 231-232).

Kasali founded the *Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo* in conflict-torn Beni as a concrete response to this call, reimagining education as moral and communal reconstruction (Katongole, 2017, p. 218). After surviving massacres in Burundi, Barankitse lamented in love of enemy and neighbour as a path towards sustainable peace, founding *Maison Shalom* and other homes for displaced children (Katongole, 2017, pp. 231-233). Their lives stand as signs of contradiction to revenge and despair, demonstrating that peacebuilding emerges from faithful action rooted in lament, the victims' form of speech.

Conclusion

While peace agreements, institutional reforms, and political negotiations remain indispensable, they are insufficient when detached from the voices of those who suffer violence. This article has argued that the victim's word, articulated through lament, possesses a generative power that challenges mainstream peacebuilding approaches, which risk sidelining lived experience in favour of technocratic solutions. By restoring victims as theological, moral, and political agents, lament re-centres peacebuilding within wounded communities themselves, revealing that sustainable peace emerges not only from negotiated settlements but also from speech that names suffering, preserves memory, and sustains hope before God.

References

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Chancy Mterera is a student at Hekima University College, currently serving as the President of the Hekima University College Students' Association, Nairobi-Kenya.

MP Mathai
mpmathaie@gmail.com

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YES, MIRACLES ARE POSSIBLE THROUGH NONVIOLENT/ COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

The systematic and intentional misuse of language - through hate speech, propaganda, misinformation, fake news, or coded forms of exclusion - produces violence at multiple levels: **personal, structural, and cultural. In such contexts, a conscious and disciplined practice of Nonviolent or Compassionate Communication offers a vital way forward, enabling us to express ourselves truthfully, while listening to others with empathy and care.**

Let me begin with a brief reflection on Nonviolent or Compassionate Communication. This reflection rests on a few fundamental premises - namely, that human beings are essentially good and, therefore, essentially nonviolent. To be essentially good or nonviolent means to be naturally oriented toward love and compassion. In other words, it is more natural for human beings to love and to be loved, and to act with compassion, than to hate or to harm. Love and compassion constitute the most basic and enduring human urge.

In the ordinary flow of life, human beings strive - both intrinsically and through social interaction - to nurture and enable the natural development and flourishing of this inherent loving and compassionate nature. Yet, paradoxically, human beings are also capable of creating conditions that alienate them from this foundational orientation, leading them to act violently. One such condition is the violent use of language.

Language functions like a double-edged sword: it possesses destructive, generative, and profoundly ambivalent power. Words have been compared to arrows shot into the air, the archer losing control over them once let out. Like shot arrows, words too, go out of control and can generate, justify, and perpetuate hatred and

violence. The systematic and intentional misuse of language - through hate speech, propaganda, misinformation, fake news, or coded forms of exclusion - produces violence at multiple levels: personal, structural, and cultural. In such contexts, a conscious and disciplined practice of Nonviolent or Compassionate Communication offers a vital way forward, enabling us to express ourselves truthfully, while listening to others with empathy and care.

The history of nonviolent conflict resolution and transformation offers abundant testimony to the transformative power of compassionate communication. It is replete with instances in which such communication has achieved what once seemed impossible—resolving deep-seated conflicts and fostering genuine reconciliation. In what follows, I will recount two such memorable instances from my own repository of experience as a peace activist.

The anecdotes are set in the suburbs of Monterrey, the capital of the Mexican state of Nuevo León, a region long affected by violent conflicts between rival drug cartels. Like many cities across Mexico, Monterrey experienced a climate of fear and insecurity generated by gang warfare. In response, a group of citizens committed to peace and nonviolence formed a voluntary organisation called Uno Uno Paz—One to One for Peace—aimed at fostering harmony within their neighbourhoods.

Within a year of its formation, Uno Uno Paz underwent a remarkable development when a former drug cartel member joined the organisation. Juan Pablo, known as JP, was not an ordinary recruit: he had been a gang leader with firsthand knowledge of cartel operations and personal relationships with many active gang members. Through his own experience, JP recognised that poverty and unemployment were the principal forces driving young people into gangs, despite their often-unacknowledged desire to leave that life and reintegrate into society.

Motivated by this understanding, JP and several colleagues founded another organisation, Nacido Para Triunfar – born to succeed - (NPT), to work directly with vulnerable youth and support their disengagement from gang life. The author was invited to conduct workshops for NPT on Gandhian nonviolence and to train volunteers in nonviolent action. The programme was enthusiastically received, and participants demonstrated strong commitment to its principles.

Within a year, NPT volunteers succeeded in persuading and supporting nearly five hundred young men and women who had previously belonged to twelve rival gangs. To publicly affirm this transformation, NPT organised a large ceremony in which former gang members signed a *Peace Pledge*. The author attended as a witness and was honoured with the title *Padrino,* signifying a role as mentor and patron. The event brought together former gang members, their families, and observers from federal, state, and municipal authorities. Former rivals who had once fought violently were now celebrating together through song and dance.

During the gathering, a stranger quietly asked JP to step outside. He returned after nearly half an hour, and the event concluded peacefully. Only later, did JP explain what had occurred. The regional leader of the dominant drug cartel had arrived, heavily armed, intending to disperse the gathering. According to cartel rules, no public assembly was permitted without prior approval, and JP was confronted at gunpoint for failing to seek permission.

Rather than responding with fear or defiance, JP apologised calmly and respectfully, explaining that the gathering was peaceful and would immediately disperse if approval were denied. He gently appealed for permission to continue. After a tense pause, the cartel leader unexpectedly granted approval and ordered his men to withdraw. As they were leaving, JP softly asked him why he had allowed the programme to continue despite the serious violation of his code. The leader replied:

"If I had been fortunate enough to meet someone like you ten years ago, I would not have become a confirmed criminal."

With that, he said goodbye and departed.

This is the alchemy of nonviolent communication. Through a mutual flow of compassion, the gang leader momentarily reconnected with his own humanity - a compassionate self from which he had long been alienated. To many, this story may sound as incredible as a miracle. Yet, it may be worth remembering that the essence of a miracle is precisely this: it occurs when it is least expected.

The second anecdote occurred in 2010, also in a suburb of the city of Monterrey. Two heavily armed gangs were engaged in a gunfight in front of a primary school. When one group began to lose ground, its members took refuge inside the school building, while the opposing gang positioned itself to launch an attack. The lives of nearly one hundred children were placed in imminent danger.

Author with Paula Paloma

Author with John Paul, leader of NPT

The incident was reported to the Municipal Officer in charge of internal security, a courageous woman named Paula Paloma. Without hesitation, she rushed to the scene. As she advanced to meet the gang leader, she was confronted at gunpoint by a police officer who was colluding with the gang. He threatened to shoot her if she took another step. Remaining calm and composed, Paula gently told him that only God—not he—had power over her life, and that only God could take it. She also reminded him that he was her brother, entrusted with the duty to protect her, not to kill her.

Her poise, courage, and moral clarity profoundly affected the officer. Disarmed not by force but by her words and presence, he lowered his weapon, shared a cup of coffee with her, and allowed her to proceed to meet the gang leader. She appealed to him to spare the lives of the innocent children. The gang withdrew, and the children were saved.

Here we witness the same alchemy, the same miracle. Such is the transformative power of nonviolent and compassionate communication. All that is required is to be trained in it—and, above all, to rediscover our own capacity for compassion and to act without fear.

Prof MP Mathai is Academic Dean, LIPI, Kochi and Adjunct Professor, Gujrat Vidyapith.

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Francesca Flosi / Milroy Fernando
flosi.f@fondazionemagis.org / roysj1@gmail.com

LANGUAGE AND VIOLENCE
THE POWER OF WORDS TO HARM, HEAL, OR TRANSFORM
A SRI LANKAN REFLECTION

The island's long struggle with ethnic conflict, political polarisation, and social inequality has shown repeatedly that words can do what weapons do: divide, destroy, and dehumanise. **Yet it has also shown that words can stitch together broken trust, speak dignity back into lives erased by violence, and invite communities into a deeper humanity.**

In Sri Lanka—a land of breathtaking beauty and painful histories—language has never been a neutral tool. It has been a weapon, a shield, a wound, and, at its best, a bridge. The island's long struggle with ethnic conflict, political polarisation, and social inequality has shown repeatedly that words can do what weapons do: divide, destroy, and dehumanise. Yet, it has also shown that words can stitch together broken trust, speak dignity back into lives erased by violence, and invite communities into a deeper humanity.

For decades, Sri Lanka's conflicts were narrated not only through bombs, bullets, or rebellions but also through powerful vocabularies of suspicion and exclusion. The rhetoric of "us versus them," so familiar in global conflicts, appeared here in local forms—Sinhala versus Tamil, North versus South, soldier versus insurgent, patriot versus traitor. These binaries did not arise suddenly. They were cultivated slowly through political speeches, media narratives, school textbooks, and everyday conversations.

The Power to Wound

Language in Sri Lanka has long carried the weight of ideological battles. The Sinhala Only Act of 1956 was not merely a linguistic policy but a narrative declaration - one that defined linguistic identity as the gateway to political belonging. For Tamils, it signalled the erasure of their language and dignity. For Sinhala speakers, it symbolised cultural restoration. Either way, language became not a shared medium of coexistence but a symbol of power and grievance.

During the civil war, terms like "terrorist," "traitor," "enemy," and "extremist" permeated public discourse. These words reshaped the imagination of a nation. Communities were painted with broad strokes of fear. Empathy became rare. Suspicion became normal. As Marshall Rosenberg observed, "Violence is the tragic expression of unmet needs" - yet, in Sri Lanka, dominant narratives obscured those unmet needs, portraying entire communities as existential threats rather than as human beings carrying fear, memory, and aspiration.

Even today, hate speech and social media misinformation are potent forces. Muslims are labelled as "invaders," Christians as "converters," plantation workers as "outsiders." Repeated and amplified, these words narrow our moral imagination. They prepare society to tolerate discrimination long before violence erupts. Conflict always begins in language.

The Silence That Harms

Just as harmful as violent speech is the silence that erases suffering. In Sri Lanka, the perspectives of victims - families of the disappeared, war widows, plantation communities, displaced fishermen, impoverished farmers—rarely penetrate national dialogue. Governments speak in the vocabulary of security, political elites in the language of ethnic mobilisation, and media houses often echo dominant narratives.

Silence becomes complicity when it allows harm to continue unchallenged. Desmond Tutu's warning - "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor" - resonates painfully here. When stories of suffering are ignored or dismissed, violence becomes invisible, and its victims become unseen.

The Power to Heal

Yet Sri Lanka offers countless moments where language served as a balm rather than a blade. Following the 2025 Cyclone -Ditwa, communities crossed ethnic boundaries with compassion that softened decades of hostility. After the civil war, numerous reconciliation initiatives - led by religious groups, women's collectives, and youth movements - used dialogue circles, storytelling, and theatre to rebuild trust.

Storytelling, especially, has been transformative. In Mullaitivu, Batticaloa, Mannar, Vavuniya, Puttalam, and Hatton, victims gather in safe spaces to share memories - sometimes trembling, sometimes resolute. These narratives restore dignity. Listening to them allows communities, often divided, to confront uncomfortable truths and rediscover humanity in one another.

Artists, poets, filmmakers, and journalists have also challenged dominant narratives, reminding the nation that language can reveal what politics tries to conceal: the human cost of conflict and the fragile hope of reconciliation.

Through leadership training, teacher formation, and digital storytelling projects, Loyola Campus equips a generation to resist racism, challenge misinformation, and become ambassadors of peace in their communities. **These exercises help young people reflect on the power of language, learn to express disagreement constructively, and transform narratives that might otherwise perpetuate prejudice or fear.**

Paths of Education, Dialogue, and Reconciliation

In 2024, we started a project "Paths and practices of education, dialogue and reconciliation in Sri Lanka - EDIRI, funded by AICS (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation), and promoted by Fondazione MAGIS ETS in Italy and The Trustees of the Society of Jesus - Sri Lanka Province, together with the Loyola Campus. We engage young people who are at the margins of the Sri Lankan society by offering a structured educational system which fosters critical thinking, dialogue, and transferable skills.

We seek to equip them to participate in an emerging knowledge-based economy while nurturing their capacity to question dominant narratives, resist dehumanising language, and contribute to social reconciliation. By strengthening local educational capacities and creating inclusive learning communities, we want to affirm education as a form of nonviolent action—one that empowers voices that too often are silenced and supports the construction of a more just, peaceful, and cohesive society.

In recent years, Loyola Campus has emerged as a crucial force in reshaping Sri Lanka's linguistic and relational landscape. Loyola Campuses' Mission – Educate, Empower and Transform - recognizes that peace begins with how people speak, listen, and understand one another.

The campus conducts programmes in Nonviolent Communication, conflict transformation, restorative dialogue, and community storytelling. Participants - youth, teachers, religious leaders, community members - learn how words can escalate tension or invite understanding. They explore how unspoken fears and unmet needs shape aggression and how compassionate language can soften hardened identities.

These workshops are more than lessons; they are encounters. Tamils, Muslims, and Sinhalese, Buddhist monks and Catholic priests, plantation workers and urban youth sit in shared circles of honesty. Through dialogue, they begin dismantling inherited stereotypes and rebuilding trust.

Because religion shapes the identity in Sri Lanka, Loyola Campuses' together with Fondazione MAGIS give special attention to interfaith engagement. Through shared reflection, peace pilgrimages, and collaborative community projects, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim leaders rediscover common ground. Here, language becomes a bridge - clarifying fears, affirming shared values, and strengthening bonds of trust across communities.

Under the broader vision, we play an equally vital role in nurturing social cohesion across the island. With eight Centres in Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Thanamalwila, Boragas and Hatton, Loyola Campus brings together young people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds - often for the first time.

In these classrooms:

- Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim youth learn side-by-side.
- English, IT, and skills training become equalising tools.
- Students participate in dialogue sessions, cultural exchanges, and community projects.
- Teachers integrate restorative language and peace education into everyday lessons.

A Loyola classroom becomes a microcosm of the Sri Lanka we hope to build - one where difference is not a threat, but a shared resource.

Across Sri Lanka, small movements of linguistic transformation are taking root. Interfaith circles speak a language of common humanity. **Youth groups create videos that challenge stereotypes. Teachers foster restorative classrooms. Community radio stations amplify marginalised voices.**

Through leadership training, teacher formation, and digital storytelling projects, Loyola Campus equips a generation to resist racism, challenge misinformation, and become ambassadors of peace in their communities. These exercises help young people reflect on the power of language, learn to express disagreement constructively, and transform narratives that might otherwise perpetuate prejudice or fear. As Pope Francis observed, "we must learn the lexicon of peace and not become accustomed to the vocabulary of war," highlighting how the words we choose influence the world we create.

By combining ethical education with practical skill-building, Loyola Campus together with Fondazione MAGIS ETS, nurtures both the personal growth of participants and their capacity to contribute to social reconciliation and inclusive communities.

The Power to Transform

If hate speech can mobilise mobs, then compassionate speech can mobilise communities. If propaganda can sow division, then education can cultivate critical thinking. If political rhetoric creates enemies, then dialogue can create neighbours.

Across Sri Lanka, small movements of linguistic transformation are taking root. Interfaith circles speak a language of common humanity. Youth groups create videos that challenge stereotypes. Teachers foster restorative classrooms. Community radio stations amplify marginalised voices.

Transformation is cumulative—built word by word, story by story.

A Call to Responsibility

Sri Lanka's future depends on the narratives we choose to nurture. Will we repeat the stories of fear and division, or will we craft new vocabularies of dignity and truth? Will our public language remain hostage to political agendas, or will we create spaces where humane speech can flourish?

Narayan Desai reminds us, "Words are not weapons, but they can wound more deeply than knives." In Sri Lanka - a land that knows wounds and resilience - our responsibility is clear: to ensure our words heal more deeply than they harm.

Through the sustained efforts of educators, peacebuilders, storytellers, communities, and institutions like Loyola Campus, a new narrative is already being written—one of dignity, dialogue, and reconciliation.

Francesca Flosi is from Fondazione MAGIS ETS - Project Manager of AID 12970/01/7 EDIRI project.

MilRoy Fernando is the Country Director of Loyola Campus in Sri Lanka.

Vijay A. D'Souza
vijayalwin@gmail.com

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LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT AND LINGUISTIC VIOLENCE

THE STORY OF HRUSSO AKA LANGUAGE REVIVAL

Language has been weaponised as an instrument of violence throughout history. For example, fascist ideologies in the past and at present have used carefully manufactured labels such as "cockroaches" (Rwanda), "termites", "rice bags" and "urban naxals" (India), to dehumanise minority groups and activists. Armed with such disdainful labels, demagogue strongman leaders further harness the power of language to whip up resentment and hatred that culminate in acts of physical violence.

Apart from the use of language as a tool of violence, there is another form of language-related violence where people are victimised because of languages they speak. This process is known as language marginalisation which often leads to "linguicide", that is, killing of a language, to use the term popularised by the linguist Tove Skutnabb-Kangas. Language marginalisation and linguicide occur when speakers of one language deliberately suppress the language of another. This is done through subtle and overt means such as denigration, ridicule, and exclusion from governmental, educational and socioeconomic domains.

Language marginalisation is actively perpetrated in many schools today in North East India, when children's mother tongues are banned and children are punished and shamed for speaking them, ostensibly to promote learning of more powerful languages such as English. This practice is known to create negative attitudes amongst children about their own languages and identities. It is also pedagogically harmful as it dismantles the overall linguistic architecture in children's brains and stunts their cognitive development.

Examples of linguicide are found throughout the world in acts of violence perpetrated against indigenous languages. For example, in the American and Canadian and Australian residential schools in the 19th and 20th centuries, indigenous languages were often brutally suppressed through deliberate State policies and by using physical, mental and emotional violence, annihilating most indigenous languages and severely traumatising the children who spoke them.

Language marginalisation and linguicide occur when speakers of one language deliberately suppress the language of another. **This is done through subtle and overt means such as denigration, ridicule, and exclusion from governmental, educational and socioeconomic domains.**

Such acts of exclusion, denigration and punishment are forms of linguistic violence, that is, language-based violence perpetrated upon speakers of marginalised languages. This violence may be subtler and lack the immediacy of a physical blow, but its effects are no less devastating: the erosion of identity, the severing of intergenerational bonds, the loss of entire worldviews encoded in grammar and vocabulary.

In Northeast India, a region of extraordinary linguistic diversity, this violence unfolds every day in classrooms, government offices, and even within families, as economic pressure and social stigma push communities to abandon their mother tongues. Northeast India is one of the most linguistically diverse places in the world, being home to well over 200 languages.

However, this language diversity is under severe threat as the majority of these languages are now endangered to various degrees. One such language is Hrusso Aka.

When Language Marginalisation is Internalised

The Hrusso Aka people of West Kameng district in Arunachal Pradesh speak a language of remarkable beauty and complexity. Words that sound as though many consonants are stacked together, like tkhrñ (ginger, written as tükrüñ) and khtskrhñ (a neighbouring clan, written as kütsükrüñ) showcase its intricate phonetic structure. The language is also known for its beautiful rhythm, evident when elders spontaneously speak in poetic metres during formal gatherings.

My first visit to the Hrusso Aka land was in 1999, to learn Aka as part of the Kohima Jesuit Region's policy that every Jesuit scholastic learn a local language. I encountered something more challenging than the unwritten script or complex grammar: widespread resignation amongst the speakers themselves. "What is the use of teaching our language to the children? It won't earn them a living," parents told me repeatedly, choosing to teach their children Hindi instead. This is what linguistic violence looks like from within, when a community internalises the message that their language is worthless, when economic pressure transforms a source of pride into a liability.

Language Preservation as Peacebuilding

The urgency of the situation led me to develop a writing system for Hrusso Aka. When the first-ever printed book in the language was published in May 1999, the excitement was palpable. People saw this as a new hope for their language. What began as a collaboration between myself and Apang Rumo, the first catechist of Palizi village church, grew into the Hrusso Literature Team of fifteen members, formally recognised by the Hrusso Aka apex council in 2017. The Team was then renamed as the Aka Language Academy in 2021 and now functions as the official language and literature wing of the Aka tribe.

This work is now carried forward through the North Eastern Indian Languages & Culture (NEILAC), which was founded as the Golden Jubilee initiative of the Kohima Jesuit Region in 2020. NEILAC aims to extend the Hrusso Aka model to other endangered languages across the region. NEILAC's approach is rooted in a fundamental conviction: language preservation is peacebuilding. When communities reclaim linguistic dignity, they heal the violence of erasure and assert their right to exist on their own terms.

For the Aka, this has meant creating several works of early literature like elementary textbooks such as Ako Na Kako (Little children's book, 2005, 2022, 2023), the hymnal Nuĝu Dziiwsa (beautiful songs) with 200 songs now used across churches (reprinted in 2024), children's storybooks, and alphabet charts with illustrations by local artists. We've developed digital tools, a talking dictionary app, a language-promotion website, and a mobile keyboard with AI-supported predictive texting.

Documentation through the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme, SOAS, London (2015) has preserved 100 hours of recordings now archived at the well-known and open-access Endangered Language Archive (ELAR) based in Germany ensuring future generations have access to their linguistic heritage.

The transformation has been profound. Elders who had resigned themselves to their language's disappearance now see children learning to read and write in Hrusso Aka for the first time in history. A recent language vitality survey showed us that the Hrusso Aka language has been able to resist the onslaught of Hindi and is making a comeback, with as much as 85% language retention in certain areas. This is a much higher rate of retention than most languages in Arunachal Pradesh.

Toward Linguistic Justice

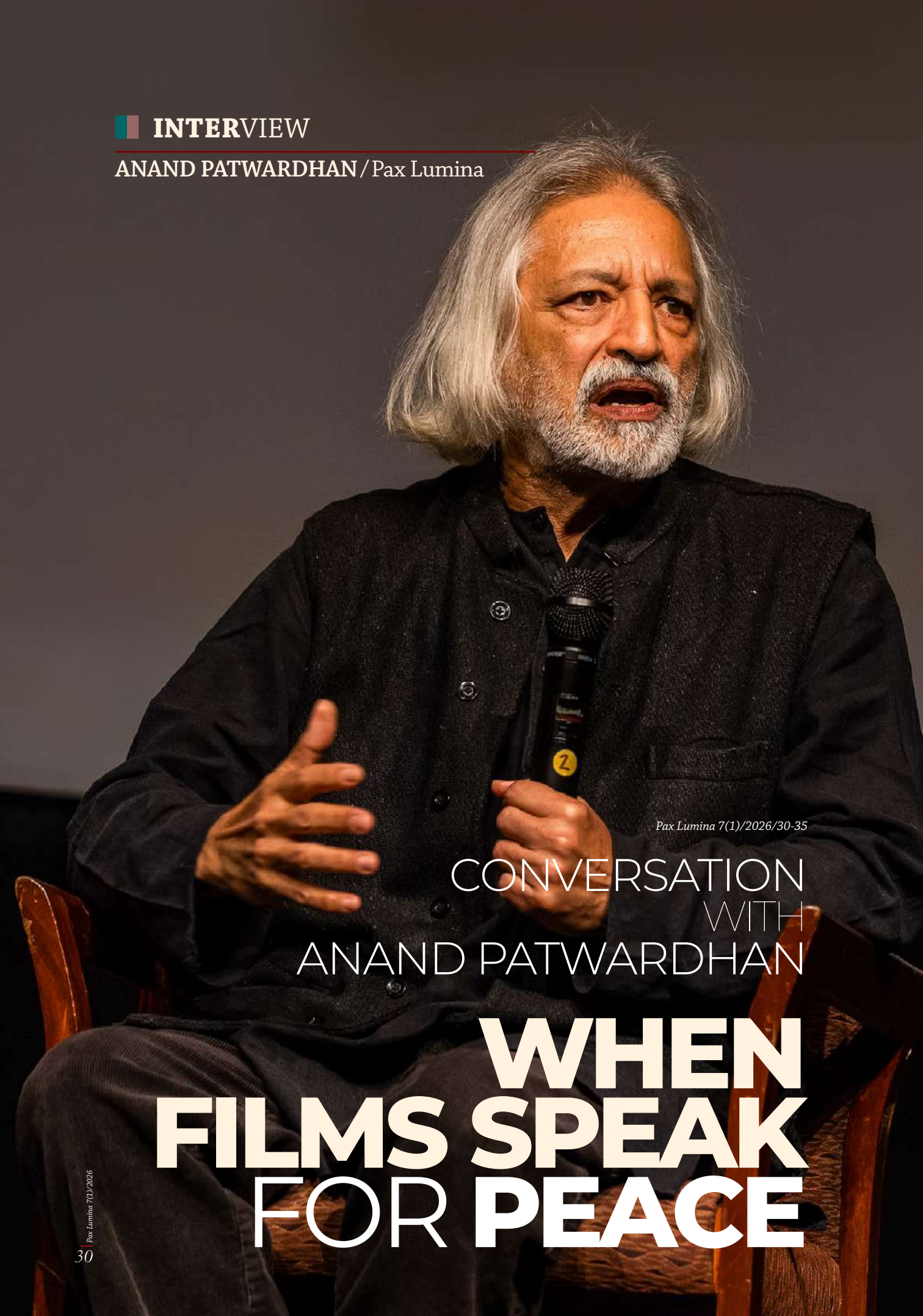
Language endangerment is not inevitable; it results from choices: policy choices, economic structures, social attitudes which can be challenged and changed. True linguistic justice requires that endangered languages have functional domains: in schools, media, government services, and digital spaces. It demands policy frameworks recognising linguistic rights as human rights and educational institutions actively supporting mother tongue-based education. Schools and colleges can become spaces where linguistic diversity is celebrated, where indigenous languages are taught and valued, where dominant language privilege is critically examined.

Language is how we know ourselves, relate to the world, and pass wisdom across generations.
When we defend linguistic diversity, we defend the right of all peoples to dignity, self-determination, and peace. In the voices of Hrusso Aka children speaking their ancestral tongue, we can now hear not nostalgia but hope.

Hrusso Aka still remains endangered; its future is still uncertain. But it is no longer disappearing in silence and there is hope for its revival. NEILAC continues this work with other languages across Northeast India, each revival a small act of peace and affirmation of identity in a region too familiar with violence. Language is how we know ourselves, relate to the world, and pass wisdom across generations. When we defend linguistic diversity, we defend the right of all peoples to dignity, self-determination, and peace. In the voices of Hrusso Aka children speaking their ancestral tongue, we can now hear not nostalgia but hope.

Vijay A. D'Souza is a Jesuit, Founding Director of NEILAC (www.neilac.org.in) and an Associate Member of Faculty of Linguistics, University of Oxford.

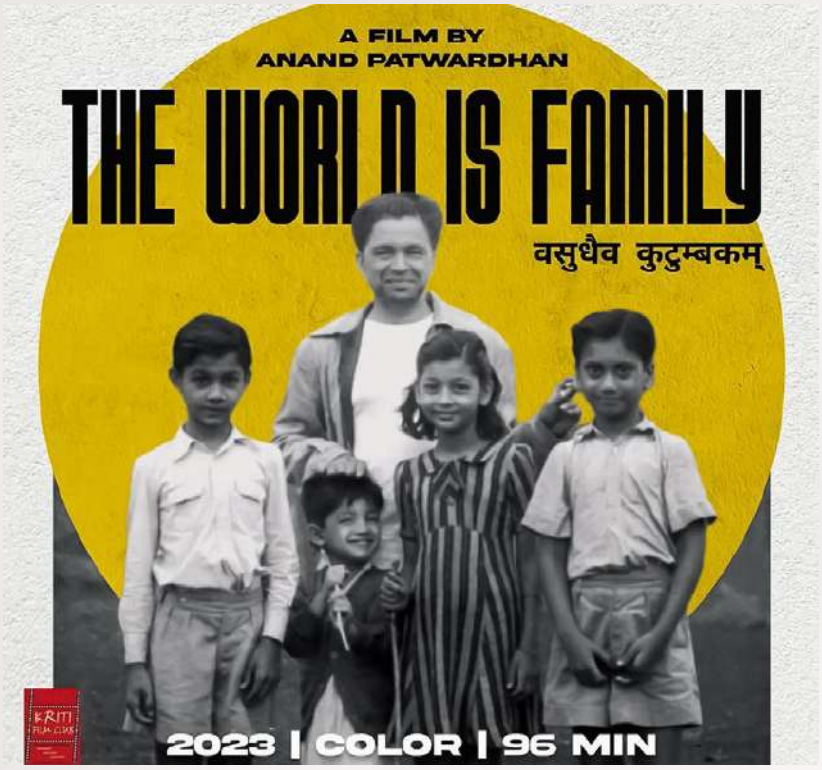
ANAND PATWARDHAN / Pax Lumina



Pax Lumina 7(1)/2026/30-35

CONVERSATION WITH ANAND PATWARDHAN

WHEN FILMS SPEAK FOR PEACE



Anand Patwardhan is one of India's most distinguished documentary filmmakers, widely known for his lifelong engagement with issues of democracy, social justice, and human rights. Active since the early 1970s, Patwardhan has consistently used cinema as a tool of critical inquiry, documenting the lives, struggles, and voices of marginalised communities while interrogating dominant political and cultural narratives.

Patwardhan brings both intellectual depth and grassroots sensitivity to his work. His documentaries address themes including caste oppression, communalism, displacement, militarism, and the shrinking spaces for dissent in contemporary India. Many of these films have faced censorship and legal hurdles, underscoring the discomfort they create by speaking truth to power.

Patwardhan's filmmaking is marked by patience, ethical engagement, and a deep faith in democratic dialogue. Rather than offering easy conclusions, his films invite viewers to confront uncomfortable realities and reflect on the moral foundations of society. Over the decades, his work has received national and international recognition, and it continues to serve as an important archive of people's movements and resistance in India.

1 You were actively involved in the Anti–Vietnam War movement and the Bihar Movement during your youth. In what ways did these early political engagements shape your personality and your evolving socio-political consciousness?

I came from a family that had fought for India's freedom, but it was becoming a part of the anti-Vietnam war movement as a student on scholarship in USA in 1970-72, that awoke my political consciousness. After returning to India in 1972 I worked in a Madhya Pradesh village as a volunteer in a rural development project for two years and then went to Bihar to join a non-violent, anti-corruption mass movement. That is how I ended up making my first film.

2 Your first film, *Waves of Revolution,* was made during the repressive years of the Emergency. Today it stands as a reminder of a generation that fought for democratic rights. What challenges did you face while making this film, and how do you view its relevance in the current political climate of India?

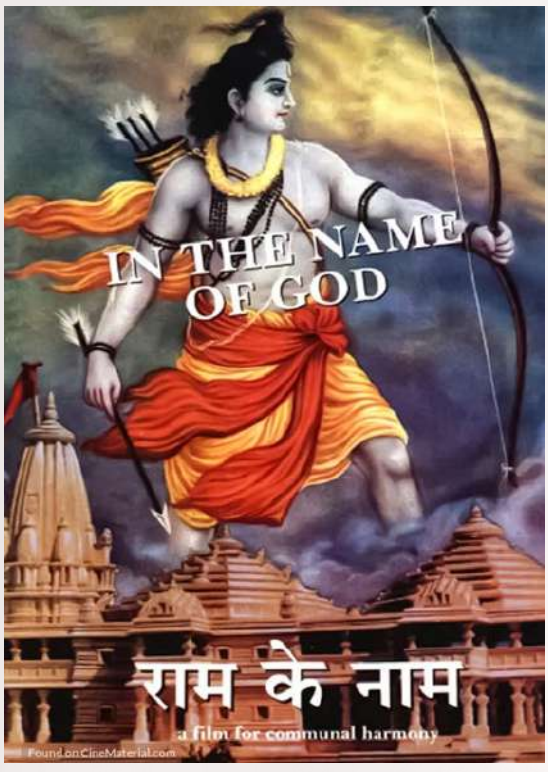
At the time the JP Narayan-led struggle held out a lot of hope for building a grassroots democracy. But though the main inspiration was Gandhian Socialist, the RSS had also been given entry into mainstream political action and this proved to be a fatal mistake. In retrospect I am no longer a blind supporter of the JP movement that eventually led to an Emergency being declared across India. Nor do I remain a die-hard critic of Indira Gandhi. She did impose a draconian Emergency but ultimately in 1977 she allowed fair elections which defeated her. That itself is in stark contrast to today's Modi regime that won't allow fair elections anywhere. Today's Emergency is hidden but even more effective because people have been brainwashed into hatred and the RSS family controls every aspect of our so-called democracy.

JP was not clear-headed enough to see that the RSS was using him to come to power. Meanwhile the USA was also playing its own Cold War game against a Congress government that had opposed US policies during the Bangladesh war, and had come closer to the Soviet Union. Internally the Indian state was bolstering public enterprise, perhaps a last throw of the dice against the onslaught of liberalization and privatisation.

3 India was once celebrated for its religious tolerance and communal harmony, yet several of your films document a different reality. *In the Name of God* captures the rise of religious nationalism and the political mobilization around the Babri Masjid movement, while *Father, Son and Holy War* explores violence, masculinity and the commodification of religion. What compelled you to make these films, and how did ordinary citizens, progressive thinkers, and right-wing groups respond to them?

The liberalization era of the 1980's to the present day has spawned its own religio-political upsurge. The beneficiaries are the super-rich who prefer that the masses fight over religious identity rather than realize the fact of their own oppression. As the 80's unfolded, I could see the shift but did not quite understand the forces behind it. The Cold War was ending with the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union and with it, ideas of socialism and even equality and fraternity were losing ground to "free enterprise" and "market forces". On the ground, instead of battles for economic and social justice, religious identity became a powerful motivator.

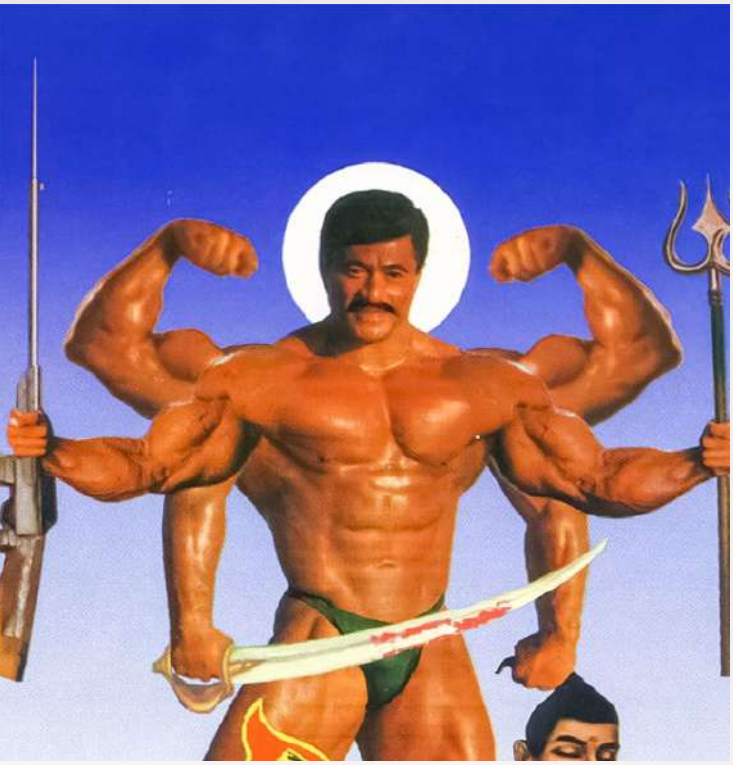
Father, Son and Holy War (1994) was actually shot and edited over a 10 year span. In this period, I went wherever religious upsurges were taking place. **The film explores the relationship between patriarchy and communal violence, examining how masculinity is commodified within religious nationalist discourse.**



As a filmmaker for the next decade, with a sinking heart, I recorded the rise of the religious right, from the Khalistani upsurge in Punjab to the glorification of Sati in Rajasthan and the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.

In the Name of God (1992) was completed a year before the Babri Masjid's demolition. It documents the campaign by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the BJP to destroy a 16th-century mosque that they claimed was built by the Moghul Emperor Babar after he had demolished a temple that marked the exact birthplace of Lord Ram. The truth is that until the 16th century, the Ramayana was largely restricted to Brahmins who knew Sanskrit. It was only after Tulsidas's Hindi version was composed in the 16th century that Ram became a popular god for the masses. Tulsidas is a contemporary of Babar so it is unlikely that there were Ram temples prior to this period. In fact in 1990 we found scores of Ram temples in Ayodhya, each claiming that Ram was born right there - for the simple reason that once such a claim becomes accepted, pilgrims and profits are assured. But such is the power of literature and legend that within a few hundred years a work of poetry and fiction had turned into historic and architectural fact, of course with immense help from those who could make political and financial gains.

We filmed the events of October 1990 that culminated in the first attack on the mosque and its gory aftermath. We interviewed the head priest of the Ram temple, Pujari Laldas, an inclusive Hindu, who was anguished by the assault and the carnage. The film was completed in early 1992, but in December that year there was a second assault that finally demolished the mosque leading to violence and death across the subcontinent. A few months later, Pujari Laldas, the inclusive priest, was murdered. The final film has an epilogue about both these events.



Father, Son and Holy War (1994) was actually shot and edited over a 10 year span. In this period, I went wherever religious upsurges were taking place. The film explores the relationship between patriarchy and communal violence, examining how masculinity is commodified within religious nationalist discourse. **Part One Trial by Fire** speaks about how patriarchy treats women, both Hindu, examining the Sati of Roop Kanwar and Muslim, examining the ramifications of divorce. **Part Two Hero Pharmacy** looks at the effect of patriarchy on men, looking at machismo in popular culture as well as the mindset of politicians. Despite winning two National Awards, Doordarshan (DD) rejected the film for telecast on "law and order" grounds, triggering a legal battle that took 10 years and ended with the Supreme Court ordering Doordarshan to telecast the film without a single cut.

4 As someone who has consistently advocated for communal harmony, how do you view the current religious climate in India? How might the growing insecurity among minority communities and the rising friction between majority and minority religions reshape the very idea of India?

There is poison in the air, not just the everyday poison of the cement particulate matter from non-stop construction but also the majoritarian poison of religious hatred. We who believe in secularism and egalitarian politics are under siege. But we will neither give up nor be vanquished.

5 Your documentaries often make those in power uncomfortable, and you have had to approach the courts more than once just to secure the right to screen your films. How far do you think the Indian Censor Board today supports—or restricts—freedom of expression?

The RSS family has been producing lawyers and judges for decades. Now they flood the courts. Look at how Umar Khalid's bail was denied despite 5 years in jail without trial, merely on the basis of "hidden" testimony from "hidden" witnesses. Look at how Justice Loya's murder was covered up and SC judges refused a proper inquiry. I think the court option to fight for freedom of expression may be a thing of the past except in some lucky cases which the State machine and the RSS machine overlooks.

6 Your documentary *Jai Bhim* Comrade, which chronicles the lives and struggles of Dalit communities, took 14 years to complete. At a time when there appears to be a political attempt to fold Dalit identities into a dominant religious mainstream, how do you foresee the future of Dalit communities in India?

The future for a rainbow coalition of all those who see themselves as human beings is great. The future for separatist politics is to consciously

The World is Family is both about my own family and about the India our freedom fighters tried to build. **It is also about the world family we should aspire to be - a family that cannot sit back and watch helplessly as our family members in Gaza and elsewhere, suffer a televised genocide.**

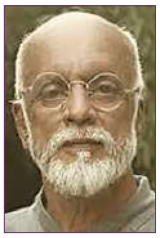
or unconsciously play into the hands of the Manuvadicasteists in power who know exactly how to safeguard their caste/class interests by appropriating symbols of their class/caste enemies.

7 Your film *Vivek* (Reason) offers a powerful examination of right-wing extremism and the crackdown on dissent, especially in universities, as part of a broader effort to reshape India along religious lines. How do you interpret the growing trend of citizens having to approach the courts simply to defend their right to free expression and dissent?

Umar Khalid and his colleagues who have spent 5 and 6 years in jail without trial for the "crime" of advocating a non-violent protest against a Citizenship Bill that turned Muslims into second class citizens, are symbols of the fight for justice in present day India. They did not "approach" court, except to seek bail after the State threw them into prison.They are in jail because they are Muslims and the State has already created a public mindset that Muslims are terrorists.

8 We are living in an era in which Indian history is being rewritten and collective memory has become far more politically charged than nostalgic. Beyond your personal reflections, what does your film *VasudhaivaKutumbakam* seek to convey to India—and to the world—about this moment?

The World is Family is both about my own family and about the India our freedom fighters tried to build. It is also about the world family we should aspire to be - a family that cannot sit back and watch helplessly as our family members in Gaza and elsewhere, suffer a televised genocide.



K P Shankaran
shankaran_kp@yahoo.com

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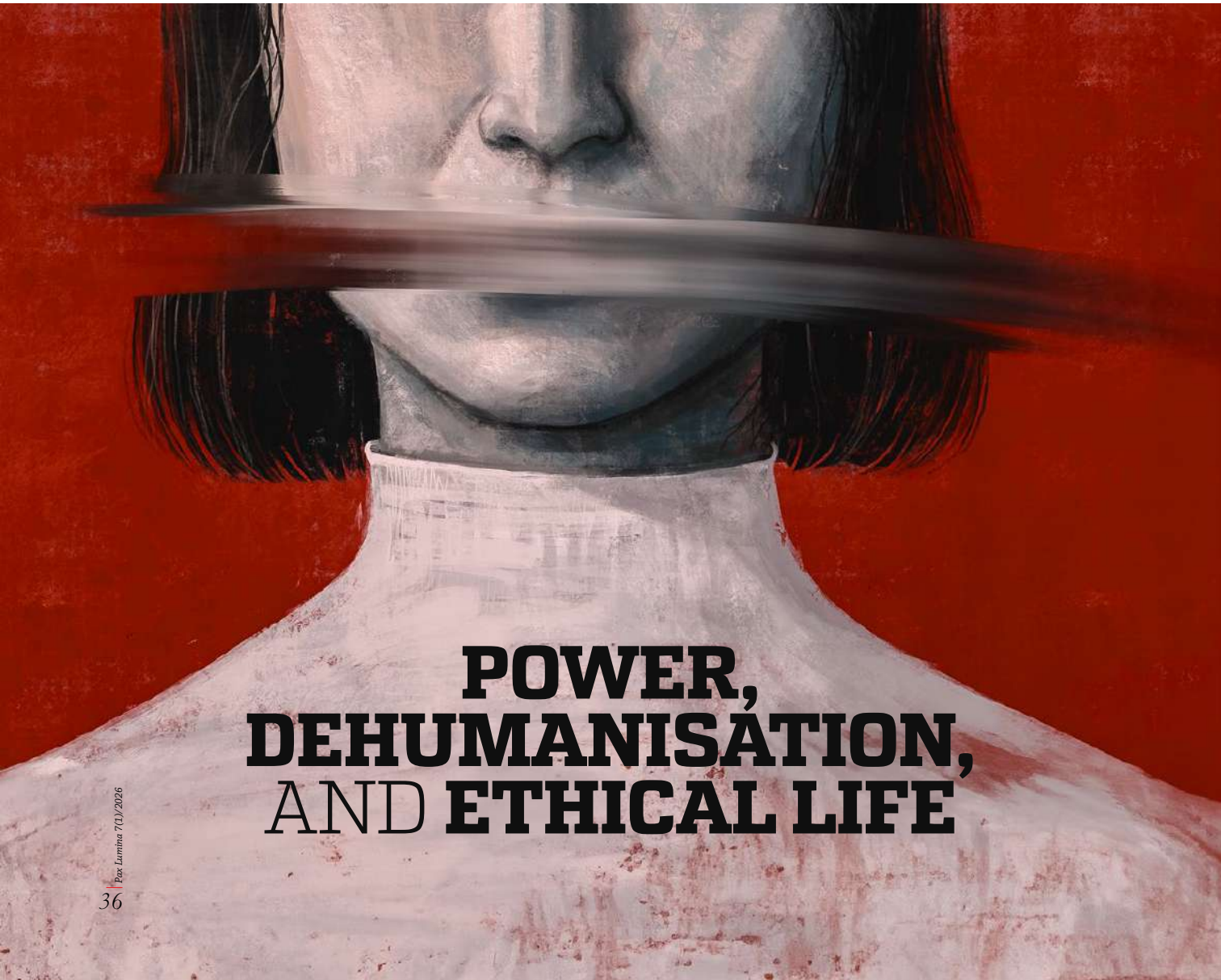
WHEN LANGUAGE HARMS



POWER, DEHUMANISATION, AND ETHICAL LIFE

We in India know very well that large-scale physical violence is typically preceded by linguistic practices that dehumanise the target population. **Dehumanisation operates initially by categorising victims in ways that simplify their moral worth, often by linking them with something commonly perceived as cheap, impure, or objectionable. Language is used in such a way that physical assault comes to appear less objectionable, even justified.**

Recently, the American president Trump described Somali Americans as "garbage." The election speeches of the Prime Minister of India are often saturated with abusive descriptions of Muslim citizens; he repeatedly taunts them by suggesting that they are Pakistanis and should go to Pakistan. This is how hate speech functions in both the international and national arena. Figures like Trump and Modi employ words to harm individuals and thus encourage their supporters to disrespect the dignity and communal unity of the groups they target. This type of violence does not produce visible scars but it can be persistent and profoundly unsettling. These verbal attacks erode the feeling of safety that a nation promises to its people through its constitution.

What does this behaviour of a president and a prime minister show? It shows that language is structured by relations of power that determine who can speak and who must listen. We in India know very well that large-scale physical violence is typically preceded by linguistic practices that dehumanise the target population. Dehumanisation operates initially by categorising victims in ways that simplify their moral worth, often by linking them with something commonly perceived as cheap, impure, or objectionable. Language is used in such a way that physical assault comes to appear less objectionable, even justified.

The absence of language also serves as a means to threaten and leave someone in a state of confusion. When someone deliberately chooses not to hear a person describing the harm done to her that disregard unquestionably causes pain and intensifies the victim's vulnerability. Denying the recognition of harm is, in itself an act perpetrated against the victim.

Language also has the capacity to resist violence. It allows the possibility of re-describing situations in ways that can turn the tables on the oppressor. We have seen this phenomenon in India. Consider the Dalit population, which effectively rendered the oppressor's vocabulary unusable, thereby releasing themselves from the shackles of servitude.

While language often functions as a prelude to violence and is deeply intertwined with it, it can also, as seen in the case of the Dalits, be effectively used to re-describe social reality in a way that liberates the oppressed from the grip of oppressive conditions.

Vocabularies that hurt, insult, and provoke physical harm are far more prevalent than vocabularies of peace, compassion, and love. Why have the Buddha, Jesus, and Gandhi, as

far as the ethics-led life is concerned, failed to attract imitators, while figures like Trump and Modi are repeatedly resurrected? My suggestion is that human beings are more inclined to lead a metaphysics-led life than an ethics- led life. Human life seems to require something stabilising. Metaphysical ideas—such as belief in supernatural and eternal entities—provide this stability for the general populace. An ethics-led life can also provide stability, but unlike metaphysical belief, it must be practised to yield its benefits.

Belief in God and the mechanical performance of prescribed rituals are relatively easy. An ethics-led life, however, demands far more. Consider the idea of loving one's neighbour: it requires a deep attitudinal change, manifested in one's behaviour through a constant willingness to extend help to anyone in need, irrespective of who that person is. Such behaviour does not come naturally; it must be cultivated through habituation.

This challenge is highlighted in the story where Jesus tells the rich man that despite meeting every other conditions of good life he must relinquish his riches to follow Him and gain entry, into the Kingdom of God. To follow Jesus means living a life guided by ethics. When the rich man departs disappointed Jesus comments that it is more likely for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God. This clearly demonstrates that the life promoted by Jesus—one guided by ethics—is very challenging to follow.

In a similar way, one may treat "Nirvana" as a particular mental state to be achieved through meditation or the practice of Vipassanā, instead of attending to what the Buddha actually demanded: a reduction of self-preoccupation. The Buddha held that this is possible only through an ethical life grounded in the practice of satya, ahiṃsā, aparigraha, and brahmacarya. Anyone who reads the New Testament carefully will see that Jesus, too, was a practitioner of these same virtues. The story of the rich man makes it clear that such a life is hard to live.

Gandhi's life offers another compelling example. Gandhi's reading of the Gītā is particularly significant. In the introduction to his translation and commentary on the Gītā, Gandhi critiques the text's valorisation of violence. The language of the Gītā, where war is glorified, was, according to Gandhi, ethically problematic, and hence the text must be read with this awareness. This shows that an ethics- led life is necessarily reflective: everything has to be viewed, as in Gandhi's case, through the lenses of satya and ahiṃsā. Thus, as with the Buddha and Jesus, Gandhi insisted that even one's thought ought to be guided by ethical virtues.

Thus, in human life, ethics often plays only a secondary role, and the language we use reflects and reinforces this tendency, privileging metaphysical comfort. Power-driven speech comes to rule over the difficult, demanding discipline of ethical transformation. In conclusion, it can be said without hesitation that the relationship between language and violence is not an accidental phenomenon. Language itself is structured by the hierarchical relationships that exist in all modern human societies. Language also shapes the horizons within which violence becomes thinkable, justifiable, or invisible. To attend to language is, therefore, to attend to the ethical as well as the hierarchical conditions of social life.

K.P. Shankaran is former Professor of Philosophy at St. Stephens College, University of Delhi.

Thomas Cattoi
tcattoi@pust.it

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THE ROLE OF THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE IN SHAPING ITALY'S NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Italian language was used only by a small fraction of the population – especially in the larger cities of the Center-North - while the vast majority of the rural peasantry used dialects that were specific to very circumscribed geographical areas. **Traveling twenty or thirty kilometers often meant encountering significant variations in speech that made communication between inhabitants of different regions often impossible.**

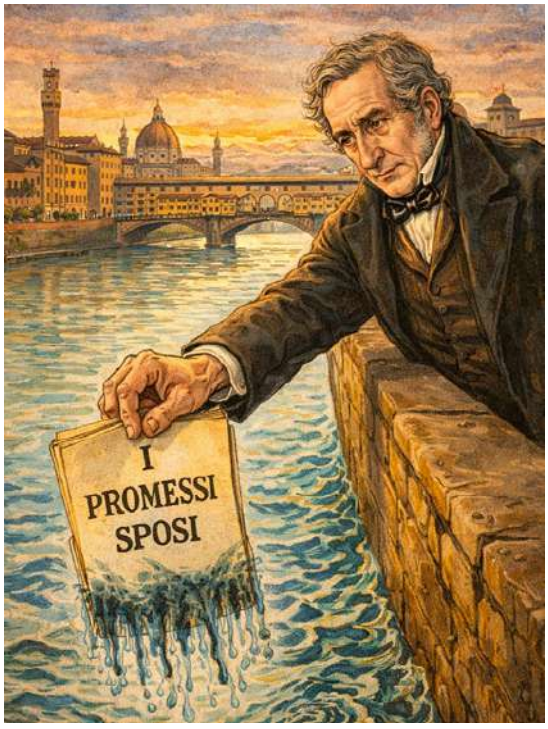
At the 1815 Congress of Vienna, when the great European powers met to decide the future of the continent in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, Prince Metternich (1773-1859), Austria's State Chancellor, famously stated that "Italy was a geographic expression."

At the time, the Italian peninsula was divided into a number of small state units: Lombardy and now Venice and the Veneto region were subject to the rule of the Austrian emperor, Tuscany and Modena were the dominion of secondary branches of the Habsburg family, Parma was assigned to Napoleon's wife Maria Teresia – herself daughter of the Austrian emperor – while central Italy was restored to the rule of the Popes and the so-called Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was governed by the Bourbon kings from Naples. The only semi-democratic state in the peninsula was the Kingdom of Sardinia, ruled by the House of Savoy from their Northern capital in Turin.

This fragmented political landscape was mirrored by a highly differentiated cultural and linguistic situation. Literacy rates varied enormously from region to region, but were no higher than 30% in the North, while in parts of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies they were no higher than 10%.

The Italian language was used only by a small fraction of the population – especially in the larger cities of the Center-North - while the vast majority of the rural peasantry used dialects that were specific to very circumscribed geographical areas. Traveling twenty or thirty kilometers often meant encountering significant variations in speech that made communication between inhabitants of different regions often impossible.

Between 1859 and 1870, Italy's political landscape changed drastically – the kingdom of Italy was established in 1861 under the rule of the House of Savoy, its capital moved from Turin to Florence, and finally to Rome. While the Italian speaking cities of Trento and Trieste remained under Austrian rule until 1918, the contours of the modern Italian nation were established by the 1870s. Yet, this new country faced enormous challenges – first of all, the fact that the culture and language of its population had been shaped by centuries of allegiance to local centers of power.



Alessandro Manzoni standing by the Arno River in Florence

Most Italians continued to identify more readily with their city and region than with a State that was perceived as abstract, bureaucratic and distant. In addition, most people simply could not speak Italian at all- a language that already had six centuries of literary history, from the Sicilian poets of the high Middle Ages to Dante to the great literary efflorescence of the Renaissance, had always remained the vehicle of communication of an elite. Massimo d'Azeglio (1798-1866), a prime minister of the kingdom of Sardinia, famously stated that "Italy has been created, but we must now create the Italian people."

In 1859, the government in Turin had passed the so-called Casati law, which mandated two years of compulsory education for all children. In 1861 this was extended to the whole kingdom of Italy, and in 1877 the two years became four. The goal was to teach everyone – boys and girls – the rudiments of Italian, reading and writing.

The implementation of this law, however, proved extremely difficult, as the establishment of primary schools was the duty of local municipal authorities, many of which lacked the necessary funding and personnel. In addition, many families were extremely reluctant to send children to school, as children were expected to help with work in the fields or to look after cattle.

Thus, especially in the Southern part of the country, extremely high rates of illiteracy persisted until the early twentieth century, and it was only in the 1920s and 1930s that the laws from half a century earlier could be fully implemented. Indeed, if in the 1980s and 1990s one could still meet older people in the 70s and 80s who could not read and write, Italy now can boast a 99% literacy rate.

Another very strong factor in the spread of the Italian language was compulsory military service – between 1861 and 2005, all Italian men had to spend a period – initially two years, eventually reduced to one – in the army, where they were taught the rudiments of military discipline. As young men were routinely – indeed, deliberately – sent to postings that

More than in other European countries, however, Italian regional accents and specificities of speech survive even into the era of global mass media. **Italians can recognize each other's provenance after hearing just a few words – a simple 'good morning' may be enough to identify the region or even the town where the speaker was born.**

were very distant from their region of origin, this forced them to speak 'proper' Italian with their superiors and colleagues, often for the first time since primary school. This writer can attest that, as late as 1997, some young men with little formal education struggled with speaking 'proper' Italian during their military service, as they had hardly ever been outside their native region.

Literature, of course, played a huge role. The writer Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), a native of Lombardy, chose to write his novel The Betrothed using a Tuscan-inflected language as opposed to the dialect of his region – he famously said that he took his novel to Florence to 'rinse it in the river Arno'. Thus, Tuscan came to be regarded as the dialect that was closest to the 'normative' form of the language. Nowadays, Northern Italian tends to be viewed as closer to the standard, in light of the economic and cultural dominance of the Northern part of the country.

More than in other European countries, however, Italian regional accents and specificities of speech survive even into the era of global mass media. Italians can recognize each other's provenance after hearing just a few words – a simple 'good morning' may be enough to identify the region or even the town where the speaker was born. Indeed, immigrants to Italy almost invariably acquire the accent of the region where they settle, and international students who spend long periods of time at Italian universities almost invariably retain the accent of the town where they studied.

Traveling in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, this writer can still remember his experience of meeting Indian priests and nuns who had completed their theological education in Rome and spoke Italian with heavy Roman accents even in remote Indian villages. Linguistic uniformity in Italy has yet to be achieved... and perhaps this is not something to be regretted.

Thomas Cattoi is William and Barbara Moran Chair in Early Christian Theology and Interreligious Relations, Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), Rome, Italy.

Alex Pillen
a.pillen@ucl.ac.uk

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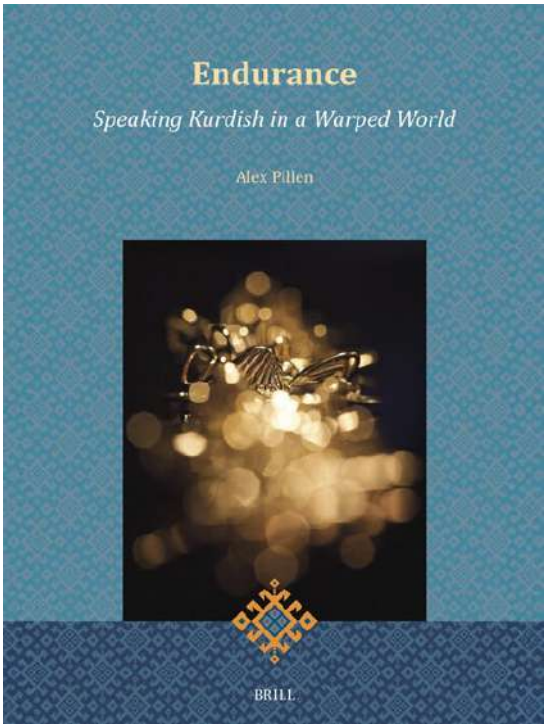
LINGUISTIC FINESSE IN A WARPED WORLD

I have used the work of seven classic scholars to develop this argument about language, violence, and uniqueness. They come from diverse cultural backgrounds and historical periods. **The relevance of each of them to the book's theoretical framework reflects the complexity of the study of language in contexts of violence.**

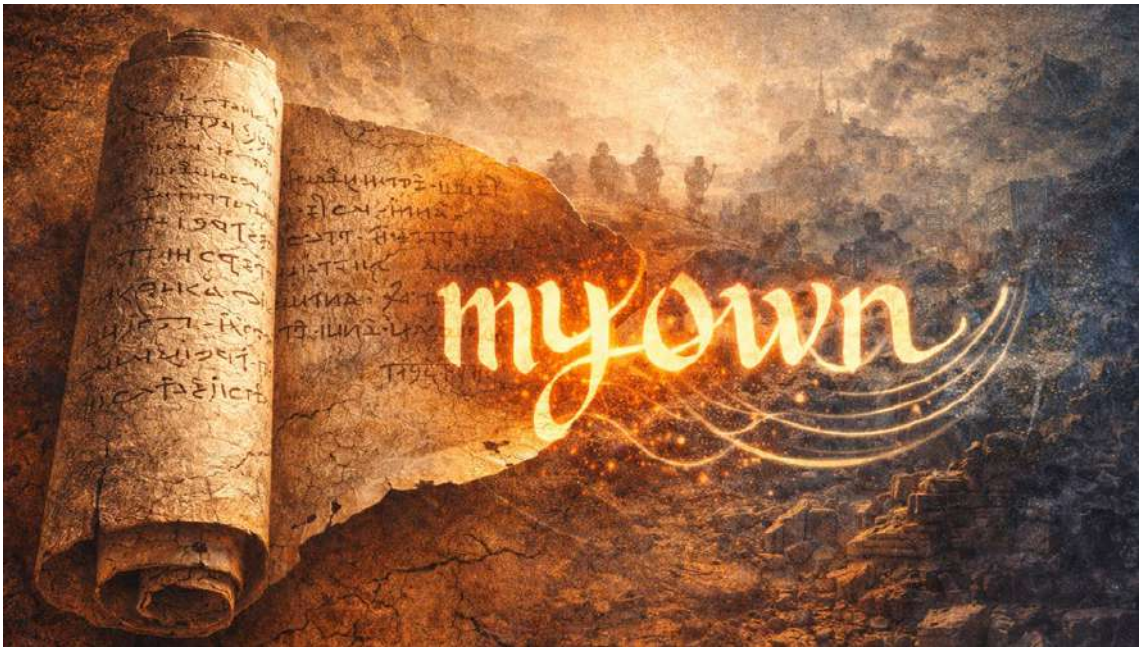
Violence, especially war often strip people of their individuality. Citizens are suddenly removed from a familiar life-world. Many lose their basic human rights and some are reduced to living as a number within the masses of a refugee camp. Others end up in the statistics and debates about migration. Their suffering may result from an attempt to annihilate their culture or unwelcome ethnic identity in the current post-colonial grid of nation states.

My research asks questions about the language resources of communities and peoples that enable them to feel and be unique in the face of totalising loss. This quest for uniqueness is something we all share. What we also have in common is fear of a random geopolitical pair of dice that has become global. As violence spreads in unpredictable ways, this research raises questions for us all. Once we have lost all our possessions and rights, how can a mother tongue and its linguistic finesse become a tool for singularity and survival?

My recent book asks such questions about the Northern Kurdish language spoken amongst refugees in London. The book is called 'Endurance'. I have used the work of seven classic scholars to develop this argument about language, violence, and uniqueness. They come from diverse cultural backgrounds and historical periods. The relevance of each of them to the book's theoretical framework reflects the complexity of the study of language in contexts of violence.



First of all, I relied on the work of the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Julia-Kristeva (1941-), a Bulgarian-French philosopher who translated his work. Other scholars indispensable for this project were the Czech composer and music theorist Leoš Janáček (1854-1918), the French linguist Émile Benveniste (1902-1976), the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), the English literary critic William Empson (1906-1984) and finally the French linguist Josette Rey-Debove (1929-2005). Taken together this scholarship constitutes a deep layer of theory in my book.



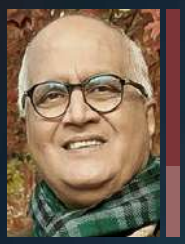
This framework is then complemented by the work of contemporary anthropologists and experts in Kurdish Studies for an in-depth study of spoken Kurdish. In the aftermath of devastating violence, a sense of uniqueness lives within the interstices of Kurdish speech and this is what I tried to unearth.

Two chapters make up the core of the book and the argument. They both are about the pronoun 'my own'. It is important to note that calling something 'my own' is subtly different from saying it is 'mine'. In Northern Kurdish this pronoun is used often and with gusto. People talk about 'my own culture', 'my own history', 'my own country', 'my own mother', 'my own freedom', 'my own Kurdistan', 'my own power', 'my own philosophy', 'my own thought'. The list is endless. I had to read extensively to come across a handle for this linguistic reality. My entrypoint for the analysis of the material about this pronoun I gathered in London came from the theoretical and historical work of Émile Benveniste. This is one example and an element of the deep layer of theory that characterises my book.

The pronoun 'my own' is called a reflexive pronoun by linguists. It was Émile Benveniste who traced the history of this pronoun over millennia in his classic work, the 'Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society' from 1969. The reflexive pronoun 'my own' is a word of great antiquity within the history of Indo-European societies. It can be documented from the time of the earliest Indo-European texts. Furthermore, Benveniste locates its root in an ancestor Indo-European language spoken between 7,800 and 9,800 years ago. This root later gave rise to the Sanskrit word for personal belonging, as well as related terms in the Greek and Latin of classical antiquity.

In Kurdish, a modern Indo-European language, this pronoun expresses both a sense of belonging, as well as singularity and uniqueness. In my book I address its current popularity in the context of political violence, forced displacement and cultural assimilation. Many families have lost their Kurdish names, names replaced by Turkish, Persian or Arabic ones. I ask how people can be and feel genuine without a name they can identify with? Through detailed historical analysis, I argue that it is the experience of namelessness that plays a role in the surge of the use of the pronoun 'my own'. This pronoun and language resource with deep historical roots enables people to express a sense of uniqueness within beleaguered Kurdish cultural spheres.

Alex Pillen is an Associate Professor at University College London, UK. Since 2001 she has been teaching courses in the Department of Anthropology, about language, violence, war, gender, religion and kinship.



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Peter Ronald deSouza
peterdesouza223@gmail.com

WORDS, WORLDS AND GAZA

Gaza has changed all that. It has reversed the gains of 70 years. It has shred the emerging universal compact, begun dismantling the institutions of the international moral order, such as the many multilateral institutions of the United Nations. **The 'so called' civilized world has, under pressure, succumbed to normalizing the Gaza genocide perpetrated by the Israeli military machinery.**

In our wounded world, peace and reconciliation initiatives are sorely needed, even in the face of impossible odds. If they are at all available, they must be tried. Since nobody can foretell when such a possibility of peace will appear, they must be grasped when they do. They will appear. They must. It is a simple law of statistics.

It seems from a study of history that peace can rarely be engineered by good arguments, or moral sermons, or even by appeal to the angels of one's better nature. Peace appears at epiphanic moments in the consciousness of the combatants; a chance encounter, an unplanned experience, a throw of the dice, or in other words a 'Moral luck' according to philosopher Bernard Williams.

Hatred, on the other hand, resists peace. Hatred is a powerful blinder preventing peace from being seen even as a possibility. Hatred permits the person to transgress both personal and social morality. Lynchings, torture, demolitions of homes, sexual assault as an act of war, all take place because of hatred. When hatred reigns, morality, both personal and social, remains in suspended animation. It is there and not there.

For peace, therefore, to be given a chance, for that little doubt to creep into the minds of the combatants, the epiphanic experience must be taken seriously and allowed to grow. How does one thereby prepare oneself, and the other, one's enemy, for those epiphanic moments? This appears to be an intractable question.

Red Lines Not to be Crossed

What would it require for the aggressors to acknowledge that red lines are being crossed, that some of the actions they are taking, or contemplated taking place, overstep the boundaries of what is 'right' and 'good'. These are both notions and boundaries. All have them.

When one sees on Television the use of white phosphorus on innocent children in Gaza, in the first month of the war, one feels that one is watching evil in action. One sees in the actions of the Israeli Defence Forces, what Hannah Arendt called, the 'banality of evil'. Such violence makes one feel that the perpetrators are sans such notions of 'right' and 'good'.

However, this idea of something being 'sans' is a falsity. Everyone, however deeply it may lie buried in the sub-conscious of the aggressor, has notions of 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'evil'. These are fundamental organizing principles required by society for its survival. They constrain the behaviour, especially social behaviour, not just of the powerful but of the maverick, gambler and free rider. It may be in varying degrees but they do.

They are the basis by which institutions are regulated. One wonders why such regulation, which had been growing stronger since the end of the second World War, has, since 2023, become so feeble in many conflict zones across the world, especially in Gaza. We have become soulless in Gaza. Can one find a clue to why this happens in William Golding's "Lord of the Flies"?

Since the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the evolution of human rights law that grew from it, a social compact had been emerging globally that regards acts of violence on children, women, the elderly and the sick as a red line not to be crossed.

A consensus had emerged that the wounded would always have access to medical treatment; that hospitals would be regarded as non-combat zones; that food, water, and medicines would be allowed to reach civilian populations; that banned substances such as chemical weapons (including white phosphorus) would not be used; that starvation would not be employed as a weapon of war; and that human dignity would be respected. We were moving towards embedding in our public life the secular religion of humanism.

The red lines, not to be crossed, grew as a result of a robust global debate within all groups in civil society on the core aspects of a 'just' and 'good' society. The global institutions that were being built, since the holocaust, had one primary purpose. To promote the idea that red lines were not to be crossed. And if they were

One answer lies in the control of the language of public discourse. Such control allows the controller to determine how the controlled will perceive reality. **Control the narrative and you will control the public response. By doing this one can get people to see the world in the way you want them to see it.**

indeed crossed there would be a penalty, both material and moral. 'Never again' became a guiding principle by which the new world was being fashioned.

Violaters of this emerging humanitarian order would be prosecuted in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The world was becoming more moral. Peace was in with a chance. Institutions and mechanisms, however weak - since many of the powerful had not signed up to the legal compact - were emerging those would make the red lines of Humanitarian law more real. Crossing them would have negative consequences. The cost of transgression was getting higher. Observance was growing.

Gaza and the Dismantling of the Moral Order

Gaza has changed all that. It has reversed the gains of 70 years. It has shred the emerging universal compact, begun dismantling the institutions of the international moral order, such as the many multilateral institutions of the United Nations. The 'so called' civilized world has, under pressure, succumbed to normalizing the Gaza genocide perpetrated by the Israeli military machinery. The media empires of the Western world, that dominate discourse, works overtime to produce a feeling of 'business as usual' where speech, as a result, is divorced from social reality.

In the capitals of the Western, Judeo-Christian world, genocide and genuflection to Christian values, surreally cohabit. In spite of the substantial ethical protests, within Israel itself, by people who believe that the cry of 'never again' applies to all people, and that the genocide cannot be done in their name, the horror continues. Barbarism has been normalized. Dead children have become a statistic. Gaza's schools and universities have been bombed into a distant memory.

One of the reasons why there is no universal revulsion - it is producing widespread disgust but such emotions are not universally held - is because the cognitive world of a section of the viewing public has been colonized by a carefully crafted discourse by the Israeli military regime.

Hence, the colonized are unable to recognize the transgressions of their moral order. They are unable to accept that things have gone too far and that the regime must be made to stop and reverse the course. They are unable to recognize that all that Israel has stood for has been undermined by the military actions in Gaza. They are unable to see that the humanitarian guard rails that emerged from the ashes of the holocaust are being violently and viciously breached. Why has the UDHR been abandoned?

One answer lies in the control of the language of public discourse. Such control allows the controller to determine how the controlled will perceive reality. Control the narrative and you will control the public response. By doing this one can get people to see the world in the way you want them to see it. The hard reality - evidence from photos, press reports from journalists on the ground, videos, personal testimonies from victims, doctors in bombed hospitals, UN officials, etc, - will be challenged, even rubbished, and a constituency of believers will emerge. The universal consensus will thereby be undermined.

Control language and you will control the public reaction to the barbarity of war. Language has been weaponized by the Israeli military machine. It has become a deadly weapon in the armory of the Israeli state. They control the language used to discuss the war in Gaza. By taking possession of, and giving prominence to, keywords to describe the situation, they determine how it will be viewed.

Reclaiming Words

There are many words that are central to their scripted narrative that have produced a way of seeing the conflict that has blunted opposition to what they are doing. Let me take just eight words that they have colonized: 'terrorist', 'human animals', 'self-defense', 'human shields', 'ethical army', 'just war', 'unfortunate collateral damage', and 'Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East'. Look at the Oxford dictionary for these worlds and you will see that they apply to the actions of the Israeli army with greater validity than they apply to the Palestinian Hamas. These words have been occupied by the Israeli propaganda machine so effectively that all the evil is seen to belong to one side only.

Yet the evidence from even partisan media organizations, such as the New York Times and BBC, would show the Israeli Military machine's claims to be hollow and false. But they control the meaning keywords have acquired in the public discourse. They dominate language. By doing so they control and determine the way people will see the reality in Gaza, and of Gaza. Seeing it any other way becomes difficult unless there is a counter discourse.

If peace is to be given a chance, the hegemony of meanings given to these words must be undermined. An alternative discourse must be mounted that punctures the discourse of the Israeli military regime. Transgressors of the humanitarian order must not be allowed to impose their view of the world. It is not a 'just war'. It is the equivalent to what Chengiz Khan's army did in its brutality and its disregard of innocent life. Children, and women, and the elderly are not collateral damage of war but are deliberate targets of military action. There is sufficient evidence presented to ICJ and ICC to support this conclusion. There is nothing 'ethical' about it.

Even the late Pope Francis tried to call it out. But 'calling out' carries the risk of being accused of anti-semitism. This is the brahmastra of keywords because such an accusation checkmates all opposition. In fact articles such as this are written because one is pro-semitic, pro-truth, pro-justice and pro-peace. The battle for words must be vigorously fought if we want peace in the world. This is what the 'word made flesh and dwelt amongst us' means. We must prepare for its welcome.

Peter Ronald deSouza is an independent scholar. He was formerly Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, (2007-2013); Professor CSDS (till 2020) Delhi; and Head, Department of Political Science, Goa University (till 2003).

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Kuruvilla Pandikattu
kuru@kuru.in

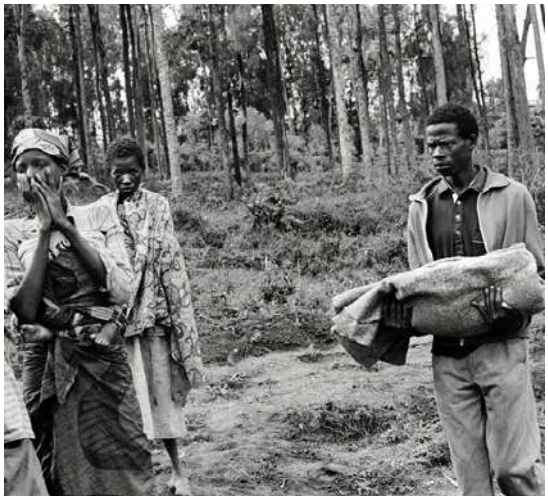
RWANDA POST-GENOCIDE RECONCILIATION

REWRITING LANGUAGE TO REBUILD A NATION

In this painful article, I examine how Rwanda, after the 1994 genocide, rebuilt itself through the painstaking transformation of language, identity, and collective memory. This case reveals both sides of linguistic power: how words destroyed, and how words later helped the nation move—almost painfully—towards reconciliation.

How Language Became a Weapon in 1994

The genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 remains as one of the starkest examples of how language can kill. Over roughly one hundred days, nearly 800,000 people—mostly Tutsi and some Hutu moderates—were slaughtered by ordinary citizens who had been primed by years of propaganda (Des Forges, 1999).



Extremist broadcasters on Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) normalised hatred through dehumanising vocabulary. Tutsis were repeatedly labelled inyenzi ("cockroaches") and inzoka ("snakes"), metaphors deliberately designed to remove their humanity (Hintjens, 1999). The phrase "cut the tall trees" circulated widely as a coded directive to kill Tutsi civilians.

These metaphors and euphemisms were not rhetorical flourishes; they were tools of mobilisation. By transforming neighbours into vermin, violence became morally permissible. Propaganda reframed mass murder as civic duty, existential defence, even patriotism. The genocide was therefore not only a collapse of political order but a collapse of moral language.

Among the most painful episodes were those in which places of refuge—churches, convents, schools—became sites of betrayal. In one notorious case, two Benedictine nuns, Sister Gertrude Mukangango and Sister Maria Kisito, were later convicted in Belgium for facilitating the killing of Tutsis hiding in their convent. They had identified Tutsi refugees to militias and provided gasoline used in their execution (Rettig, 2007). Such episodes remind us that genocidal language seeped into institutions of faith and moral authority.

During my time in Innsbruck, Austria, I lived in a Jesuit community with a Rwandan member whose brothers and father had been killed in the conflict. His grief—quiet, dignified, and enduring—reflected the deep human cost of a nation torn apart by words turned into weapons.

One of Rwanda's most distinctive tools for post-genocide reconciliation was the Gacaca courts—community-based tribunals revived from traditional Rwandan practice. **While widely debated, they provided a structured space for truth-telling, confession, and communal participation.**

Reframing Identity After the Genocide

When the genocide ended, Rwanda faced a question rare in history: how does a society remake its collective identity when its old vocabulary has been used for mass murder? The government undertook radical steps to reshape the symbolic order.

The most important reform was the removal of ethnic labels—Hutu, Tutsi, Twa—from national identity cards. Before 1994, these labels made it easy to identify and kill Tutsis at checkpoints. Eliminating them was both a symbolic rejection of ethnic essentialism and a practical step towards reducing everyday discrimination (Buckley-Zistel, 2006).

The education system also changed. School curricula that once reinforced fixed ethnic narratives were revised. Textbooks began emphasising national unity, shared citizenship, and critical reflection on the genocide. Public rhetoric shifted from ethnic categories to the language of "Rwandanness," collective trauma, and shared healing.

Language reforms were institutional as well as emotional. The state media was restructured to prevent hate-broadcasting. Public communication discouraged labels that had once fuelled dehumanisation. In their place, a new vocabulary emerged—justice, unity, reconciliation, memory, dignity. This linguistic reconstruction became a form of moral architecture.

The Gacaca Courts: Storytelling as Justice

One of Rwanda's most distinctive tools for post-genocide reconciliation was the Gacaca courts—community-based tribunals revived from traditional Rwandan practice. While widely debated, they provided a structured space for truth-telling, confession, and communal participation.

Language was central to the Gacaca process. Survivors narrated atrocities publicly; perpetrators confessed and expressed remorse; communities collectively heard and judged. In these exchanges, truth replaced rumour, acknowledgement replaced denial, and recognition replaced erasure (Clark, 2010).

The Gacaca courts were not perfect—some testimonies were false, some confessions incomplete—but they allowed ordinary Rwandans to reclaim narrative agency. People who had been dehumanised in 1994 now spoke their names, their losses, and their pain. The act of speaking was itself restorative.

Faith, Betrayal, and Institutional Reckoning

The role of religious institutions in the genocide remained one of the most painful legacies. The involvement of some clergy in violence forced churches to confront their own complicity. Over time, the Catholic Church in Rwanda formally apologised for the role certain priests and nuns played during the genocide.

This institutional reckoning was necessary not only for justice, but for linguistic healing. Institutions that had once enabled silence or hostility were now compelled to adopt the language of repentance, ethical responsibility, and communal solidarity.

Reconciliation Today: An Ongoing, Fragile Achievement

Rwanda today is often presented as a striking example of post-conflict transformation. The streets are calm; ethnic violence is rare; national identity has largely replaced ethnic identity. Survivors and perpetrators sometimes live in the same communities. Young Rwandans, born decades after the genocide, are taught not to identify themselves by ethnicity.

Yet it is more accurate to say that Rwanda is almost reconciled. The past remains painful; the wounds are deep; trust, though rebuilt, is delicate. But the absence of everyday ethnic hostility—given the horror of 1994—is remarkable.

Language continues to play a vital role in this fragile peace. Political leaders and civil institutions closely monitor rhetoric that could reignite animosities. Public discourse insists on unity; media standards are strict; and cultural programmes emphasise shared narratives of suffering and survival.

Conclusion: Words Can Kill, and Words Can Heal

The Rwandan story shows that violence begins in language—sometimes whispered, sometimes shouted. When categories harden into identities and metaphors strip people of humanity, violence becomes imaginable. Yet Rwanda also shows the reverse: language can create pathways to justice, compassion, and renewed community.

From the removal of ethnic labels to the public testimonies of Gacaca courts, from revised schoolbooks to reconciled villages, Rwanda's transformation was fundamentally linguistic before it was political. Words that once divided have been replaced by words that repair.

If our global society hopes to prevent such tragedies, we must treat language not merely as communication but as moral infrastructure. Our collective future depends on the stories we tell, the names we use, and the humanity our words are willing to recognise.

Kuruvilla Pandikattu was Professor of Physics and Philosophy at Jnana Deepa, Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Pune and of Business Ethics at XLRI, Xavier School of Management, Jamshedpur. kuru@kuru.in

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Kaustav Chakraborty
kaustavchakraborty2011@gmail.com

LANGUAGE, VIOLENCE, AND SAFFRON MONOCULTURE

YOUTUBE SONGS AS SONIC INFRASTRUCTURES OF HINDU ULTRANATIONALISM

In contemporary India, the social epidemic of saffron fascism is constantly getting marketed by the salespersons of Hindu Rashtra. **YouTube Hindutva songs are among the most potent of these sales pitches because they fold violence into the sensual pleasure of rhythm, rhyme and devotional affect.**

A homogenizing Hindu nationalist cultural formation, grounded in a re-articulated and increasingly normalized idea of "Sanatan Hindu" identity, has become more visible in contemporary India. This development has unfolded alongside, and at times in tension with, the constitutional commitment to secularism and the pluralistic fabric that has historically shaped India's social and political life. This monoculture is not only a political project but also a linguistic one, in which YouTube songs become laboratories for manufacturing an everyday vocabulary of threat, revenge and siege.

Social epidemics, like the fascist monoculture, occur exactly like the contagious dispersal of viruses, based on the mediations of three agents which Malcolm Gladwell calls "Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor and the Power of Context." [(1)]The motivated drive by a few influential transmitters becomes the "Law of the Few" through their strategic spreading of contagious propagation(s).

The infectious disseminations are focused on a familiar and a local context that holds the promise of becoming viral. The spreaders work on "the Stickiness Factor", investing on the emotional impacts of the audio-visual messages, so that the propaganda creates maximum effect by getting fixed to the memories of the audience.

In contemporary India, an increasingly visible form of Hindu hypernationalism is promoted through narratives associated with the idea of a Hindu Rashtra. YouTube devotional songs aligned with Hindutva discourses are among the more effective vehicles in this process, as they integrate themes of conflict and exclusion into the sensual pleasures of rhythm, rhyme, and devotional affect. Processes of othering, particularly the positioning of Muslims as outsiders, are reinforced within this framework of "Moditva," which draws on supremacist imaginaries of Hindu nationalism. Within these narratives, Bharatmata is frequently idiolised as a Hindu goddess, while Muslims are represented as abstract or symbolic adversaries, against whom political leadership is portrayed as vigilant in the name of protecting Hindus and the nation conceived as a sacred maternal figure.

"Ideas are immutable," remarks Joseph Goebbels, "Propaganda, however, is labile, adaptable to changing relationships and requirements. It is intended for the millions, the broad masses of the working people, and must therefore, above all, have a popular character."[(2)] Propaganda, thus, according to Goebbels, is framed keeping the "small" people in mind, who, unlike the intellectuals, perceive things by their hearts. The language, therefore, also must be antithetical to the philosophic and the sophisticated. Songs are effective means of conveying multiple connotations, and therefore music videos are a favourite tool of the saffron fascists to underscore the specific connotation that they try to convey through songs.

Bhakti songs, or songs of devotion often known as bhajans, as Neelima Shukla-Bhatt [(3)] has outlined, derive "their appeal from their lyric," which traditionally does not justify "the destruction of life and damage to materials

caused by violence," but instead calls for an intimate "affinity with the 'other.'" For this reason, bhajans have been "regularly heard in events for peacebuilding." However, within contemporary digital and political contexts aligned with Hindutva-oriented nationalism, these songs of harmony and interfaith aspiration are frequently re-signified on social media platforms. In this process, devotional forms that historically sought to unsettle social hierarchies are transformed into cultural instruments that reinforce hegemonic distinctions between a supremacist Hindu identity and its constructed Muslim "Other."

The YouTube song of animosity by Rocky Mittal, a singer from Haryana who has composed more than 200 songs, that begins with the line, "A bolt of lightning is Hindu"[4], delineates the muscular aggressive quirk of the militant Hindu nationalism:

> A bolt of lightning is Hindu
> And sword is Hindu
> If you ever quarrel with Hindu
> You will be beheaded by Hindu

In these lines, the lyric fuses identity and weapon into a single semantic cluster: to be 'Hindu' is to be lightning, sword, beheading, so that the very name of the community is linguistically welded to the possibility of spectacular violence. The lyrics assist in invigorating an ethics of daring that the song performance tries to validate:

> Will take bloody revenges for bloodsheds
> Will not allow the survival of enemies
> Those who jostle with Hindus
> They will starve of water drops

The soldiers are seen standing in a row before a hoisted Indian national flag on a snowy terrain while the singer chants: "We sport with weapons / We fight following Sanatan lines / The enemies abandon the battle fields / Listening to the roaring Hindus."

The singer proclaims that a Hindu is the harbinger of peace, but they can be the Yama for the butchers—and the backdrop images of cows indicates that the singer refers to the beef sellers. Mixing slang with bhakti, the ultimate shakti is propagated when he states how those, like the beef eaters, who violate the Hindu dictates are shot down by the Hindus:

> We are messengers of peace
> And the Yama of enemies
> On us those who cast their eyes
> Those sala are shot down by us

The oscillation between 'messengers of peace' and 'Yama of enemies' performs a classic fascist double-speak in which exterminatory desire is wrapped in the soft idiom of protection, purity and peace.

Just before the 2024 general election of India, another singer Laxmi Dubey, introduced as Laxmi Hindustani, urges through her song to vote for Modi so that BJP's monoculture of Ram/Hindu Rashtra is ordained. The song "Modi like dominant lion is what we all need" [5] begins with a roaring lion, and the singer with BJP's flag behind her makes her appearance with the announcement:

> In very household people must be
> talking of lotus—Modi's sign
> The entire form of Hindustan would
> experience a transformation.

"Modi like dominant lion is what we all need / Bringing back BJP government is what we demand / Gifts like development and faith are what all we need / A triumphant Bharat in the global scale is all that we demand." Here, the language of development is sutured to the idiom of animal ferocity, so that infrastructure, welfare and global glory are imagined as derivatives of a singular, leonine masculinity.

Another YouTube song by Laxmi, beginning with "Saffron will cover all household", transmits the notions of Militant Hindu chauvinism,

In such lines, language does not simply describe an aspiration; it issues a performative script in which chanting, teaching 'lessons' and **transforming the state into a Hindu Rashtra are presented as sequential duties of the militant devotee.**

Hindu nationalism and Hindu nation with an enhanced "stickiness factor". The singer frames the legitimate identity of a saffronized bhakt:

> Identity of the saffronized lies
> In the loving Jai Sri Ram cries...
> Jai Sri Ram chants those who refuse
> Let their lives be full of hardships

The lyric thus constructs a speech-act regime where the refusal to utter 'Jai Sri Ram' justifies hardship, exclusion and implied violence, turning a devotional chant into a linguistic test of citizenship and belonging. Voices of contestation against Moditva, including the criticisms of the opposition parties, are packaged in media as anti-Ram and anti-Hindu outlook.

The Hindu supremacism is the major pillar based on which the un-making of India into a Hindu Rashtra can be commenced: "Inform this to the entire world / That the Hindus are unsurpassed / Be the dreading hour, come forward / Teach lessons to the traitorous band / Loudly chanting Jai Sri Ram mantra / Transform Bharat into a

Hindu Rashtra." In such lines, language does not simply describe an aspiration; it issues a performative script in which chanting, teaching

'lessons' and transforming the state into a Hindu Rashtra are presented as sequential duties of the militant devotee.

These YouTube songs, as bhakti vibrators of the Hindu Right, ensure that the social epidemic of saffron fascism is carried in the very syllables, rhymes and refrains that circulate through headphones, loudspeakers and comment threads in contemporary India.

Kaustav Chakraborty is an Associate Professor in English, Southfield College, Darjeeling, Inida.

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George Thenadikulam
georgetsj@gmail.com

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LANGUAGE AND HARMONY

THE LEGACY OF ARNOS PADIRI (JOHAN ERNST HANXLEDEN) IN CULTURAL HARMONY

Language is more than a tool of communication; it is a carrier of memory, culture, identity, and values. In societies marked by diversity, language can either become a site of exclusion and conflict or a bridge of understanding and peace. The history of Kerala offers a compelling example of how linguistic engagement can foster cultural enrichment and social harmony. Among the early contributors to this tradition stands Johan Ernst Hanxleden (1681–1732), a German Jesuit missionary from Osnabrück, popularly known as Arnos Padiri, whose engagement with Malayalam and Sanskrit represents an early model of language as a pathway to peace.

Osnabrück occupies a unique place in European memory as one of the cities where the Peace of Westphalia was negotiated, bringing an end to decades of religious violence in Europe. It is perhaps not coincidental that a son of this city would later seek peace not through treaties, but through grammar—learning the language of another people and entering their cultural universe with respect.

Arnos Padiri: A Bridge Between Cultures

Arnos Padiri arrived in Kerala in the early eighteenth century. Rather than imposing a foreign linguistic or cultural framework, he immersed himself deeply in the languages of the land. His mastery of Malayalam and Sanskrit, at a time when these were closely tied to social hierarchy and religious learning, was extraordinary. His seminal work, Grammatica Linguae Malabaricae, remains one of the earliest systematic grammars of Malayalam. Puthen Pana—an epic poem on the life of Jesus Christ; Chanduranthyam (The Four Ends of Man)—poetic reflections on mortality and the ultimate destiny of human beings; Umma Parvam—a narrative on the life of the Virgin Mary; and Genoa Parvam—the story of Genevieve, are among his major contributions to Malayalam literature.

What distinguishes Arnos Padiri's contribution is not merely scholarly excellence, but the spirit of cultural respect underlying his work. By studying and codifying Malayalam, he affirmed the dignity of the local language and its speakers. At a time when colonial encounters often generated cultural violence and epistemic domination, his approach demonstrated that genuine dialogue begins with learning the language of the other.

Arnos Padiri Memmorial, Velur, Kerala

Language as Cultural Enhancement

Language nurtures culture by preserving oral traditions, shaping collective imagination, and enabling artistic expression. Arnos Padiri's engagement with Malayalam helped strengthen its status as a language capable of grammar, literature, and intellectual discourse. His works contributed to the standardization and academic recognition of Malayalam, encouraging its use beyond purely local or domestic contexts.

Such cultural enhancement is itself a form of peacebuilding. When a language is respected, the community that speaks it feels acknowledged and valued. Marginalization of language often leads to alienation, resentment, and conflict. Conversely, affirmation of linguistic identity strengthens self-worth and social cohesion. Arnos Padiri's work thus played a subtle but lasting role in nurturing Kerala's rich cultural pluralism.

Peace and Harmony through Linguistic Dialogue

Violence, whether physical or structural, often arises from misunderstanding, misrepresentation,

and denial of voice. Language can counter these tendencies by creating spaces for dialogue and empathy. Arnos Padiri's linguistic scholarship enabled communication across religious and cultural boundaries. By engaging local intellectual traditions, he opened avenues for mutual understanding between European Christianity and Indian thought systems.

This approach contrasts sharply with models of engagement that relied on coercion or cultural superiority. Arnos Padiri showed that learning the language of the other is an act of humility, and humility is foundational to peace. His life reminds us that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of respectful relationships.

Language, Power, and Peace in Contemporary Context

The relevance of Arnos Padiri's legacy extends to contemporary debates on language and violence in India and elsewhere in the globe. Linguistic homogenization, cultural domination, and the politicization of language continue to generate social tensions. In such a context, Arnos Padiri's example invites us to reimagine language as a shared cultural commons rather than a weapon of power.

Promoting multilingualism, mother-tongue education, and intercultural linguistic exchange are essential strategies for peace today. When languages coexist with dignity, communities are more likely to coexist peacefully. Kerala's relatively harmonious social fabric owes much to its long tradition of linguistic openness and cultural exchange, of which Arnos Padiri was an early contributor.

Conclusion

Arnos Padiri's contribution to South Indian languages, especially Malayalam, stands as a powerful reminder that language can be an instrument of peace. By engaging deeply with local culture, affirming linguistic dignity, and fostering dialogue across differences, he demonstrated how scholarship can serve humanity. In a world increasingly fractured by identity-based conflicts, his life and work urge us to rediscover the peacebuilding potential of language and literature.

By studying and codifying Malayalam, he affirmed the dignity of the local language and its speakers. **At a time when colonial encounters often generated cultural violence and epistemic domination, his approach demonstrated that genuine dialogue begins with learning the language of the other.**

Arnos Padiri's legacy does not belong exclusively to Kerala or to Germany. It belongs to a shared humanist tradition in which cultures grow not by conquering one another, but by learning from one another. Kerala shaped Hanxleden as much as Hanxleden contributed to Kerala.

We cannot ignore the fact that language has often been used as a tool of domination in Europe—imposed through administration, education, and religion. Against this backdrop, Arnos Padiri's immersion in Malayalam and Sanskrit stands out as a counter-cultural act, resisting the epistemic violence that accompanied many colonial encounters.

In contemporary Germany, where questions of migration, language, and cultural coexistence shape public debate, Arnos Padiri's life offers a quiet but radical lesson. Peace is not secured by demanding linguistic conformity, but by cultivating the patience to learn the language—and the world—of the other.

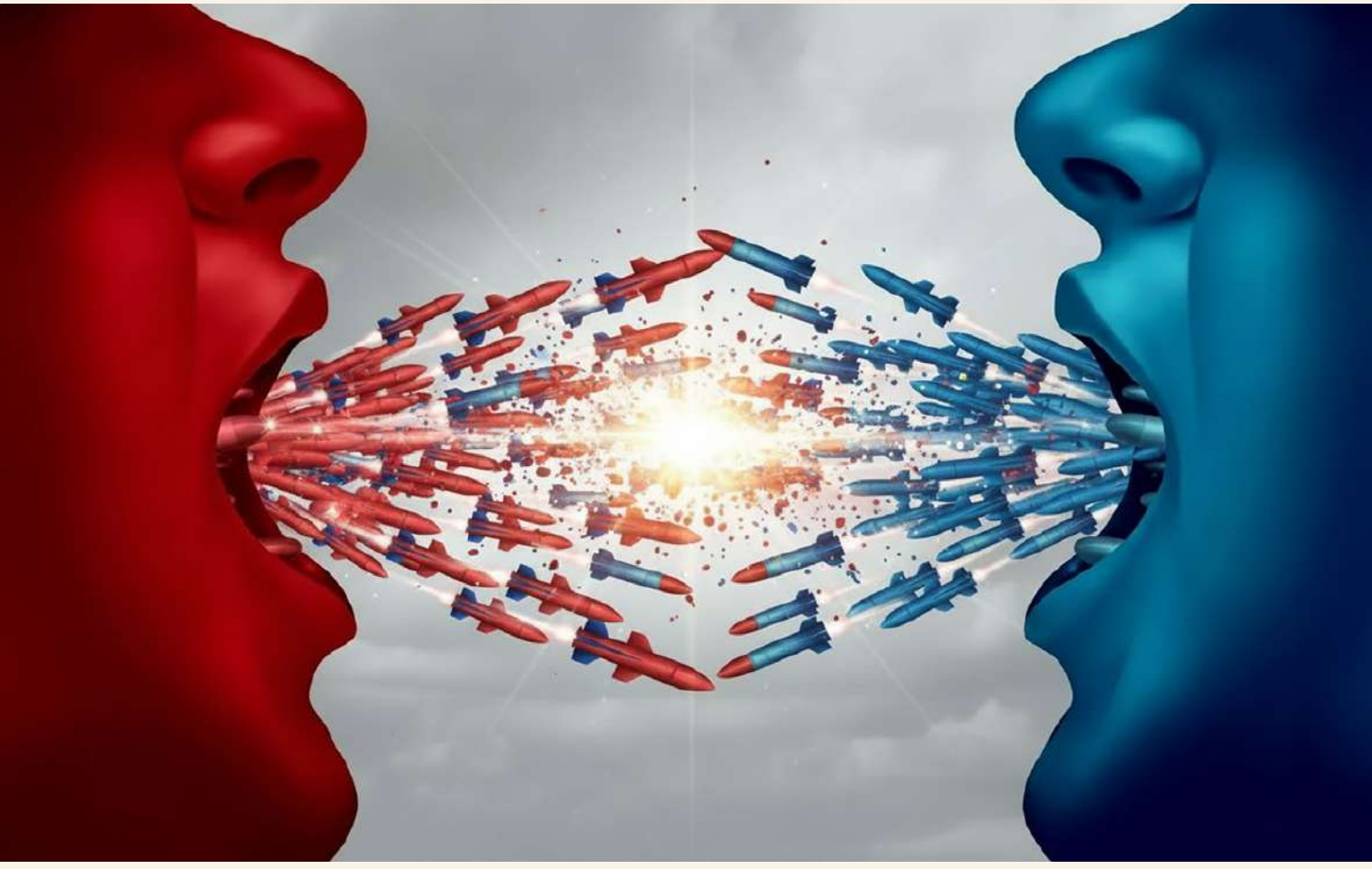
Dr. George Thenadikulam SJ is the Director of Arnos Padiri Academy, Velur, Kerala.
www.arnosacademy.com

Aneeta George
Email: h25130@astra.xlri.ac.in

BOOK REVIEW

Pax Lumina 7(1)/2026/62-65

HATE SPEECH AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE



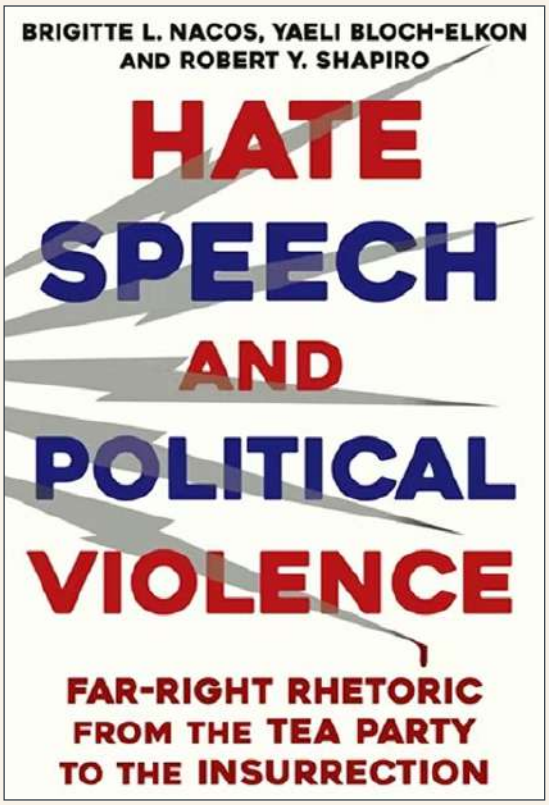
Brigitte L. Nacos, Yaely Bloch-Elkon & Robert Y. Shapiro (2024)
Hate Speech and Political Violence: Far–Right Rhetoric from the Tea Party to the Insurrection.
Columbia University Press.

The book argues that hate speech is not a marginal phenomenon. **Rather, it is often a strategic tool used by political actors to redefine group boundaries, delegitimise minority or dissenting groups, and delegitimise established norms of justice and equality.**

Why This Book Matters for Social Order, Justice, and Equity

Hate Speech and Political Violence offers a compelling account of how extremist rhetoric can destabilise social order and erode the foundations of equitable and just societies. The authors trace the trajectory from the rise of right-wing populist movements (such as the Tea Party in the United States) through to the violent United States Capitol attack of January 6, 2021. They show how language, amplified by mass media and digital platforms, created a climate in which political violence became imaginable, even acceptable.

The book argues that hate speech is not a marginal phenomenon. Rather, it is often a strategic tool used by political actors to redefine group boundaries, delegitimise minority or dissenting groups, and delegitimise established norms of justice and equality. By reframing certain communities as "threats," "invaders," or "illegitimate," hate speech can lay the groundwork for social exclusion, discriminatory policy, and ultimately, violent conflict. The authors demonstrate how this process gradually erodes social cohesion and institutional trust, rendering society more fragile and inequitable.



Key Mechanisms by Which Rhetoric Undermines Justice and Stability

The book identifies several interlinked mechanisms by which hate speech destabilises social order and undermines equity:

- Dehumanization and Othering: When political language repeatedly portrays a group as "dangerous," "undesirable," or "inferior," it dehumanises them. This shifts public perception: victims become legitimate targets, and violence can be justified without moral restraint.

Robert Y. Shapiro *Yaely Bloch-Elkon* *Brigitte L. Nacos*

- Moral Disengagement and Legitimation of Violence: Rhetoric that frames violence as "defense," "purification," or "restoration" enables moral disengagement. Language becomes a pretext for legitimising aggression against certain communities, under the guise of protecting "us."

- Structural Normalization of Exclusion: Through persistent hateful rhetoric, marginalised groups risk becoming permanently disenfranchised. Speech becomes embedded in institutions — media, law enforcement, electoral politics — transforming prejudice into structural disadvantage.

- Erosion of Institutional Trust and Public Solidarity: When political discourse is dominated by inflammatory rhetoric, public trust in democratic institutions, legal standards, and norms of justice erodes. Social solidarity fractures along identity lines, making cooperation, equality, and collective security difficult. Thus, for social scientists, policymakers, and civic actors, the book's central insight is that language is not trivial — it is a foundational element of social order, shaping who belongs and who does not, who is protected and who is exposed.

Lessons for Building Equitable Societies and Preventing Violence

From the analysis in Hate Speech and Political Violence, one can derive several practical lessons for strengthening justice, equity, and social cohesion:

1. Prevention by Regulatory and Normative Interventions: Monitoring and regulating hate speech — especially coded, dog-whistle, or mass-mediated forms — is crucial. Societies should develop legal and normative safeguards to curb dehumanising discourse before it manifests in violence.

2. Media Literacy and Public Awareness: Civil society and educational institutions must foster media literacy, alerting citizens on how rhetoric can be weaponised. When citizens understand the mechanisms of propaganda, they are less likely to fall prey to exclusionary narratives.

3. Inclusive Public Discourse and Counter Narratives: Promoting inclusive and dignifying public discourse — emphasising common humanity, shared vulnerability and social solidarity — can counteract the divisive narratives of hate. Empowering minority voices, ensuring representation, and facilitating cross-group dialogue helps rebuild trust.

4. Institutional Accountability and Structural Justice: Democracies must ensure institutions remain neutral arbiters of justice rather than amplifiers of partisan rage. Judicial safeguards, media regulation, and fair representation can help limit the impact of hate speech on policy or violence.

The book could have benefitted from cross-cultural comparative analysis to show how hate speech plays out in different institutional and historical settings. **Nonetheless, despite this limitation, the book's theoretical framework — of language as a structural force shaping social order — remains robust and widely applicable.**

5. Early Warning and Response Systems: In fragile societies or communities under stress, even small signs of escalating hateful rhetoric must be treated as potential warnings. Rapid response — through civil society, inter-faith groups, or local governance — can defuse tensions before escalation.

By implementing such measures, societies can strengthen the social order, protect equity, and uphold justice even in volatile times.

Critical Reflections

The book's strength lies in its empirical depth and clear linkage between rhetorical trends and actual violence. Its focus on a recent and well-documented case makes its findings highly relevant for democracies worldwide.

However, while the book offers deep insight into the American context, translating its lessons into non-Western contexts requires caution. Societal structures, historical injustices, and institutional capacities differ significantly across contexts. For example, in many societies, structural inequalities (economic, caste, race, religion) interact with speech in more complex ways than in the U.S. The book could have benefitted from cross-cultural comparative analysis to show how hate speech plays out in different institutional and historical settings.

Nonetheless, despite this limitation, the book's theoretical framework — of language as a structural force shaping social order — remains robust and widely applicable.

Conclusion: Language, Justice, and Social Stability

Hate Speech and Political Violence is more than a study of rhetoric and its perils. It is a diagnosis of how fragile social order becomes when language is weaponised, and how facile is the slide from speech to systemic injustice, from prejudice to violence, from social plurality to exclusion.

For anyone committed to social justice, equity, and democratic stability, the book serves as a powerful warning: democratic institutions and legal safeguards matter, but so does everyday language. Public discourse — the words chosen by politicians, media, influencers, community leaders — can either uphold justice or erode it.

If societies hope to remain inclusive, stable, and just, they must attend to the moral and social weight of language. This book makes that case with clarity, evidence, and urgency.

Aneeta George is an MBA (Human Resources) student of XLRI, Xavier School of Management, Jamshedpur. She has an Engineering Degree from TKM College of Engineering, Kollam.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pax Lumina 7(1)/2026/66

Dear Editor,

Congratulations on the current issue! It looks great. I look forward to using this with my challenge of peace course.

Joshua Snyder
Boston College, USA.

Dear Editor,

What an exceptional issue this is, focusing on Social Media and Peacebuilding. Content and graphics are par excellence.

Congratulations and best wishes to you and your team.

Raju Deepti
Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

Dear Editor,

Thanks for sharing the November edition of Paxlumina on digital media and peacebuilding. This is very relevant subject matter and articles are insightful and helpful.

Deben Bachaspatimayum
Imphal.

Dear Editor,

Thanks for Pax Lumina Novemebr issue.

Very timely and relevant.

Augustine Bahemuka
Kampala, Uganda.

Dear Editor,

Thank you so much for the beautiful and inspiring edition of Pax Lumina.

Sr.Dr.Bindu Thomas,
Don Bosco College (Autonomous)
Maram, Manipur.

Dear Editor,

Pax Lumina on Social Media and Peacebuilding is much appreciated.

Annie Kunnath
Calcutta.

Dear Editor,

Many thanks for the last issue of Pax Lumina. Hearty congratulations!

José M. Guibert
Universidad Pontificia Comillas
Madrid.

Dear Editor,

Very happy to receive Pax Lumina November 2025 issue. I truly appreciate the opportunity to contribute and share my knowledge on the topic: Peace or Discord? How Social Media can be Reimagined as a Catalyst for Public good, Social harmony and Peacebuilding in Nigeria.

Chinyere Cecilia Ibezim
Kenya.

Dear Editor,

Thank you for sharing the issue. It looks excellent.

Rumaan Mecci,
Delhi.

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- GENDER, CASTE AND VIOLENCE
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23. **Dr. Binoy Jacob Pichalakkattu** (Director, LIPI, Kochi), et al.

When people talk, listen completely.
Most people never listen.

- Ernest Hemingway

LOYOLA INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (LIPI
Ponoth Road, Kaloor, Kochi - 682 017, Kerala, India

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION NETWORK
New Delhi, India

INDIAN SOCIAL INSTITUTE (ISI)
24 Benson Road, Benson Town
Bengaluru - 560 046