

Bimonthly

Pax Lumina

Vol. 2 | No. 4 | July 2021

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

Pandemic AND Peace

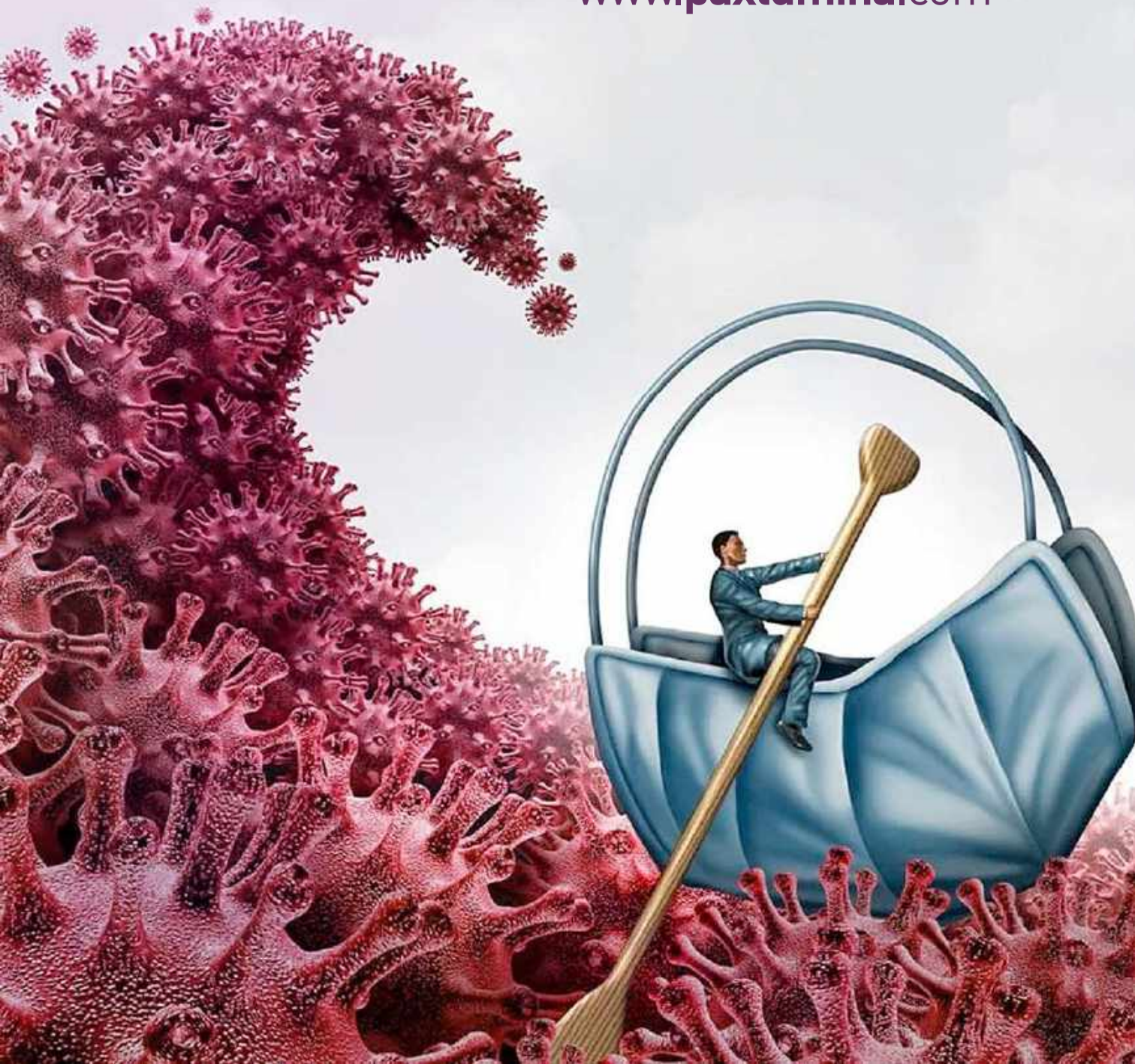


Pax Lumina

A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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LOYOLA INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

LIPI, Ponoth Road, Kaloor,
Kochi- 682 017, Kerala, India

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION
NETWORK

Jesuit Conference of South Asia
225, Jor Bagh, New Delhi-110 003, India





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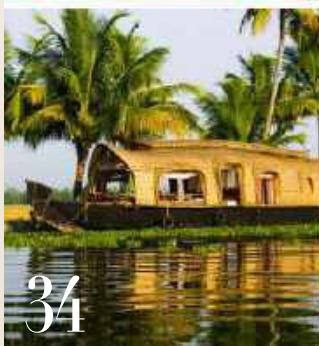
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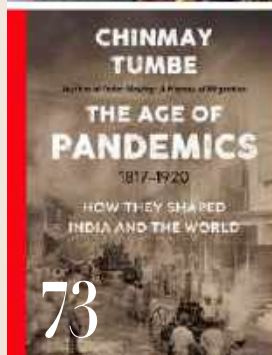
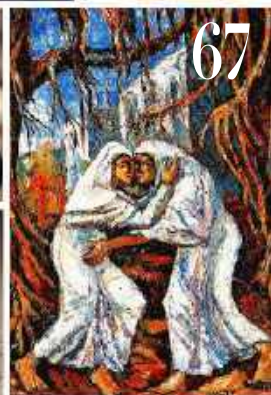
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Outthink Evil**
Shiv Visvanathan



Death of Fr. Stan Swamy



Editorial

Fr. Stan Swamy SJ, died a few days back in Mumbai in a private hospital. All his life he had fought for the protection of human rights of the excluded; the undertrials and the adivasis. It is, indeed, a cruel irony that he had to die as an undertrial. But the irony does not end here. While his struggles and protests were peaceful and non-violent and involved only legal recourses guaranteed under the Constitution, the charges levelled against him amounted to abetment to waging war against the State. Also the rights he sought to ensure for others were denied to him after his arrest under the Unlawful Activities [Prevention] Act (UAPA). Does UAPA or for that matter any other law of the land permit such a treatment to an undertrial? This question is important fortunately not for Stan Swamy now, but unfortunately for those awaiting trial under UAPA as well as for the more than one lakh other undertrials in various prisons in India many of whom have spent well over the maximum possible period of punishment permissible under law already in jail.

UAPA was enacted in December 1967. Almost all political parties active now or their predecessors have been in power or supported the government in power since then. UAPA and other such draconian acts continue in the statute books periodically fortified by amendments. So it is clear that the crucial political initiative to repeal or amend UAPA and other such laws to prevent arbitrary detention of citizens and to ensure humane treatment of undertrials will not be forthcoming unless civil society takes it up and acts.

Now about the innocence of Stan Swamy. Unfortunately, the trial in this case is over before it started and the criminal case against him is closed with his death. But the allegation of his being a Maoist, though unproven is not disproved. Now, it is for his friends and well-wishers to take up this matter to clear him of the charges posthumously.

Hope amidst the Pandemic

It is as difficult to hope as it is to keep one safe from the virus during the Pandemic. But there are stories of fortitude, endurance and survival from the field which keep our hopes alive. We feature a few of them in this issue of Pax Lumina with the hope that these stories may help to keep hope alive in our readers.

Jacob Thomas
Editor



Remembering Fr Stan Swamy

*I am not a silent spectator, but I am part of it, part of the game.
I am ready to pay the price, whatever be it.*

- Fr. Stan Swamy, SJ

Fr. Stan Swamy, SJ
The Martyr of the Marginalised



■ POEM

by **Fr. Stan Swamy**

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Light, Hope, Love - The New Order

(This poem was posted by Fr. Stan on 7 April 2021 from Taloja Prison)

Light overpowering darkness
Hope replacing despair
Love winning over hate
Is the message of Jesus risen.

*Darkness, despair descended on me
At lower court declaring me complicit
Of waging war against the State
As such not deserving bail.*

*And what was the evidence?
Some documents planted in my computer
Which were supposedly addressed to me
Something I myself was not in the know.*

*My co-accused colleagues
Assured me this accusation is nothing new.
They too have been accused similarly
I was thus consoled to be in their good company.*

*But fight we will till the end.
Not so much just to save our skin
But to speak truth to power
Counting all the while you all are
with us in mind and heart.*



Jean Dreze

(A Belgian-born economist, social scientist and activist.
A close associate of Fr. Stan Swamy, now lives in Ranchi)



It's one of the saddest days of my life. I had known Fr. Stan Swamy for 15-20 years. He was a wonderful human being and an exemplary citizen. Nothing can excuse the manner in which he was treated. He was not a Maoist by any stretch of imagination. Even if he were, he was entitled to human treatment.

Fr. Stan has been totally cooperating with the investigation. He was not a flight risk. He could not tamper with evidence. Absolutely, there was no logic, whatsoever, in refusing bail. But, we must remember this is a routine practice in UAPA cases. Thousands of people across the country have been treated in the same manner for years. That needs to be urgently looked at. Very few countries, if any, treat their prisoners in this manner, letting them languish in jail without trial. Without even knowing what is happening about their trial. Their families are being ruined by greedy lawyers.

And if the trial happens, they are acquitted in most cases. The conviction rate in UAPA cases is just two per cent. By the time they're acquitted, their lives are ruined. The sacrosanct principle that people are innocent until proven guilty has been turned upside down. It's now guilty until proven innocent. That has to change.

It appears that those who have worked among tribals are in a way seen to be Maoist supporters. That is one way of explaining this cruelty. I think it was a deliberate attempt to make an example and send a message that the people who do that sort of work will have to meet the same fate. I guess Stan was targeted because he stood in the way of the persecution of tribals, Dalits. He showed a relentless defence of under-trial prisoners. He was also working for communal harmony. That's where he became a 'nuisance' for the government.



Joseph Xavier, SJ

(Director, Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru. He was heading the legal proceedings in the case of Fr. Stan Swamy)



Fr. Stan (84) had spent his active life mainly in three places - Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru, JOHAR, a Jesuit Social Centre in Chaibasa, and Bagaicha, Ranchi in Jharkhand. Stan served as the Director of ISI Bengaluru for 11 years. In the late 80's, he was missioned as the Director, Jharkhandi Organization for Human Rights centre, popularly known as JOHAR (a word used in Jharkhand to wish one another), where he served for 12 years. He was much disturbed by the hard realities of the 'Ho' tribe. Soon, he learnt 'Ho' language and spent his time in educating and strengthening the hopes of the poor Adivasis.

In the 90's, as India was opening its economy to neo-liberal paradigm, a number of multi-national companies intruded into mineral-rich Adivasi lands. Many villagers were displaced from their habitats in the name of development. Fr. Stan rightfully

said, "Every mine that is dug, not only destroys the green forests, fertile lands and water bodies but also often displaces entire village habitations". By mid-90's, discourse on separation of Jharkhand from Bihar has been picking up momentum. Considering the new space emerging for the empowerment of the Adivasis, Stan was asked to move to Ranchi in 2000. He was staying in a rented house, establishing contacts, talking to different leaders and political parties on how Jesuits could be at the service of the Adivasis in the newly formed Jharkhand State.

In 2006, Bagaicha was established as a common venture of the central zone Jesuit provinces. During these years, various multinational corporations were bent upon extracting the minerals from the very rich sources in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. This process is generally preceded with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the government and the industries. The Gram Sabhas were never taken into confidence, as mandated by PESA Act. Fr. Stan actively participated in the movement led by Adivasis, that opposed Netrahat Field Firing project, which was to displace thousands of villagers and a number of Adivasi hamlets in Jharkhand. He also opposed the large-scale Koel Karo dam project, that was to displace many Adivasi families. This can be counted as one of the 'wrong doings' of the man with a steel spine. He wrote on these subjects extensively in print media.

During 2014-15, indiscriminate arrests, of mostly Adivasi and Dalit youth, were taking



place. Stan convened a meeting of people of goodwill, and the group decided to form a common forum by the name, 'Persecuted Prisoners Solidarity Committee' (PPSC), so that they could collectively intervene in the court, on behalf of Under-Trial Prisoners (UTPs), seeking immediate bail and speedy trial. Some Adivasi villagers in Khunti district of Jharkhand, inscribed in the pathals the Constitutional provisions given to the Gram Sabhas as per Fifth Schedule of the Constitution and PESA Act. This, known as Pathalgadi movement, became popular.

To everyone's surprise, in 2018, Stan was implicated by the Pune Police in Bhima Koregaon case. Stan had never been to Bhima Koregaon in his entire life.

However Fr Stan was arrested and was interrogated for 15 hours in a span of 5 days in July and August 2020, by the National investigation Agency (NIA). Despite his age and illness, he fully cooperated with the interrogation. He was under judicial custody till death.

Personally, I was with Stan, for 3 days, before his arrest, spending time at his place of solace. It is always more than an experience to spend time with him. More than his ailing health, what was more prominent about him, like always, was the fact that he stays strong, and confident. He was ready to pay the price as a true follower of Jesus.

Shashi Tharoor

(Member of Parliament)



I am here in solidarity with all those joining to mourn the death of the 84-year-old Father Stan Swami, suffering from Parkinson's disease and other ailments. He spent four decades of his life working for the poor and the tribal people and was inexplicably arrested by our Government. I must say, for our country, the challenge we are all facing as a civilization is how to make progress in the future of the most deprived and marginalized sections of our society.

Various people are trying to help, some of us as lawmakers, as writers and opinion shapers, as social activists, as religious and social leaders. Everyone has a role to play. Ultimately, the government has the responsibility entrusted to it by our voters and taxpayers to deliver justice, hope,

and progress for the poorest and weaker sections of our society. An 83-year-old man was arrested eight months ago from his residence near Ranchi and at the same time his computer, his mobile phone, all sorts of items had been confiscated. He was interrogated, and was detained without any regard for his health, his principles, and his own idealism. As one who has benefited myself from a Jesuit education, I am convinced that no Jesuit priest would ever be guilty of either violence or incitement to violence. The charges of these seem to me to be preposterous.

Fr. Stan was a good man who had worked and lived with the Adivasis for social change. He worked at the Indian Social Institute in Bangalore and at the same time spent a quarter of a century in Jharkhand, only devoting himself to Adivasi rights. Such a person deserved our respect, our support and all the encouragement we could give, because those of us who have a conscience would want to see him succeed in his noble and often thankless task. Instead, we saw

him in jail. This is a national disgrace. It is also eroding our country's standing as a liberal democracy in the eyes of the world.

Very sad to learn of Fr. Stan Swamy's passing. A humanitarian and man of God whom our government could not treat with dignity and humanity. I am deeply saddened as an Indian. RIP.

Justice Kurian Joseph

(Former Judge, Supreme Court of India)



We are all unequivocal in saying that Fr. Stan Swamy was denied justice. In fact, justice itself was crucified which democracy cannot tolerate. In my opinion, 5th of July must be remembered in history as Stan's day for truth and justice. A person may die, but his dignity shall not die. Our Constitution guarantees equality, justice and dignity of the individual. But Stan did not get a chance to prove his innocence. It was a case of failure of justice. There is a contradiction. The purpose of law is to ensure justice. Hence, it is our duty to see that he is proved innocent and his dignity restored posthumously. The main allegation against Fr. Stan was that he was a Maoist. A Maoist never believes in the legal proceedings. But, Fr. Stan totally believed in the rule of law and fully cooperated with it. To me, a person cannot be a Maoist and a follower of law at the same time.



Stanislaus D' Souza, SJ

(President, Jesuit Conference of South Asia)



I write this with a deep sense of pain and anguish at the loss of Fr. Stan Swamy who has gone to his Eternal Home. In his death, we, the Jesuits of India, have lost a courageous, committed and compassionate elder brother, who lived and worked selflessly for the mission of the Society of Jesus: reconciliation and justice. He championed the noble ideals of love and compassion, equality and justice, truth and peace, and sacrificed his life for them. He is an example for us to emulate and become effective Jesuits in our life and mission. Fr. Stan had deep love for Jesus and the poor. This made him see, judge and act differently. He embraced a simple life and worked tirelessly for the rights of the poor Dalits and indigenous people. Right up to his last breath, imprisoned and deprived of basic human rights, he still continued to march in solidarity with the marginalized people of our times. Therefore, even as we mourn his undeserved, untimely and unjust demise, we shall still celebrate his life wholly

dedicated to the service of the last, the least and the lost. It is true that Fr. Stan is no more and we are deeply troubled at the death of Fr. Stan. However, a person like Fr. Stan cannot die. He will rise in the lives of people and in the struggles for justice and peace. He will raise a generation of people with conscience and commitment to take up the work among the underprivileged.

The death of Fr. Stan is not the end, but the beginning of a fresh impetus for justice and freedom. It is a kairos moment for us to read the signs of the times and to respond to them. It is an opportunity for us to pause, ponder and proceed boldly on our way of proceeding. It is an occasion for us to discern, decide and dedicate ourselves to our mission of reconciliation and justice as Fr. Stan has done. Let us pray for the grace of discernment and holy boldness. May the courage and fortitude of Fr. Stan inspire us to deepen our faith and to hope for a new desire, a new purpose and a new future.



Walter Fernandes, SJ

(Director, North-Eastern Social Research Center, Guwahati)



No prophet is recognised by the powerful. Prophets are killed because they are a threat to the powerful. Fr. Stan Swamy was bearing witness to it. I have worked with Stan for forty years and have witnessed his commitment to India of equality. This is the India that the Constitution demands but not the India that the powerful seekers of corporate profit want. So the State that is supposed to uphold the constitutional values but gives priority to the interest of this sector called him anti-national and arrested him. He is one of the many persons who paid this price in different ways.

During the four decades I have worked with him, I have seen him sticking his neck out on behalf of people in the periphery which included bonded labourers of Bangalore, and Dalits of Villupuram, Tamil Nadu. However, in the past decades, his priority was the right of the tribals of Jharkhand and neighbouring States.

The corporate sector wanted their land and the tribals as cheap bonded labour. But, Stan wanted them to be citizens of an inclusive India in which they too got the benefits of development and enjoyed democratic rights. That was not acceptable to the powerful and he was accused of being anti-national and got him arrested. That is the fate of the people who fight for the rights of people in the periphery.

Where do we go from here? Will Stan's death and sufferings of dozens of people go in vain? It should not happen. It is time the human rights activists and all people of goodwill, including the media, came together to demand an inclusive India in which all people are equal. That would be a good way of paying tribute to Fr. Stan.



M.K. George, SJ

(Jesuit Curia, Rome)



I have known Fr. Stan over five decades. Watching him sometimes at close quarters, at other times from a distance and devouring whatever he wrote, I have always tried to follow him. He comes across to me primarily as a social critic with a humane compassion. He has influenced thousands of men and women like me to look at social reality critically. He convinced us that the best way to read reality is to read it from the eyes of the poor. He insisted on using the insights and tools of social sciences. Much like Paulo Freire, he believed that a naïve and fanatic consciousness do not lead to liberation. His life mission was to educate all in critical Social Analysis which does not remain in armchair philosophizing, but leads all to committed action for liberation.

As a Christian and Jesuit, the Gospel of Mathew, chapter 25 seemed to have influenced him much. The chapter announces firmly that the final judgment of anyone would be based on how one dealt with the hungry, clotheless, homeless, prisoners and the most deprived people. It is interesting to note that he was bold enough to criticize even the Society of Jesus and the Catholic Church, both of which were mother figures for him. Probably the image that best fits Fr. Stan is that of Jesus who cleansed the temple with a whip, a rare occasion when Jesus could be seen angry.

The fact that Fr. Stan's mission is incomplete is best demonstrated after his death. There are two versions of his death. The officials and the powers be say, he died of illness and old age. The second version calls his death a "judicial murder." He was murdered because

he stood against the vested interests of the corporates and the supportive government that deprived the tribals of their basic rights. It is so sad to see that even educated Indians do not see the latter.

Stan's murder raises certain questions not only for India, but also for the rest of the world. Do compassion and mercy have a role in judicial governance? Remember the judiciary and the government agencies dealt with an 84 year-old sick man with utmost callousness, taking 20 days to give him a straw to drink water. Is questioning the government, why thousands of innocent tribal youth are in jail as under trails with no concrete evidences, an act of terrorism? When 'terrorists' are ruling the nation, what moral right do they have to call citizens terrorists? When the tribal is losing his/her land, water and forest for the benefit of the rich and powerful, where is justice? For whose interest is the government creating laws and ordinances at will? For the poor citizens or for the corporate companies who finance the political party in power? How long can we keep silent when 'electoral democracy' is promoting 'social disintegration'?

Fr. Stan Swamy is a burning torch of fire. Whether the government and the judiciary will succeed in putting it out, is a question you and me have to answer.

E.P. Mathew, SJ

(Provincial, Kerala Jesuit Province)



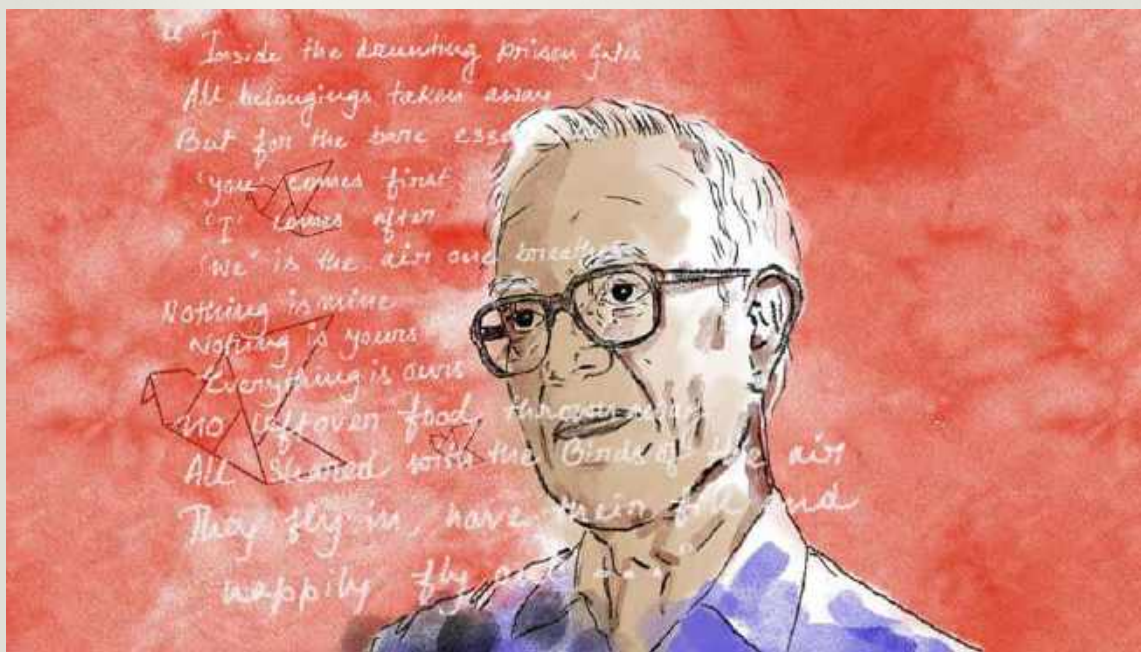
Long ago on 1 January 1972 Pope Paul VI addressed the World Day of Peace with the following words: “If you want peace, work for Justice.” Fr. Stan Samy, SJ grew up as a Jesuit in the continuing inspiration of such powerful words reflected in the Catholic Social Teachings, and above all, in the power of the Gospel. On 5 July 2021 he breathed his last under the good care of the Sisters of the Holy Family Hospital, Mumbai as a UAPA detenu. The callous attitude of the authorities, such as the NIA, the prison officials, the judges, all became silent as Dr. Ian D’ Souza announced the death of Fr. Stan Samy at 1.24 pm on 5 July 2021. His friend and companion, Fr. Joe Xavier, rightly notes that the Almighty saw to it that no human power, be it judges or prison officials, could pass a judgment on him. They saw to it that it is delayed to the very end. Justice delayed is Justice denied.

The institutionally-sponsored killing of Fr. Stan sends many messages: if you work for

Adivasis and Dalits, do only simple work of education. Do not touch on the question of land of Chotanagpur. It is estimated that 2.1 million hectares of Tribal land is reserved for the land bank. Likewise, do not touch on the question of forest rights of the tribals and the sad plight of under trials, mainly innocent youth.

I am of the opinion that it is planned to have a calculated and chilling effect on the so called “Urban Naxals.” Above all, it sends a chilling message to all who show dissent. Dissent is very essential for the protection of Democracy.

Stan will be a continuous inspiration. The Jesuits have decided to see to it that he will be officially free from the illegal NIA charges. Let us be reminded that in a free society, some are culpable but all are responsible.



Sr. Joel Urumpil, SCN

(Jyoti Bahen, Chatra – Jharkhand)



Fr. Stan Swamy as I have known.

F Fr. Stan's mortal remains are placed reverently with proper dedication. And we all know that his spirit and commitment will live forever in me, you and in the whole world.

I want to speak about Fr. Stan whom I have known over 30 years; a very vibrant man totally committed to the liberation of the society/world.

Let me highlight two aspects of Fr. Stan - the intellectual and the grass root level activist. Stan was part of the Jesuit-operated T.R. T. C (Tribal Research and Training Center) in Chaibasa/Lupunguttu. His realm of research was not confined to books and library alone, but he would also go out to the outlying villages, to learn about the people, their culture, etc.

Another period of his life that changed my life totally was my association with him as a student at the Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru. He was the Director and later

one of the professors. At this Institute, Socio Political analysis was taught. A very important role Stan exercised in this institute and later in his field of action (Karma Bhoomi) was to help individuals/ institutions to get out of the age-old systems and practices which prevented them from getting involved with the marginalized people for systemic change. Stan navigated the students to get out of the dotted lines of the outdated social norms, religious rules and dictums and get involved with real people with real issues.

As a student of Stan, even after many years of grass root involvement, I realized that I had known very little about systems and politics. Here Stan helped me see a new world - of corruption/exploitation/ war with one another/communities! As a Jesuit Catholic Priest, he was ruthlessly honest and fearlessly courageous to question the systems, be they secular or religious! He repeatedly spoke (in workshops/ individual conversations) of the need to collaborate/net work and to harness secular forces and to learn from common people. He allowed his students to look squarely into the issues of the inhuman laws which allow the powerful to live above the laws of the land.

While in Jharkhand, many joined him as collaborators/friends in his struggles for justice and peace. Fr. Stan was a fiery, ruthless messiah for the oppressed/exploited. A priceless contribution of Stan Swamy to the Christian missionaries, in fact, to the society at large, is to bridge the gap among religions, castes, communities and institutions.



Prabha Lakra

(Bagaicha, Ranchi)

I should say I was inspired by his simplicity. He used to listen to people irrespective of the background one belonged to.



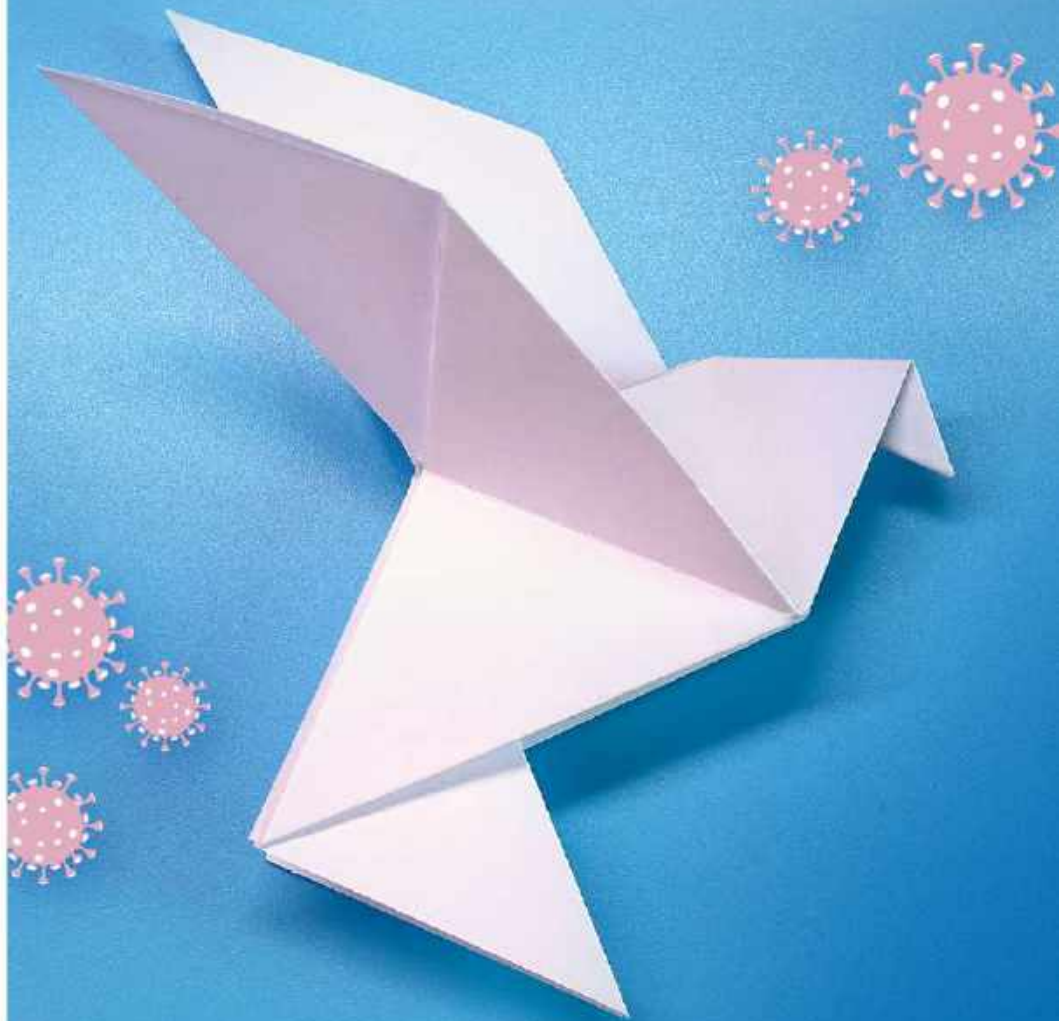
Aloka Kujur

(Member, Adivasi Adhikar Manch)

Fr. Stan used to question the violation of the rights of the people by the State. In the coming days our struggle to save water, land and culture will continue. We shall also fight for the social workers, human right defenders, and CAA/NRC protestors who have been kept in jail on fake charges and whose lives have been destroyed. We ensure that the protests and campaigns would not stop here, instead, they will be intensified.



Pandemic and Peace



*None of us,
including me, ever
do great things. But
we can all do small
things,
with great love,
and together we
can do something
wonderful.*

- Saint Mother Teresa



Gem Yecla
gemyecla@gmail.com

Pax Lumina 2(4) / 2021 / 21-23

Community Pantries in the Philippines

The phenomenon of the community pantries in the Philippines is God's visitation to God's people giving light and hope in the darkness in the face of the pandemic that seems to go on and on. The lockdown is the longest in the world causing millions of Filipinos to lose their jobs and eventually leading to hunger, depression, and misery.

Ana Patricia Non, the woman who started the community pantry in Maginhawa St. is one among those who lost her job (incidentally 'Maginhawa' is a Filipino word that connotes the ability to breathe freely, to feel relief and comfort). But instead of bemoaning her misfortune, she turned her fate around and started something that has gone viral and widespread.

I learned about the community pantry from the homily of Bishop Ambo David who spoke of it as an example of Easter hope amidst darkness and chaos. The community pantry began on April 15, 2021. Bishop Ambo's homily was on April 18. I was deeply touched by what he said and got intrigued by it. I checked it out on YouTube and there it was.

I saw a very good interview of Patricia Non and I forwarded Bishop's homily and the interview to my family and some of my friends. I put a caption in the interview saying that I wished there will be more of this all over the country.

Two of my friends responded positively and we agreed to meet and organize one in Barangka, Marikina City. I messaged some of my friends and family members



This has been phenomenal. Community pantries are happening all over the Philippines initiated by ordinary citizens - youth, fisherfolk, neighbourhood groups and by individuals whose only desire is to help their kababayans (fellow citizens) and making sure that nobody in one's community is left behind languishing in hunger and misery.



requesting prayers. A cousin of mine donated 5000 pesos (\$100) and another friend volunteered to bring 25 trays of eggs.

Other friends of my companions (Karen and Red), along with their neighbours gave donations of vegetables, fruits, rice, canned goods and noodles.

By April 25, (Good Shepherd Sunday) we were able to launch our first community pantry in our place. Around 200 to 250 people came and received provisions. After a faith-sharing session and discernment, we decided to have another one.

And so, the second community pantry was held on May 23 (Pentecost Sunday) with more provisions from kind-hearted donors and friends in the Philippines and from countries like Australia, Canada and the US.

Our next target is on the Feast of St. Ignatius on July 31 since most of our residents are connected with the Jesuit-run institutions and are exposed to the Ignatian formation and spirituality. We are deliberate in holding our community pantry on significant feast days of the Church because we want to underscore the important connection between faith and activism. The initiative to do good will be sustained since it is rooted in



God. It is like a branch connected to the vine.

This has been phenomenal. Community pantries are happening all over the Philippines initiated by ordinary citizens—youth, fisherfolk, neighbourhood groups and by individuals whose only desire is to help their kababayans (fellow citizens) and making sure that nobody in one's community is left behind languishing in hunger and misery.

For me, it is a people's revolution that is non-violent, creative and festive. We, Filipinos, are fun-loving people. We enjoy food, getting together, eating, laughing, and singing. That we have been in lockdown for more than a year now with many of us jobless is simply torture. But our innate goodness and generosity are



indomitable. In fact, it shines even more in challenging situations.

Although I am not aware of any study conducted on the extent of benefits that the poor get from the community pantries and their effectivity in responding to the needs of the most indigent members of the community, the spontaneous remarks of those who receive food items indicate their gratitude for the help received at this most opportune time.

The fact that citizens stand in queue for three to four hours at the venue of the community pantries before the opening and distribution of food attest to the urgent need for such assistance.

Sadly, the Duterte administration has not been supportive of this initiative. The community pantry has been branded as Communist because of its slogan, 'Give what you can, take what you need'.

But because the ordinary civilians are relentless, the local government officials have gradually been showing support by giving donations and being visible in the venue by providing assistance in maintaining peace and order.

In our place, though, the citizens are disciplined and are keen on following the protocols (wearing of face mask, face shield, keeping physical distancing). Also, we have expanded the slogan, 'Give what you can, take what you need and remember those who are also in need. Let us pray that those who are receiving

now will also be givers in the future'.

Our vision is to empower people to be givers, as well, not only perpetual receivers as we are conscious that we do not want to foster dependence among the poor but interdependence.

It is worth noting that the Caritas Philippines under the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines has been actively and directly involved in the wholistic poverty alleviation programme soliciting monetary donations from willing and generous laity both here and abroad and assisting those who are most in need in various dioceses all over the country.

During this pandemic, the Church leaders and the faithful, and the ordinary concerned citizens, have been working together and creatively seeking ways to reach out to those who have been gravely affected by this crisis. Although there is much to be done, it is inspiring and empowering to see each Filipino rising to the occasion, helping in all ways he/she can through prayer, monetary donations, online organising and coordinating and volunteering to repack goods for distribution in the community pantries. The Spirit of the Risen Christ is so much alive and that is what matters most.

Gem Yecla is a family counsellor and a spiritual director from the Philippines. Currently she is helping out in the community pantry in her native place in Barangka.



The New Space of Democratic Aspirations for Hong Kong's Youth

Pax Lumina 2(4) / 2021 / 24-26

Causeway Bay, which is flanked by malls and glitzy shops, can be touted as Hong Kong's shopping hub. But just like the whole of Hong Kong itself, this district has been changed by the city's quest for democratic ideals.

In 2019, Causeway Bay, just like the other districts, has seen its streets filled with black-clad protesters, most of them young. These people - students, young professionals, daughters, sons, friends - marched down the area's avenues to demand the withdrawal of a bill that critics said would allow Hongkongers accused of crimes to be extradited to mainland China.

The movement captured the imagination of the rest of the world during that time. As about a million people walked the streets, people like me who saw them were more than inspired.

The 2019 protests injected Hong Kong with renewed hope and vigour following the 2014 Umbrella movement, which was imbued with the sense of being a failure because the government didn't give in to the people's demand for universal suffrage.

To say the least, Causeway Bay, in 2019, wasn't just known for its bustling economic activity, but for also serving as a nucleus of resistance.



Come 2020, when COVID-19 struck, that changed. The black mass of people was gone.

Does that mean the youth have waved the white flag?

Not if you still walked on the streets of Causeway Bay now.

Gone are the throngs of young people marching, but as the world tried to survive 2020, Causeway Bay became known as ‘Keung To’ bay, named after a young, charismatic singer whose songs were known for supporting actions of the opposition and calling for reforms.



Gone are the throngs of young people marching, but as the world tried to survive 2020, Causeway Bay became known as ‘Keung To’ bay, **named after a young, charismatic singer whose songs were known for supporting actions of the opposition and calling for reforms.**



It became ‘Keung To bay’ after he released a song in April, last year in solidarity with the medical personnel who worked hard up until now to save lives amid the pandemic.

But young people also support Keung To because he and the rest of his 12-member group Mirror sang about the necessity to fight and stand up.

Music and art also helped keep afloat the sense of hope for the youth and other sectors in Hong Kong in general at the height of the pandemic.

When the first cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Hong Kong in February last year, it was a stand-up comedy act performed by Kathy Makattack which reminded everyone why Hong Kong can survive this, as it draws lessons from its experience from SARS or the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003, which killed 299 and infected 1,755 people then.





As the national security law saw charges being filed against leaders of the movement and the political room for pro-democracy figures continued to shrink, **the youth has now turned to music and art to preserve the ideals of freedom.**

Artists like Chloe Lai and photographer Tse Pak Chai also chronicled how life changed for Hong Kong's people at the height of the pandemic to showcase the magnitude and differences in how it affected us. Hong Kong Free Press wrote that they interviewed seafarers who remained stranded in their vessels as they could not dock, mothers who had to decide if they will have their children homeschooled or not.

As Hong Kong got through the first, second, third and fourth waves and saw its cases decline, art exhibits and events have again re-emerged in the city.

The same cannot be said about public assemblies expressing aspirations for universal suffrage though, or freedom of expression. They are yet to return in Hong Kong as everything remains precarious with the national security law.

So, instead of assemblies or marches or public protests, the city's youth express their hopes, dreams and ideals through music.

In a recent article, The South China Morning Post wrote about how Mirror sang about the 'chosen kids', a phrase that pro-democracy activist Lester Shum used to describe himself and the other students who led the 2014 Umbrella protests.

Shum has now been sentenced to 4-6 months in prison for participating in an unlawful assembly in 2020.

But even if Shum and others like him - Joshua Wong, Agnes Chow, Ivan Lam - have now been removed from the public eye and thrown behind bars, songs from groups like Warrior will continue to remind people why the fight must go on.

The quest for democracy may now come in a different form for the young people, especially with the passage of the national security law in June, last year.

As the national security law saw charges being filed against leaders of the movement and the political room for pro-democracy figures continued to shrink, the youth has now turned to music and art to preserve the ideals of freedom.

It's not the same as before. But what's important is that there continues to be a space for the democratic spirit. And for the youth, that space may well be a song.



Debasis Gupta
debasisgupta@hotmail.com

Pax Lumina 2(4) / 2021 / 27-29

Kolkata: Where Love is still the only Religion

Love is instinctive to all of us. It is a primordial force that binds us to one another, makes us equal, but what separates one from the other is the will to act. Merely sitting on a sofa and lamenting on the plights of the less fortunate who suffer will not help.

It is enough if we can extend support to even one suffering man, whichever way we can. Although it depends upon numerous factors such as our resources, network, knowledge, and capability, what is most important between the divide of 'helping' and 'not helping' is our innate will to extend hands.





Many good Samaritan doctors, institutions (for-profit and not-for-profit alike), and corporates have come forward to augment the shortfall of city infrastructure for Covid-19-related healthcare services. **Lately, the Scottish-Church College’s Students’ Union provided essentials such as oxygen cylinders, food, and medicine to the affected population.**



In this historical city of Kolkata, the footprints of great souls like Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, and Saint Teresa are well marked. They worked for the cause of lifting humanity to greater heights with a profound emphasis on ‘Love All’ and ‘Serve All’: The heartbeats of the people there still carry forward their ideology in spirit, beyond the barriers of caste, creed, and religion.

Of late, the situation in the ‘City of Joy’, Kolkata, has been challenging amidst the ongoing ‘second wave of the pandemic’ with several problems. There is the nonavailability of vaccines, essential medicines, hospital beds, oxygen cylinders, ventilators, and, above all, the scarcity of doctors because of the tremendous pressure of patient count at hospitals across the city.

Many good Samaritan doctors, institutions (for-profit and not-for-profit alike), and corporates have come forward to augment the shortfall of city infrastructure for Covid-19-related healthcare services. Lately, the Scottish-Church College’s Students’ Union provided essentials such as oxygen cylinders, food, and medicine to the affected population.

Many local clubs have come forward to provide food to the people who have lost their daily wages/earnings. They have supported them with an arrangement of hospital beds, oxygen support, medicines, and even doctor facilities.

Corporate houses, for instance, India Tobacco Company Limited, the West Bengal Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation, and the International Institute of Hotel Management have set up Covid beds, free food supply, oxygen-supported isolation centres, and free online/telemedicine advisory services for

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hundreds of people undergoing self-quarantine.

NGOs like the Ramakrishna Mission have converted their headquarters in Kolkata into a Covid treatment facility with hundreds of oxygen-facilitated beds, doctors, medical attendants and free food with free treatment. Bharat Sevasram Sangha, another leading religious trust has also set up similar facilities to serve the people.

The Kolkata Municipal Corporation is also on its toes. It is tirelessly serving the population in many ways, like inviting private hospitals of repute to convert sports stadiums, public buildings, schools, and colleges into Covid treatment centres.

It is providing free sanitising services to patients undergoing self-quarantine at home and establishing zone-wise Covid helpline call centres. There are regular public announcements by mobile vans on maintaining Covid-appropriate protocols. The Corporation is motivating the people to get vaccinated, and to keep the city clean and free of garbage.

I keep supporting the vulnerable by maintaining communication lines



It is in my habit to stand beside the poorest of the poor, with competent medical advice and prescribed medicines which are not always affordable to them.



between them and my doctor-friends. I also provide free-of-cost medical advice, treatment, and services. I am also regularly setting up the Arogya Setu App (developed by the Government of India to connect essential health services with the people of India. This is part of our combined efforts against Covid-19) for the less initiated and lesser-aware mobile phone users.

I serve them by processing appointments for vaccination and aiding them to reach those Covid-19 Vaccination Centres by handing them the travel fare.

It is in my habit to stand beside the poorest of the poor, with competent medical advice and prescribed medicines which are not always affordable to them.

I can proudly say that Kolkata has retained its duly earned distinction of being the 'City of Joy' till eternity, and till I am active, I will keep serving its people and preserve their joy.

The motto remains - Love All, Serve All and always remember 'JAH'.

Debasis Gupta is an Altruist, Environmentalist and Peace Evangelist from Kolkata



Dr. Nitin Kulkarni, IAS

Battling the Pandemic Successfully

We were still immersed in the decadal celebrations in January 2020 when news broke of a novel coronavirus infecting people in western countries. Three months later, on March 31, 2020, Jharkhand had its first positive case. Since then, news about the virus has become routine. Nothing else received more newspaper space and screen-time on television news channels than the death toll and distress this virus generated. This was a once-in-a-lifetime crisis that no one had experienced, barring a few motion-picture films.

Our healthcare machinery was not prepared to stand up to the onslaught of the invisible enemy, nor was it ever designed with such intention. There were no standard treatments, established protocols or methods to thwart the spread of the infection.

However, with concerted efforts, we learned more about the virus and managed to slowly put a leash on it. Things started to fall in place and the first phase of the disease was considered to have almost died down by October-November 2020.

The curve of new cases was flattening, and frontline workers were able to catch their breath for the first time in a few months. However, this respite proved to be short-lived, only two months later, the second wave hit the world like a tsunami.

The second wave was more lethal, and countries like India with limited healthcare delivery resources bore the brunt. It is common knowledge that our healthcare system is not structured to handle a health crisis of such magnitude. But, it stood up to the challenge and tried its best to save as many lives as possible.



It is common knowledge that our healthcare system is not structured to handle a health crisis of such magnitude. **But it stood up to the challenge and tried its best to save as many lives as possible.**



As part of the combined efforts of frontline workers, healthcare institutions and State machinery, additional beds were put in place, oxygen supplies were augmented, and a new ICU was set up in record time.

A ray of hope emerged when the vaccination drive against COVID-19 started. Now as the second wave has almost ebbed away, and lockdown restrictions are being lifted by the government, people are trying to reboot their lives and livelihoods. Thousands of families lost their bread earners, people who they loved, and thousands of children were orphaned. But as unfortunate as it is, life will go on and we must move on with it.

The onset of the pandemic had the entire administrative and social machinery pressed into action to provide relief to the affected by all possible means. Civil society organisations, NGOs and many responsible individuals stepped in to offer succour to the vulnerable sections. Besides challenging and sometimes tripping the healthcare machinery, the pandemic metastasised into other aspects of the society too.



During the pandemic, a large section of people was searching for food for survival after the loss of their livelihoods. While governments organised community kitchens, the contribution of non-State entities must be acknowledged. Many social groups supplied free rations and food packets and manned up the responsibility to hospitalise the elderly who were bereft of any support otherwise. We saw a lot of community participation in the cremation of the dead, which was an unprecedented predicament as family members were unable to do so due to lack of resources and the spread of the infection.

In Jharkhand, the local Sakhi Mandals (which are organized as SHGs) operated kitchens for the rural migrant workers who returned to their villages in vast numbers. For them, special arrangements had to be made for catering to their needs. This too was achieved through effective coordination between the government and social groups. It was only due to the collaborative participation from all segments the State could manage about eight lakh migrants during the peak of the pandemic.

In rural areas, the grassroots healthcare workers, called Sahiyas, was the backbone of healthcare delivery. They went house-to-house to collect data about people showing symptoms



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and helped them to get tested and subsequently isolated if found positive.

It was because of their untiring efforts the virus did not explode in the villages during both the waves. Visiting houses in far-flung areas and ensuring that frontline workers kept themselves uninfected was a challenge for the healthcare delivery system. Fortunately, it was achieved, to a large extent.

A major task for the State government was to ensure adequate supplies of medical material and infrastructural arrangements at every level, including up to the health sub-centre.

The battle against the pandemic saw many corporate entities like Tata Steel siding with the State to provide aid in the form of equipment and material support, especially PPE kits, oxymeters, all of which eased the situation. Arranging for adequate stocking of essential drugs was another major challenge for the health department as most of the drugs were in short supply. However, with proper coordination at various levels, this too was managed effectively.

Owing to the timely action by the State which had no facility for Covid-19 testing in March 2020, seven RTPCR and



TRUNET labs with a capacity of 20,000 tests per day were set up within four months of the pandemic. Healthcare helplines like '104' and '108' (ambulance services) were fully utilised and promptly served the people in crisis.

One of the most daunting hardships was to control the spread of fake and false information on social media. In the wake of the pandemic, Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the WHO, stated, "We are not just fighting an epidemic; we are fighting an infodemic. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than the virus."

The Supreme Court of India, while passing an order, quoted Dr. Tedros and observed that the mass migration of labourers working in cities (during the pandemic) was triggered by panic created by fake news that the lock-down would continue for months. Naturally, controlling this 'infodemic' is a time-sensitive issue. Because of this, we need to be aware and be able to differentiate true claims from untrue ones. To tackle it, it was ensured that these so-called expert opinions were first verified before relying on them.

The mental and social vacuum the pandemic is going to leave behind will require the government, social groups, schools, religious organisations, and spiritual leaders to join hands in the post-pandemic era to ensure the human race comes out of this pandemic with less physical and mental damage.

Another issue posed by the pandemic was the impact on the mental well-being of the people. This area deserves more attention from State and non-State potencies. Loss of wages and employment, death of near and dear ones in the family, and isolation from society have cast a long-lasting impact. In respect of children, they have been deprived of contact with their peers, with limited social interactions and outdoor games.

The mental and social vacuum the pandemic is going to leave behind will require the government, social groups, schools, religious organisations, and spiritual leaders to join hands in the post-pandemic era to ensure the human race comes out of this pandemic with less physical and mental damage.

The author was formerly Health Secretary, Government of Jharkhand and is presently the Divisional Commissioner, South Chota Nagpur Division.



Joe Scaria
scaria.joe@gmail.com

Kottayam, Kerala - Serene Spot amid Covid Storm

In these distressing days of the pandemic who needs more bad news? So, it is appropriate to take a look at one sunny spot in the country – a district that seems to be serene and tranquil in the middle of the Covid storm.

And that district, which seems to stand apart among India's 740-odd districts is Kottayam, Kerala the land of lakes, letters, and latex.

Lakes, like the majestic Vembanad Lake, which abuts the popular tourism destination of Kumarakom where India's Prime Ministers like Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh have holidayed. Letters? Oh, yes, Kottayam was India's first fully literate town, achieving the rare distinction in 1989.





Malarikkal, Kumarakom

And latex. Kerala is India's natural rubber capital and produces 85 per cent of the country's natural latex. And Kottayam happens to be Kerala's natural rubber capital with numerous plantations.

What has made Kottayam so special and tranquil in these difficult pandemic days? A combination of factors that I would like to collectively call societal collaboration.

The District Panchayat President, the District Collector, and the District Superintendent of Police are all women -- Nirmala Jimmy, M. Anjana and Shilpa Dyavaiah -- and they get along very well. And they have exhibited a sense of community, during the weeks, months, and now more than a year of Covid-induced hardships.

There have been numerous instances where individuals and organisations have stepped in to provide help to the local community.

To mention just a few: a group of youth in Kanjirapally decided to donate blood to the blood bank, before going for vaccinations. Because, they knew, post-vaccination, they would not be able to do so. And in

Changanassery, there is an ongoing 'rice kits challenge' started by a parents' organisation to collect as many rice kits as possible, to deliver to the needy.

And in Karukachal, Panchayat Member, Korason Zachariah and his son, Kevin K. Zachariah have offered their car free of cost to anyone who would like to go to the hospital or a quarantine centre. And guess what? A local youth, Aneesh Jacob, has offered to be the chauffeur free of cost.

And in Nerchapara near Erumely, two youths, Kacheriparambil Riyas and Thundathingal Reji are collecting grass for the cattle of a family, whose members have all been laid low by the virus. The best part, Riyas, and Reji are not even the afflicted family's neighbours. All of these gestures may be minor, but they give a major sense of community.

There are reports from different parts of the country about Covid patients' bodies being abandoned, even by family members. But not in Kottayam.



The District Panchayat President, the District Collector, and the District Superintendent of Police are all women - Nirmala Jimmy, M. Anjana and Shilpa Dyavaiah - and they get along very well. And they have increased a sense of community, during the weeks, months, and now more than a year of Covid-induced hardships.



When Mathrumala Karthyayani, a woman inmate of the Kooroppada Panchayat's shelter for orphans passed away recently at a hospital, the Panchayat President Sheila Cherian and her team collected the body and gave her a decent cremation. One hears of suspected Covid patients' bodies floating down rivers from Uttar Pradesh into Bihar, but you would not hear such a thing in Kottayam where even orphans are given a proper burial.

Literacy begets higher thoughts. And so, this week a 12-year-old boy, Unmesh Shaji from Koruthod created a sanitiser-dispensing robot, a useful gadget for our times.

Unmesh used parts of a toy car to keep the costs down and could make the robot for only Rs 1,600. At the start-up technology business incubation centre at the Amal Jyothi College of Engineering, not far from Unmesh's house, as many as 30 start-ups are working on ideas that can impact the district and the larger world outside.

Covid times have seen a jump in pet ownership and naturally more consultations at veterinary hospitals. Despite being fully stretched, the vet hospital at Kottayam has provided the best care it could to a pup Naani, which was put on a drip under a shady tree. And Naani seemed as composed and calm as Kottayam has been.

Fake news is a challenge during normal times. It's a monster during crisis times. When one Gopu Rajan spread a canard on social media, that as many as 15 people had died on a single day at the Kottayam General Hospital, the Crime Branch could arrest him in virtually no time. Perhaps Rajan was not aware that the district police chief is also a B.Tech in Electronics.

Anticipation is key to managing a crisis. While the rest of India, gasps for oxygen, the St. Thomas Hospital, Chethippuzha could make a video celebrating its robust oxygen availability. The senior facilities manager of the hospital, Joseph Varghese told me that the hospital had anticipated a large-scale requirement of oxygen when it went through the experience of the 2018 floods. So the hospital got an oxygen generator installed from the United States and now has sufficient supplies to meet the second wave of Covid.





CMS College, Kottayam

And there is a public oxygen parlour at Manarcad, making Kottayam look like an oxygen oasis in the country. Of course, Kottayam has been a front-runner for India, producing one of India's Presidents, K.R. Narayanan, a Supreme Court Chief Justice, K.G. Balakrishnan and even a Saint,



Of course, this is no time for Kottayam to be jubilant. And as soon as we get over this pandemic, you should come over to Kottayam, and enjoy the lotus fields of Malarikkal or cruise through the backwaters of Kumarakom or experience how latex is tapped from rubber trees.



Sister Alphonsa. And Kottayam had the CMS College in 1817, well before Mumbai had its first one, the Wilson College in 1832.

I asked the district police chief Shilpa Dyavaiah how it feels to be working as the district's first woman Police Superintendent. And she said, "It's a very nice place. People are highly educated and law-abiding. And whenever there is some problem, they will come forward to help. It is heartening to see a district where people are so well-behaved, educated and cooperative."

Of course, this is no time for Kottayam to be jubilant. And as soon as we get over this pandemic, you should come over to Kottayam, and enjoy the lotus fields of Malarikkal or cruise through the backwaters of Kumarakom or experience how latex is tapped from rubber trees.

This talk is dedicated to Kottayam's legendary nurse, Sister Helen Muttath who passed away at the age of 83 recently. Sister Helen had spent six decades in the nursing profession and 44 of them at a single hospital, the Mary Queen's Hospital in Kanjirapally.

Author: Former Senior Assistant Editor, The Economic Times

Promoting Vaccines among Tribals through Street Drama

Pax Lumina 2(4) / 2021 / 38-39

This is the story of Dayabai, a renowned social activist, working for the upliftment of the tribals in North India over the past 50 years. She communicates the message of the importance of vaccination against Covid 19 through the medium of street drama. The tribals in the interior village of Chinthwada District, Madhya Pradesh were, indeed, afraid of vaccination and were running away and hiding. This is natural for tribals because they were not familiar with modern medicine and vaccination. They only knew their herbal medicine.



The first wave of Covid did not affect the tribals of that region because of their strong immune system. However, the second wave affected them due to their participation in a few social functions in urban areas. It is in this context that the Health Inspector and the Block Coordinator requested Dayabai to create awareness among the tribals regarding the need for vaccination. First, she thought of giving a speech in public. On second thoughts, she decided to make use of the medium of street drama to drive home the message.

People of all ages thronged in large numbers to witness the drama. Dayabai presented the message effectively using their language and costumes which has been her lifestyle for several decades.



As a result of the drama, everyone gathered there became confident, their fear was gone and they enthusiastically decided to go for a vaccine. **As the drama was videographed by the Departments of Health and Education, the message was spread throughout the State. But the present problem is the shortage of vaccines.**



The drama started with the announcement: “Here is the good news: the vaccine has come. Now we can drive out the corona.” Then, she played out the role of a grandmother who regrets not taking her grandchild to the hospital for treating corona. The child had died of it. She admits that it happened due to her lack of awareness and education about the seriousness of the infectious disease. She also blamed the system and its structures for not imparting extension education. At last, she commits herself as a promoter of vaccines.

Next, she played the role of a health worker. She took up a magnifying glass and projected the contents of the spittle of a Covid patient as if there were germs and insects the size of a scorpion. Then, the impact of the vaccine was dramatically shown as a boxing match between the virus and the vaccine in which the latter is the winner.

After this, she invited a grandfather from among the crowd and showed the mark of the vaccine for smallpox on his shoulders which he had taken in his childhood. Dayabai attributed his health and long life to the vaccine he had taken. She also demonstrated before them, the need for using masks and sanitisers and how to use a towel in the absence of a mask.

As a result of the drama, everyone gathered there became confident, their fear was gone and they enthusiastically decided to go for a vaccine. As the drama was videographed by the Departments of Health and Education, the message was spread throughout the State. But the present problem is the shortage of vaccines. Currently, she has organised a new team for presenting this drama in marketplaces and streets.



Sourya
sourcasm@hotmail.com

People's Collective Strength during the Lockdown



Governments, the world over, fell far short of any such emancipatory vision. Survival was left to informal, often invisible, bonds of solidarity that exist between ordinary people. Yet, the pandemic briefly exposed how the foundation of a just society built on mutual respect, solidarity, and a commitment to liberation - not an individualistic competition and infinite greed - is not only possible but a necessity.

As the pandemic broke out in early 2020, the novelist Arundhati Roy described it as a 'portal'. She wrote that, like the Spanish Flu a century earlier, Covid-19 could be an opportunity to break with the past and imagine the world anew. We know that this has not happened (not yet at least).

As helpline operators for 'Migrant Workers Solidarity Network' (MWSN), providing transport and food-related emergency relief for stranded migrant workers during the first and second waves of the pandemic-induced lockdowns, we have witnessed the hesitancy to shake off the status quo even in the face of a world-historic crisis. The reported 1.14 crore migrant workers who instinctively

began walking home on hearing about the nationwide lockdown on March 23, 2020, reveals a much more long-standing state of urban precariousness. Lack of public housing, civic amenities, and job security as well as the cultural-political disenfranchisement of the migrant working class in host States have plagued those who were part of the rural exodus recorded post-1991.

Unlike earlier rounds of migration to industrial townships, these migrants have been left hanging around the edges of Indian cities by design for decades. The city is prevented from integrating them within it, despite them putting in the everyday, undervalued labour that sustains urban life today. The shock value of last year's migrant exodus briefly lifted them out of governmental statistical books into the media and judiciary's spotlight. But where have they gone since? The Union and State governments' lack of intervention has pushed them into debt and hunger, unable to pay rent in the face of historic unemployment and wage losses.

How have they survived, at all, in the face of State apathy? This deserves greater attention.

On the one hand, civil society initiatives have displayed unprecedented coordination to step up emergency relief efforts in the face of the crisis. For instance, it was a joint campaign by citizens' groups in New Delhi and a PIL in the Supreme Court which forced the government to begin non-PDS foodgrain distribution on a limited scale. (Migrant workers have been the largest beneficiary of this initiative as they do not possess PDS ration cards in the host States where they work.)

Similarly, trade unions banded together when the Karnataka government refused coverage to inter-state migrants under a relief package for workers in the so-called 'informal sector'. A meeting with the Labour Commissioner in Bengaluru was able to win some governmental concessions.





The pandemic briefly exposed how the foundation of a just society built on mutual respect, solidarity, and a commitment to liberation - not an individualistic competition and infinite greed - is not only possible but a necessity.



After Cyclone Yaas devastated Odisha and parts of West Bengal amidst the second wave of the pandemic, a coalition of workers, students and doctors' organisations stepped up to run community kitchens and provide cooked food. The Sundarbans, which experiences annual flooding because of the ecological crisis, has become a hub of climate-affected out-migration. Each of these instances show that collective efforts for social intervention as well as political change had a role to play in ameliorating the Covid-19 crisis. But this, too, is not the full picture,

Beyond the role of civil society, perhaps the greatest role was played by the organic bonds that exist among working people themselves. One has to take caution to not glorify this - the withdrawal of the State from its obligations has reinforced traditional bonds based on caste, kinship and language which often takes chauvinistic dimensions.

For example, job losses and lack of

cheap, formal credit have reinforced the hold of off-the-books money lenders on highly exploitative terms. However, it must be said that unspoken, invisible social bonds among the toiling and the oppressed masses also contain the seeds for imagining a more egalitarian way of organising society.

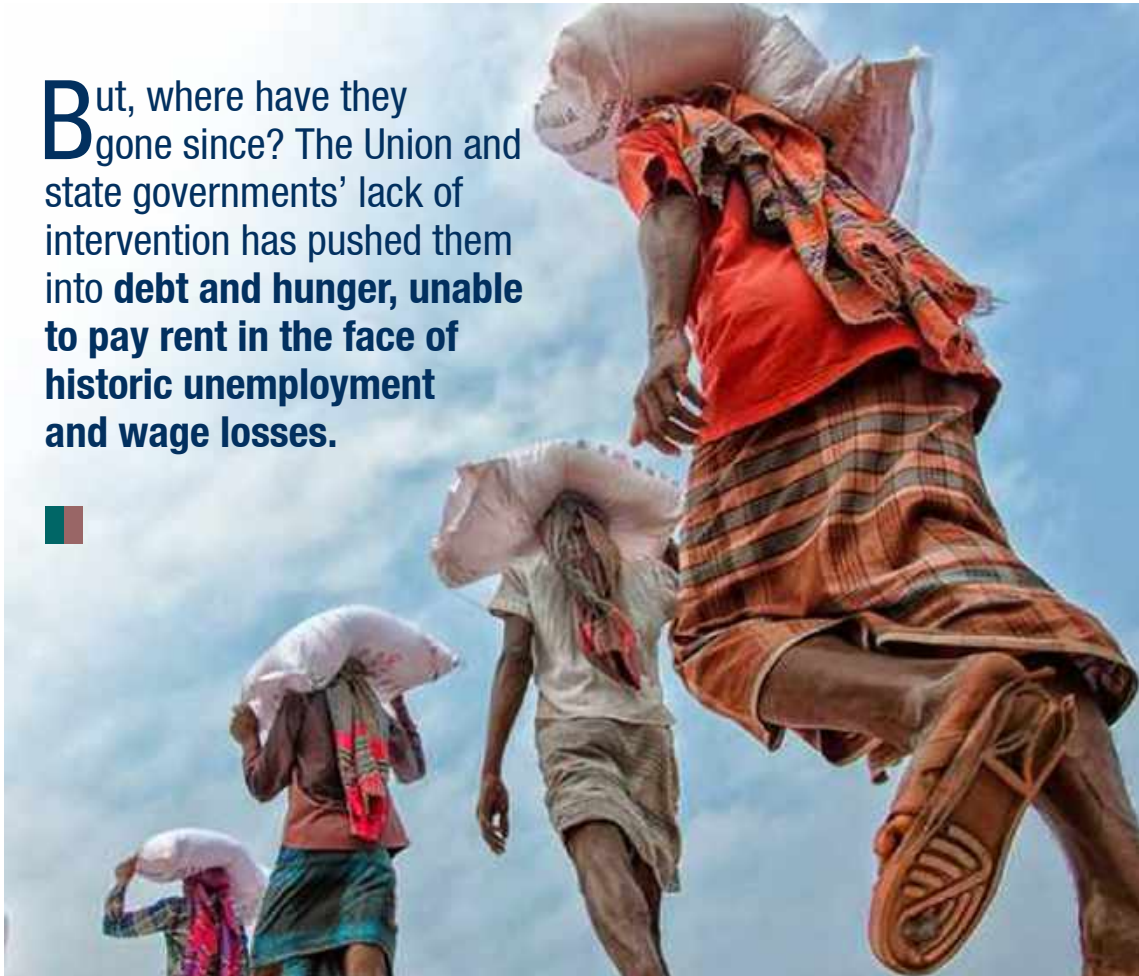
Take the case of Jyoti Kumari, a 15-year-old girl who took her ailing father on a cycle for 1,200 kilometres from Haryana to Bihar during last year's lockdown. While this was highlighted due to the gut-wrenching extent of deprivation that compels such an act, many such everyday sacrifices and heroism have been undertaken to stay afloat.

For instance, no civil society relief effort would have been possible without delivery channels imagined by working people themselves, despite the destitution brought about by the lockdown. To recount just one instance, an embroidery worker Harekrishna from Murshidabad who had received food support through MWSN's helpline would go on to arrange the distribution of ration kits to 250 families in his neighbourhood after returning home.

Many such ordinary Indians stepped up during the pandemic who went on to continue as social or political organisers even after lockdown. We have been in touch with several workers who have created new workers' organisations or women's groups and led schooling initiatives in their locality after the frail public education system was wrecked by the 'digital divide' during the previous year. More such stories are documented in our report, 'Citizens and the Sovereign: Stories from the largest human exodus in contemporary Indian history' (see Chapter 4, page 32).

Working people's collectivities also

But, where have they gone since? The Union and state governments' lack of intervention has pushed them into **debt and hunger, unable to pay rent in the face of historic unemployment and wage losses.**



challenged the denial of agency by employers and the state. For instance, it is barely publicised that the Shramik Special trains announced by the Union government after the initial migrant exodus perhaps would have been further delayed, if not cancelled altogether, had it not been for dispersed protests around this demand.

In Karnataka, the Chief Minister reversed his decision to ban inter-state travel under pressure from industry lobby groups after collective action by workers. An internal report by the Union Home Ministry, quoted by *The Hindu*, emphasised that 'labour unrest may go out of hand if trains are not restarted'. MWSN has mapped 158 instances of workers' resistance, involving over a lakh people, which broke out during the first nationwide lockdown. Often these were sporadic outbursts with

a very rudimentary organisation, but their very existence is remarkable given the magnitude of adversity witnessed during the lockdown.

Looking back at this crisis, as its disastrous consequences for the economy and society still pan out before us, what stands exposed is the need for people's solidarities to create long-lasting structural change. The urgency of why power, which has left the hands of those who make the world, must be won back by organised mass upheavals can no longer be ignored.

(Sourya studied Sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and is associated with the 'Migrant Workers' Solidarity Network')

Migration has been Good for Humanity

Dr. S. Irudaya Rajan is the Chairman of the International Institute of Migration and Development, Thiruvananthapuram. He was formerly a Professor at the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram. Currently, he works closely with the Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India, the Department of Non-Resident Keralite Affairs, Govt. of Kerala and the Kerala State Planning Board.

? What is 'migration' and who is a 'migrant'?

- Migration is a phenomenon, a process. Migrants are the people who live in a place where they were not born. That is the simplest and the best definition. Another way of defining a migrant is if your current place of residence is different from your last place of residence. Migrants are different from the diaspora. If you are an Indian citizen and you retain your Indian citizenship, then

you are technically an emigrant. On the other hand, if that person renounces his Indian citizenship, he becomes a member of the Indian diaspora. In such instances, we see a movement from 'emigrant' to 'diaspora'. Also, if you move and work or settle within the country, you are called an internal migrant.

Migration is also, in a sense, an awakening. You learn many things when you go out of your village.

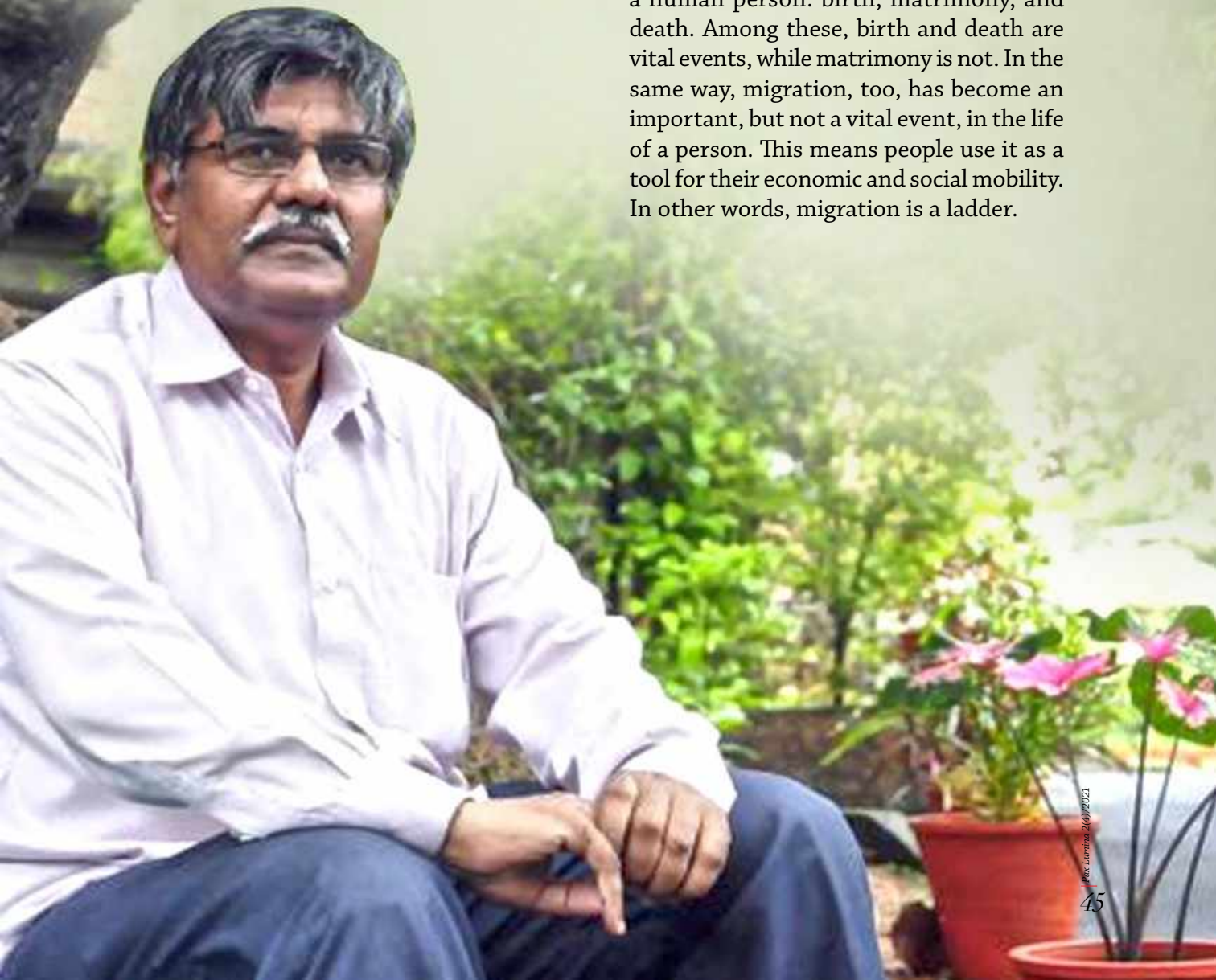
Migration has been good for humanity.



I would say migration had been there even before Covid, but what Covid triggered was not a migration crisis. Covid created a health crisis. It was we who created the migration crisis. Our flawed policies converted this health crisis into a migration crisis. **The underlying logic behind the lockdown was that by controlling the movement of people, we could curb the spread of the virus.**

? We have instances of mass migration in human history. Given the close connection between humanity and migration, is migration inevitable for human survival?

People move in search of a livelihood. It is a quintessentially human trait, because we are not satisfied with what we have. Therefore, for most people, migration is something by which they can attain something in life. It is, for them, a vehicle to prosperity. There are three main events in the life of a human person: birth, matrimony, and death. Among these, birth and death are vital events, while matrimony is not. In the same way, migration, too, has become an important, but not a vital event, in the life of a person. This means people use it as a tool for their economic and social mobility. In other words, migration is a ladder.



? Do you think it took the Covid-19 pandemic for the people to realise the plight of the migrants?

I would like to look at it from a different perspective. If you look at history, from the 1900s till the 1950s, every country in the world wanted to reduce mortality. For instance, the average life expectancy of an Indian in 1850 was 20 years. However, from the 1950s till 2000, they wanted to reduce fertility. China's 'one-child policy' is a fall-out of this effort.

India announced family planning as a policy in the First Five Year Plan of 1951. These attempts have been successful to a large extent. However, policymakers overlooked the movement of people as they were busy with managing mortality and fertility; all the while migration continued unabated. Thus, in the last 20-25 years, migration evolved as a major political issue. Before that, migrants remained hidden from public perception.

So, I would say migration had been there even before Covid, but what Covid triggered was not a migration crisis. Covid created a health crisis. It was we who created the migration crisis. Our flawed policies converted this health crisis into a migration crisis.



Ever since the onset of the pandemic, there has been a tussle between saving 'lives' or 'livelihood'. I have always called for 'unlocking' because my concern has been livelihoods while doctors were concerned about lives.

The underlying logic behind the lockdown was that by controlling the movement of people, we could curb the spread of the virus. The government, apparently, did not know that so many people were on the move. As a result, 200 million people were affected by the poorly-implemented lockdown.

If migration is so vital for earning a livelihood, how and why does it become a highly debated political issue? Are not the opposition to refugees and asylum seekers in different parts of the world and the recently enacted Citizen Amendment Act (CAA) a fallout of migration becoming a political issue?

As I told you earlier, migration became a major issue only in the last 25 years. The concept of a 'border' and controlling migration is comparatively a recent phenomenon. I would say border control measures have fuelled antagonism towards the movement of migrants to a large extent. If you look at history, another major factor that contributed towards 'border consciousness' is documents like the passport and Aadhar. These are the means of identifying the so-called 'authentic citizens'.

The National Register of Citizens and CAA can also be viewed from this perspective. Let us take the case of Sri Lankan refugees. India has a population of 1.3 billion. What difference does it make to the Indian population if some 40,000 Sri Lankan refugees are given asylum? It is not that we do not have enough food and other resources. We do have, but they are not distributed equitably.

The root cause of most of the conflicts in the world say, for example, between Israel and Palestine, Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka is migration. Migration does not cause a problem; it is when the governments



The first step is to recognise their existence. **Unless you identify a problem, you cannot solve it.**

get embroiled in the movement of people that conflicts arise. This can be called the politics of migration. In other words, to a large extent, politics is shaped by migration.

? You were a member of the Task Force constituted by the Government of Kerala to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. Does the government pay heed to the advice of experts from diverse fields?

Ever since the onset of the pandemic, there has been a tussle between saving 'lives' or 'livelihood'. I have always called for 'unlocking' because my concern has been livelihoods while doctors were concerned about lives. In the first wave, the prime concern was livelihoods. That is why we had the migrant crisis. In the second wave, we were concerned with lives as people died in large numbers. As a result, discussions in the mainstream media centred only around saving lives, while the livelihood issue took a backseat. That is why people like me raise the issue of migration and livelihood continuously, to highlight their ordeals.

? Do you know of any NGOs or persons who went out of their way to help the migrants in distress during the lockdown?

Many persons and NGOs helped the migrants. In fact, Covid has opened up everybody's heart. Everyone was helping one another

in some way or the other. I would say Covid-19 has done two good things. Firstly, it brought out the plight of migrants to the forefront. People recognised the existence of migrants. Also, people, especially in the cities, realised they could not live without them. People felt that migrants do exist. Secondly, it treated everyone equally, regardless of one's power and influence. This points to some 'big power' which is beyond our control. Nations fought a war against an invisible enemy.

? Do you expect any major change in the government policies towards migrants?

To be frank, I do not expect any changes. It is not that we do not have schemes aimed at the welfare of migrants and other less privileged groups. We do have the infrastructure, but what we need is to strengthen the existing infrastructure. For example, one of the reasons for the success of the distribution of free food kits by the Kerala government is the robust public distribution system. In the same way, we must strengthen the existing framework and schemes to help the migrants.

? Do you have any suggestions for the government and for the people to improve the situation of the migrants?

The first step is to recognise their existence. Unless you identify a problem, you cannot solve it. Therefore, firstly, we must recognise them and their plight. The recognition of the problem will bring about constructive policies for the welfare of migrants in the long run.

Interviewer: Ivin Tomy, SJ, Student of Masters in Public Policy, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai



Prof. Shreyashi Chakraborty

Pax Lumina 2(4) / 2021 / 48-50

The Pandemic: An Opportunity to Relook Peace within Ourselves

As I reflect on the word peace, the first thing which comes to my mind is peace in the community or in the country. It is of no significance unless a person is at peace with himself or herself. And the Covid-19 pandemic has unsettled the equanimity, calmness, contentedness in most of us.

One significant reason is the uncertainty related to how the disease spreads, how it impacts the human body both in the short and long term, the effective treatment protocols, when will the vaccines be delivered, and whether they will be effective. But unfortunately, the list does not seem to end, and it has compelled us to question our way of life and our perception of reality.

Questioning the reality could be a fulfilling and learning experience. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has disturbed the fundamental freedoms of life, which most of us took for granted. We could step out of our homes for work, food, or study, and we could interact with people in physical settings and fulfil the innate desire for human connection. With such freedoms curtailed, most of us struggled within as we could not decide what is better for us, which source of information is reliable for us and whom should we reach out for help or to whom should we offer our support.

With so much confusion, endless questions and disturbing images and stories in the media, we tried our best not to give up hope. As Neurologist Victor Frankl said, "Everything can



Questioning the reality could be a fulfilling and learning experience. However, **the Covid-19 pandemic has disturbed the fundamental freedoms of life, which most of us took for granted.**



be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Many unscrupulous people choose their way and are trying to exploit the Covid-19 pandemic for their material and temporal gains like extorting money in the name of providing oxygen cylinders, black-marketing, and adulterating life-saving medicines. Yet, there are our front-line health workers, police officers, mental health workers and citizens who choose to offer support either from the safety of their homes or working on the ground to provide relief to society's vulnerable and sick people.

Weren't all these Samaritans confronting conflicting questions within themselves? My guess is they would have encountered and answered those questions to themselves and their beloved family members. For some, it is a call of duty, and yet for others, it is only an act in



good faith. Unless we are at peace with ourselves, we are unlikely to bring peace to our communities or countries.

One of my colleagues, who lives with his wife and a four-year-old daughter, supports the State in managing the Covid-19 pandemic in East Singhbhum, Jharkhand. He is also the only resource person for any Covid-related question or support service for almost 400 people in our small institutional campus. He is doing all this beyond his other teaching, research and institutional work commitments.

However, the other day, when I was talking to him, he did express concern that his research has taken a backseat and was apprehensive about his employability in the institution or the academic job market for long. I couldn't say any comforting words as I am in no position of authority to provide him with some certainty in future. Then I realised, such Samaritans are also not at complete peace within themselves. They are also confronting different questions, which are equally troublesome.



Dr. K. K. Aggarwal

Running away from any questions within ourselves or questions of our beloved family members would not help anyone. A doctor knows that rest is essential for the body to generate enough antibodies to fight the virus. Some doctors choose not to rest after a tiring day of treating patients and answering questions through phone or email.

They have decided to spend time on social media to block misinformation campaigns or to make people a little more knowledgeable. They have weighed the importance of their life vis-a-vis the lives of probably thousands that could be saved with that essential piece of knowledge.

For example, Dr. K. K. Aggarwal, renowned cardiologist, who breathed his last on 18th May, 2021, because of Covid-19, did not stop making educational videos during his suffering. There are estimates that his videos would have touched at least 100 million people and saved many lives.

In our fight against the virus, we all are waging little wars within ourselves for achieving clarity and peace. With time and patience, we get access to more information and learn from one another's experiences, especially when every small action or inaction could lead to a fatality.

In our fight against the virus, we all are waging little wars within ourselves for achieving clarity and peace. With time and patience, we get access to more information and learn from one another's experiences, especially when every small action or inaction could lead to a fatality.

We are at a time where information is readily available compared to the Spanish flu pandemic, though verifying the information, and discarding the noise becomes a challenge at times. Equipped with the relevant and correct information, we can shift our focus to a different set of questions that explore how to work collaboratively with front-line workers, the State, and citizens at large.

Unfortunately, most of them did not have the freedom to answer complex questions, but we have pinned our hope of survival on them. However, we can exercise our freedom to choose the questions and their answers through our response to the pandemic, which brings peace within and strengthens our effort to work in sync with our Covid warriors to achieve peace at large.

Prof. Shreyashi Chakraborty is currently the Chairperson of the XLRI Centre for Gender Equality and Inclusive Leadership, XLRI-Delhi.



Shiv Visvanathan
svcsds@gmail.com

WE NEED A GOODNESS THAT CAN OUTTHINK EVIL

Pax Lumina 2(4) / 2021 / 51-54



Over the last few decades, I have been studying disasters and dictatorships and I am sensing that goodness is turning ironic. Take democracy, for example. As a majoritarian democracy, it is hypocrisy legitimising violence in terms of number.

I saw Bhopal turn into an act of cynicism as it peddled away from the suffering of thousands for a compensatory pittance. Who remembers Bhopal today? The Gujarat

2002 riots legitimised violence as a mode of consumption where you treat murder as a celebration of the self.

The Covid crisis is no different. I admit there are NGOs working, and Sikh 'langars' displaying the usual care and competence but there is little display of goodness.


I am not talking in a demographic sense; I am also talking about the quality of goodness especially in an age where social distancing is seen as an act of goodness. We need a more inventive, experimental idea of goodness. Not the narrow economics of social work, a donation here, a payment there.

We need goodness that has every day, an epic quality. Goodness, that can outthink evil. I am tired of goodness that sounds correct, and speaks like a vacuous piece of etiquette. The other day, I asked myself: how would Gandhi combat the concentration camps and the genocides of today? How does the 'satyagrahi' challenge the world today?


I am all for building on the optimism and generosity one sees occasionally in the pandemic. Goodness must rethink itself as ethics and theology. I do not see that happening.

I realise I am talking to myself as much as to you. How does goodness recreate itself? I do not think this is a cynical exercise. Gandhi had to redefine goodness, rethink ethics, and relink it to politics to fight the imperium.

Let's start with the global level. The Covid would have been a good time to bring the planetary as visualised by Jim Lovelock and Lynn Margolis to challenge the idea of the globe which is inflated with ego to a different level of selfishness. Goodness needs new ideas beyond Sustainable Development Goals. The Covid at India's global level did not produce the courage of CIPLA during the AIDS era.



We need goodness that has every day, an epic quality. Goodness, that can outthink evil. I am tired of goodness that sounds correct, and speaks like a vacuous piece of etiquette.



The Poonawallas are not as convincing as the CIPLA boss who had the guts to call a spade a shovel. Pandemic goodness at this level would have suggested that we secede from Intellectual Property Rights, at least on medicines or in emergencies. The Salt March today should have been a medical march of vaccine-sharing, truth-telling and science.

Instead, Modi and his gang had converted it into an Olympiad of death, the lower the casualty the higher your developmental index. We did not cheat death; we created a certain vision about it. Death as mourning lost its meaning at the hands of the spin doctors of exponentialism.

This is the time the Science Academy should have rewritten their rudimentary ethics and made the dissenting scientists, ethical and epistemic exemplars of a new world. Ethics must rewrite a new relation between epistemology and science. What is the ethics of risk, complexity, and uncertainty in a pandemic regime?

Ethics has to reinvent itself at the individual and the collective level as a different imagination. It's not an old habit. Character building was the first step but now the character has to build a different type of goodness.



Think of a powerful possibility. South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu used the Truth Commission (TRC), the idea of 'ubuntu' (seeing the humanity in others) to rethink violence and to give forgiveness a new sense of music. What words, concepts, cosmologies do we have to create a parallel exercise based on faith and optimism? I spent months in South Africa reading and listening to the TRC. The Commission was the greatest

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This is the time the Science Academy should have rewritten their rudimentary ethics and made the dissenting scientists, ethical and epistemic exemplars of a new world. **Ethics must rewrite a new relation between epistemology and science.**

■

invention of the new satyagraha. How do we create an equivalent, where goodness begins with generosity and truth-telling and then confronts the need for justice?

Think of words. We use the word obsolescence to eliminate people, knowledge and cultures. How does goodness rewrite obsolescence? This is a problem that has haunted the national movement. Historian Anand Coomaraswamy felt that the museums were built of death and formaldehyde and that the national movement should have been at war against the museum. This regime thinks of the informal economy as obsolescent. How do we create a political and moral economy and a theory of cognition which redeems the informal economy? How do we fight obsolescence when we do not even know how to mourn it? Our sense of old age added layers to obsolescence during the Covid.

Whenever I think of a movement, I think of the Bhakti movement because of its simplicity of faith and belief. One needs a similar sense of faith and belief in ethics and science. We have to restore the playfulness of science in celebration of the dreams of childhood. The more we think of science as big science, the less sense of ethics it has.

Why are there so few questions about ethics and science and medicine during the Covid period? We had the Pugwash movement, to fight the bomb, can we rewrite it to help? Anyway, it is time to invent a new Pugwash for science where ethics redefines the way we do epistemology. How do we teach our children to do a different science?

An IIT engineer does not pursue truth. He pursues the correct answer in a fabricated entrance exam which we celebrate as a national ritual. Forget Pagan rituals, it is the scientific rituals that are bloody today. How do we rescue our children from being Lemmings to the world and return them to the playfulness of a J.C. Bose or a K.S. Krishnan to science?



Lastly, we should return to storytelling. **Tell old-fashioned stories about the new ethics of goodness, dreaming new forms of goodness, celebrating exemplars, sense of joy and laughter in goodness.**



Years ago, the philosopher Raimundo Panikkar was generous enough to give me time. Panikkar talked of dialogue as the pilgrimage of differences, where the self explores the other to understand itself. How do the university and the centre for ethics conduct the three great dialogues of today? The dialogue of religions, civilisations and disciplines.

All three include a dialogue of new cognitive ethics. We have to return to civilisations themselves to do that. I heard that author Ivan Illich and Panikkar spent a lot of time in Banaras talking to each other. Imagine one eavesdropping on the conversation. What would it tell us about the ethics of pandemics, including the pandemic called development?

Part of me inevitably goes back to school and childhood as most of it was spent outside the class. How do we reinvent childhood as a prelude to citizenship? How do we show a child how to be responsible for diversity and elaborate plurality?

I remember a suggestion about treating goodness as a craft. The idea was that every child in school should do three things: save

a dying craft, speak a disappearing language or song, and protect a dying species. Every child becomes a trustee of a form of life, a way of living and livelihood which says, 'I care, therefore, I am'.

Lastly, we should return to storytelling. Tell old-fashioned stories about the new ethics of goodness, dreaming new forms of goodness, celebrating exemplars, sense of joy and laughter in goodness. We have to exorcise the idiocy of the pandemic and create a sense of ethical repair.

It's time to begin again.

I finished this essay sometime last week. Yesterday I got a phone call from a friend who is a professor of literature. He lost his wife a fortnight ago and was afraid to go home. "How does one begin again? This Covid even deprives you of the languages of mourning." What he said was poetic.

I have rearranged the conversation.

We laughed at yesterday's plague
Tell it claimed today's science
And bowdlerised spirituality,
Turned ethics
Into a Bible
Without a good Samaritan
Today's ethics won't do.

We have to invent new creation myths
Summon poetry;
Call Blake and Tutu,
To heal the world.

New Constitutions of pain
Are born every day,
New furniture of loneliness
Covid shines bright,
As a virus becomes a shiny Star.

(The author is a Professor at O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana & Academician associated with COMPOST HEAP, a network pursuing Alternative Imaginations)





International



We need citizens of the world to mobilize again. We need out-of-the-box thinking, and using all means available. Together, we'll overcome this pandemic, prepare to face future ones, reduce the impact on the vulnerable and address root causes.

- Ursula von der Leyen,
President of the
European Commission



K.P. Fabian
kpfabian@hotmail.com

THE PANDEMIC AND THE HUMAN RESPONSE

Pax Lumina 2(4) / 2021 / 56-60





“This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

- William Shakespeare, Hamlet

As we contemplate the human condition in the context of the raging pandemic with its grim toll of over 40 Lakhs deaths - the official count that is likely to be grossly inaccurate - with the daily toll running at 10,000 and above, it is difficult not to raise a few questions.

Was the Pandemic Preventable?

It could have been, and it should have been prevented.

When instances of pneumonia, of unknown etiology, occurred in Wuhan in December 2019, or even earlier, a doctor, Li Wenliang,³⁴ raised the alarm in social media. The mayor, Zhou Xianwang,⁵⁷ rebuked and silenced the doctor.

The mayor had plans for celebrating the Lunar New Year on January 18, 2020, with a banquet for 40,000 families. Obviously, Zhou was determined to go ahead with his plans. Any talk of pneumonia should not come in the way. The banquet was held, and the virus went viral.



We conclude that if the mayor of Wuhan and others, including President Xi Jinping, had acted responsibly the January 18 banquet could have been prevented.

The WHO moved at a pace out-snailing the snail and declared a pandemic only on March 11, 2020, after 4291 deaths, and 118,000 infections in 114 countries.

Did the Nations Help One Another?

Yes, but not too soon. And as of now, it remains half-hearted.

When Italy, the worst affected in the European Union (EU), sought medical equipment and financial support, the EU took too long to respond. It shows that even among the rich countries there was no sense of solidarity.

There is even less solidarity on the global plane. The rich North has been slow in coming to the aid of the poor South.

The UN General Assembly held a special session only in the first week of December 2020, after more than 1.3 million people had died.

Coming to specific assistance from the rich North to the poor South, we are witnessing some governments attaching more importance to supporting the big pharmas' boundless greed for profit rather than the need to act with a sense of urgency to arrest the pandemic.

India and South Africa put up a proposal at the World Trade Organisation to suspend the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) over vaccines and other items relating to Covid-19. The proposal was made in December, 2020. It is still hanging fire as the rich North, compelled by the big pharma have opposed it.

The world needs 11 billion doses of vaccine. The G-7 club of the rich and the powerful has promised to give away only 1 billion.

The North, with a quarter of the world population, has practically grabbed the lion's share. Specifically, Canada, Australia, the US, and the EU, have almost doubled the stock they need, reminding one of Charles Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge.

If it is business as usual, Africa with 1.3 billion people, where the species 'homo sapiens' originated, will be woefully short of vaccine doses.

How did Some Countries Address the Crisis?

We start with the US, the world's richest democracy. On January 28, last year, President Donald Trump was briefed by his national security team of the seriousness of the emerging pandemic. He chose to downplay it and dismissed it as common flu. The grim toll of his folly was 400,000 deaths till he left office in January, 2021. The toll in the US has now exceeded 600,000.

The next is Brazil with a toll of 509,000, and counting, with President Jair

Bolsonaro refusing to wear a mask till ordered by the court. He encouraged reckless behaviour and the disease spread. As the magazine, 'Scientific American' put it, Brazil's pandemic is a 'Biological Fukushima' that threatens the planet. Brazil witnessed several super-spreader events including the Carnival.

The UK witnessed a series of policy U-turns by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, with the grim toll of 127,782 as on June 2, 2021. But, there have been no new deaths since then.

China, where the virus originated, whether from the wet market or the Virology Institute in Wuhan, has been



An emergency requires out-of-the-box thinking and risk-taking. **At times in life, not taking a risk can be riskier.**





the most successful major country in dealing with the pandemic, with a comparatively low death toll of 4634. Even in terms of infection, it has a low figure of 91,693.

How has India Handled the Crisis?

India is facing one of the worst scenarios. The official death toll is 393,000. But credible reports of deliberate undercounting in some States and the fact that the country lacks a proper system of registering deaths would indicate that the actual toll is likely to be much higher.

It is painfully evident that India could have handled the crisis better. The first case was detected in Kerala on January 31, 2020. It was a student who had returned from China. Kerala's Minister of Health Shailaja had already constituted a high-level committee by then.

Unfortunately, the Union Government was slow to wake up. There was a lamentable absence of scientific temper. The first lockdown abruptly announced in March, 2020, praised by some as the greatest lockdown in history, was an

avoidable self-inflicted disaster. The government did not bother to think of the millions of inter-State migrant labour. Bereft of work and wages, they left the metros to go back to their villages, some even walking 1000 kms. Sadly, and predictably, the virus spread.

At present, India is doing better. But the road ahead is long and hard.

The Lessons to be Learnt

It is rather foolhardy to list lessons as the only lesson from history is that man rarely learns any.

Let us list what could have been done at the international level:

- The U.N. Secretary General could have convened a virtual summit as soon as the pandemic was declared in March, 2020.
- The Surgeon General could have invited the big pharma and a few eminent philanthropists such as Bill Gates and Azim Premji for the same meeting.
- The World Bank, the IMF, and other banks such as the Asian Development Bank should also have been invited.

- The big pharma should have been asked about their ideas about the vaccines and the return they wanted for the investment they have made.
- The SG should have made a public appeal to the governments in the North, the World Bank and other banks, and the great philanthropists to meet the demand of big pharma, not necessarily in full measure.

It might be argued that President Trump might not have agreed to any such summit. My answer is that he would have been compelled to attend it for fear of being isolated.

An emergency requires out-of-the-box thinking and risk-taking. At times in life, not taking a risk can be riskier.

- It is a pity that with all the scientific talent at our disposal we still do not know how the virus originated and



Dear reader, despite the encircling darkness, let us recall the thousands of men and women, the NGOs, and the Church, **all inspired by the spirit of the Good Samaritan, who have come to the succour of the fallen sisters and brothers.**

spread. China could have been less opaque and more honest.

- With \$60 billion, the humanity at large can be vaccinated. The global economy lost over \$3.9 trillion owing to the virus and stands to lose more in the years to come unless the vaccination is done in the North and the South. Why not spend the modest sum of \$60 billion and forestall the loss 100 times bigger? Where is the homo economicus?

Dear reader, despite the encircling darkness, let us recall the thousands of men and women, the NGOs, and the Church, all inspired by the spirit of the Good Samaritan, who have come to the succour of the fallen sisters and brothers.

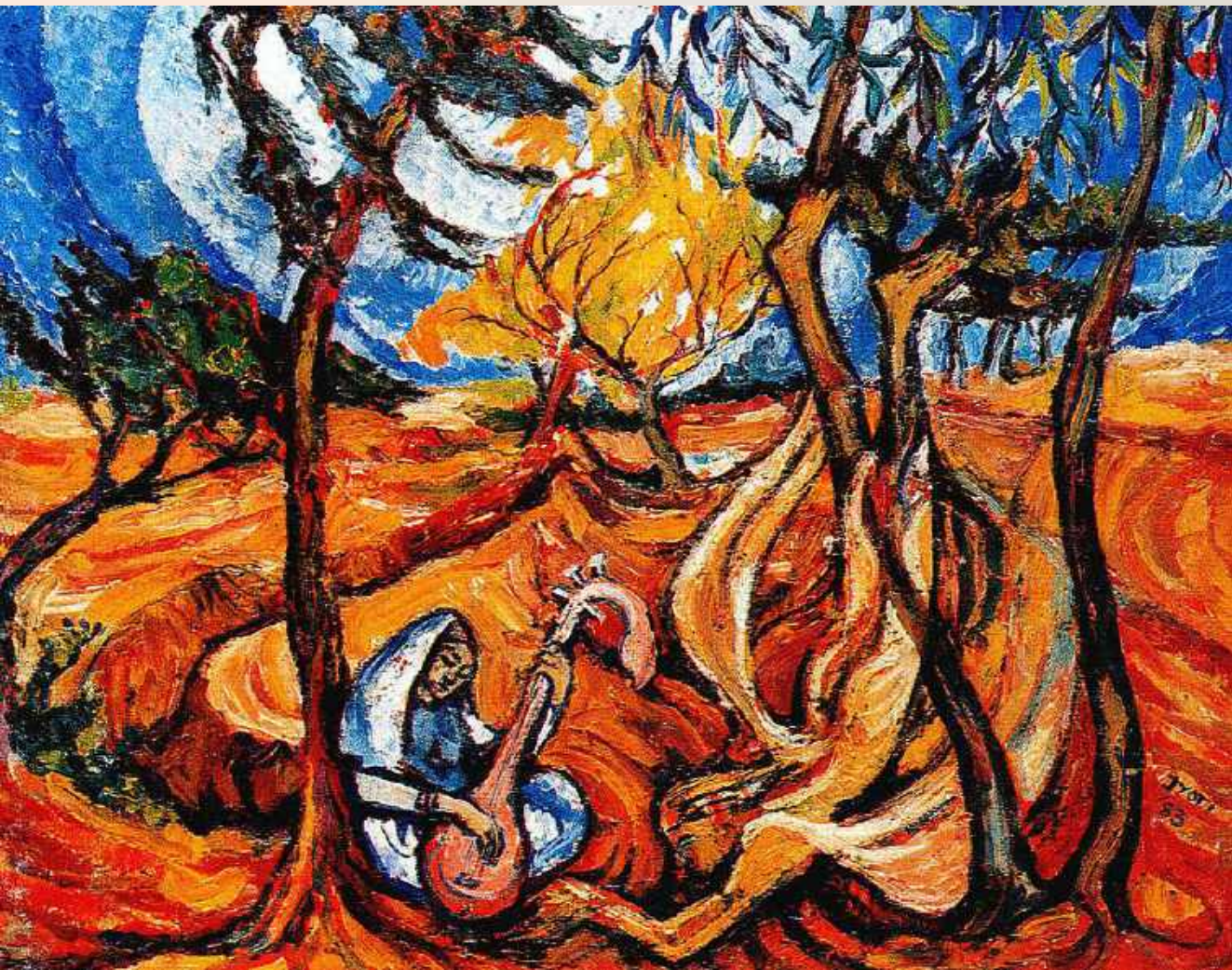
Let us pray to the Almighty to impart wisdom to our fellow human beings who hold temporal power.

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



C.F. John
cfjohn23@gmail.com

Art, Identity, Spirituality – Transcultural Questions in Jyoti Sahi's Paintings





At a time when the world is shrinking for many to a narrow sectarian view of their communities, learning, understanding, appreciating, appropriating and celebrating a rich world of differences is increasingly becoming a matter of caution and anxiety for artists and seekers of truth and beauty.



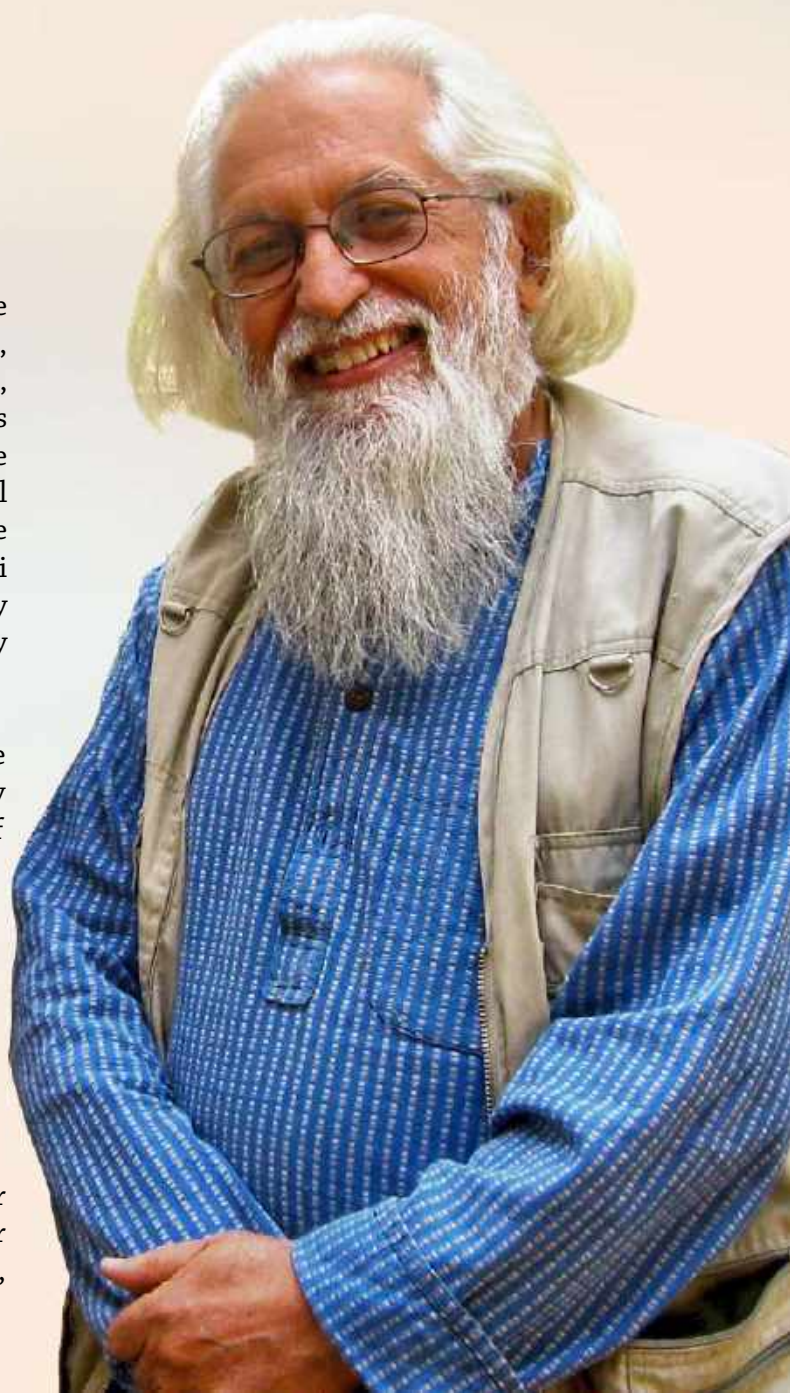
An image of the Trimurti can be placed in restaurants, buses, airports and shopping malls, but what would happen if it is placed in a church? A couple of cases were filed in the 1980s against the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC), Bangalore for placing a Trimurti image in a church. The cases were filed by a Christian as well as a Hindu (apparently on the insistence of the same Christian).

The Christian filed the case because he feared that his faith was being affected by such a move. And the Hindu filed out of a concern that Hindu symbols had been appropriated by another community. When the judge observed that the act was done, not to insult, but, conversely, to revere, the case was rejected. However, the NBCLC, with a view to avoiding tensions in any community, voluntarily removed the image.

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appreciating, appropriating and celebrating a rich world of differences is increasingly becoming a matter of caution and anxiety for artists and seekers of truth and beauty.

For artist Jyoti Sahi, born of a Hindu father, from the reformist Hindu tradition of the Radha Swami sect, and of a British Christian mother, the question of identity and differences was not theoretical but a real and an existential one. The different faiths of his parents formed the context of his childhood. And this diversity of faiths remained an important dimension of the spiritual quest for Jyoti.





His close interaction with his first art teacher from Doon School in Dehradun, Sudhir Khastgir – a Brahmo, and one among the first of Nandalal Bose’s students – and the inspiration he drew from historian/philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy and the interreligious faith movement from Bengal, all guided him to practise art as a sadhana and to discover the creative possibilities that lie within everyone. Art became a way of thinking.

It was during his further studies at the Camberwell School of Art and Craft in London that he got to meet Bede Griffiths, also known as Swami Dayananda. He was a British-born Benedictine monk and priest who lived in ashrams in South India and became a noted yogi. On his invitation and on advice from Swami Ranganathananda, who became the head of the Ramakrishna Order, Jyoti joined the Kurisumala Ashram.

The acquaintance with Griffiths and Swamy Francis Acharya of Kurisumala Ashram inspired Jyoti during his earlier years of practice to understand and express Biblical images evoked by an Indian context. This enabled him to contribute, with a deeper awareness, towards an inculturation process

that some Christian ashrams of that time took as a quest. A quest that attempted to understand and express the Biblical faith as experienced in India. What is being addressed is not only the image as memory or tradition, but a much wider power of the imagination, creating a new world of thought and action.

Jyoti says that even though his father did not want to identify himself with the Church, it was his spiritual understanding of the Christian mystical experience that led him as an art student to try and understand the spiritual roots of the Hindu tradition. When he met Dom Bede Griffiths during his college days, he was delighted to find someone in the Catholic Church who was appreciative of the Hindu faith, and felt that as a Christian, he could learn much from other faiths.

Jyoti’s approach is far from being one of those interreligious exercises that look into each other’s beliefs in the hope of inculcating mutual respect. Jyoti’s quest



has always been to try and understand the integral elements of cultures. This can be understood as a perennial philosophy – a philosophy we find among mystics and cultures of people who live close to the earth.

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Their symbols are connected to the land, representing something archetypal, which is common to many cultures. But at the same time, they are unique to each culture, as each landscape has its innate spirit. All mystics express some experience of God, using the language of the culture they belong to: Ramana Maharshi might use the Tamil Shaivite language,

and Kabir might express it through Sufi or Baul. They use poetic metaphors, which cannot be manipulated into dogma. The language holds the sensibility of appreciation and inclusion.

An innate desire for inclusion

The question of inclusion and the interplay between the local and the universal is an age-old one. Every culture is unique and yet every culture interacts with other cultures and is enriched by the cultures of people who live far away.

A complex quest known as inculturation, initiated by a small group of Christians in India during the 1970s, was almost brought to an end by the early 1980s. The quest was to understand the Bible and the Christian faith in the Indian context. This was misappropriated by some and misunderstood by others from non-Christian communities.

The Church saw it as a mission to make the Christian faith more understandable and acceptable to those outside the community,



whereas, people of other faiths felt their symbols were being wrongly appropriated, and that inculturation was not born of a desire for a religious dialogue but from a hidden agenda, of using it as a tool to convert. But there are many like Dom Bede Griffiths, Swami Abhishiktananda and others who sought to understand the Bible in the light of the spiritual traditions of India such as Hinduism or Buddhism.

For Jyoti, who has made significant contributions towards this quest, it was part of his personal search. He says, “A person in my position, like even Brahmabandab Upadhyaya, might claim to be a ‘Hindu Christian’. I would say that though I am a Christian, the Hindu or Buddhist ‘Other’ is very important to me. This ‘Otherness’ is not outside of myself. It is part of my self-understanding.”

Artists of all times have drawn inspiration from the well-springs of many cultures, to review life and its interconnectedness with everything that exists. Jamini Roy has drawn inspiration from the Santal tribe as

well as Christ; Kishan Khanna has used the image of St. Thomas exploring the wound of the Risen Christ. The Apostle’s attitude of doubt inspired Khanna who has painted several important paintings with Jesus as the theme. Khanna saw Jesus suffering between two opposing powers.

On the one hand, there was the narrow religiosity of the traditional Jews, and on the other, there was the colonial power and wider global interests of the Romans. Khanna saw that we, as Indians, are in a similar position, Jyoti says.

We have the narrow religiosity of communalism and on the other side, the colonial powers that still dominate our economy. It’s the reason for the fascination for this figure of Jesus. It was the secular Christ who opposed political and religious oppression in his time, that spoke to modern secular-minded Indians.

Art is essentially secular, in that it springs from a human rather than a religious identity. Art does not belong to any particular faith.

There is independence in art practices that makes the imagination not subservient to religious or sectarian propaganda. Art, like the imagination, is an expression of what it is to be human, and the human's longing for the spiritual.

Culture and the land

Culture, like a living tree, always has its roots in a particular place. Through a process of concealing and unveiling it evolves as a cosmology. The sense of a place serves as its breath. It is through our body's sense of place that we experience the world around us.

Kabir says

Where do you come from?

Where are you going?

Get the news from your body!

Jyoti says this is why it is important that no matter where we travel, we must always listen to what our own body tells us. We experience the outer world through the body, and so it is the body that mediates between the world and our consciousness. But, paradoxically what we are witnessing today is

that while we increasingly share a meta cosmic world view, the walls that were constructed by the land's cultures to hold us together and commune became a form to exclude the other and came to be ruled by dogmas.

People nowadays tend to speak of a 'global culture' and this seems to imply an art that has no local roots, rather like some modern airport or shopping mall – a place that is like every other place. But we all know that such places have no culture, they are nowhere, and nothing. They tend to separate the human community and cultural forms from the life springs of soil/nature.

Our body is the place we live in, or visit as a pilgrimage; or that inner place, of the heart.

Spirit of imagination

Human cultures can transcend their specific boundaries. Jyoti says religious structures can be broken down to make room for the excluded 'Other'. Walls may be constructed to contain, but today they also function as barriers, as ways of excluding those who are not within those bounds. The creative spirit always reaches out to what lies beyond the limits drawn by geographic and cultural domains.

Poetic imagination is a way of seeing another reality, and working towards its realisation. The imagination is transformative, in that it sees reality in a new way. The imaginative power of faith looks for new sources of inspiration. As the Upanishads put it, 'Let noble thoughts come to me from every side'. Faith should never be blind; faith is re-visioning. In Indian thought, it is called 'darshana' or seeing.



The spirit, we are told, cannot be contained. It blows where it pleases, and no one can trace where it comes from, and where it goes. The tendency, in any religious institution or traditional way of living, to prevent the challenges of spiritual exchange or inspired dialogue, is always an insult to the free spirit of the poetic imagination.

The artist gets news from his body

Jyoti's work stems from and forms around a specific land, people and elements. It is rooted in place and at the same time steps over to the unknown, like in the dance of Lord Nataraja, who steps over darkness. In his paintings, the landscape, the trees in and around Silvepura – the place where he lives – and the places he has walked, the people, all evoke something primordial. Though many of them are done in the context of Biblical dialogue, the paintings transcend our shared primal or archetypal experiences.



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For example, seed, landscape, trees, hills, fire, and water are constant motifs in Jyoti's paintings. The coiled image of a mother is a seed, almost buried in the elements. The earth coils itself to the silence and interiorisation of the seed that she is, to sprout and blossom, a new dawn. The sower in the field becomes a primordial sower continuing to sowing seeds, the unstoppable force of life.

An anthill, from its primordial silence, converses with the trees. In the cosmic tension between water and fire, the divine encounters take place. From an interconnection between the hills and planes, the seasons blossom. The Earth and the Sky meet in a magical union. The sheep, animals, and the snakes, all find a place to coexist in Jyoti's paintings. The wells, small water bodies,



water trickling down, all present themselves as places of healing.

People in Jyoti's paintings are always people of the lands – rooted. They remain as alive as the places they are in. Even in their rest, they hold a rightful form, like the bullock resting after a hard day's work in the field. The paintings bear the textures of the earth or tree bark. In its cracks, seeds can hide and sprout. In his paintings, we can sleep, hide, hibernate, sprout, blossom, dance, and weave with the elements. All intersect and interweave.

To embrace is the central focus of all the compositions. To embrace everything. To embrace is also to understand and heal. They are rooted, and hold the love and equilibrium of the places he walked. They take forms from the wisdom of cultures and poetic openness. A drop of water is also a teardrop wetting the seed – it sprouts. It helps one to open up to a new life. Jyoti's

paintings teach us to learn to listen to what hides in the body and the body of cultures and in turn to let the body teach our spirits.

Jyoti once said that he weeps when he paints. Yes, he weeps and dances in and through his paintings. In the paintings, the drums of earth echo a celebration. Like birds, his paintings, with their spirit of poetic imagination, cross the borders of cultures, and at the same time nest on their trees, and sing the songs of their lands. They speak of ecology, spirituality and an identity beyond identity politics. They speak of the realm of spirit, which knows only to include, to embrace, to transcend and to celebrate.

The religion of an artist

Art can help in bridging the gap between different faith systems by affirming the truth seen from a poetic immersion. Art relies on metaphors, and thus speaks from intuitive encounters and immersion in realities. A spiritual art is concerned with dialogue. Dialogue is a process of talking to a person of another culture, faith, mindset or world view.

This dialogue is not only with other persons; it is also with the elemental world of creation, with which we have to constantly engage. The artist dialogues with his materials. We are dialoguing with the landscape in which we are living. Dialogue ultimately means addressing oneself. Who am I? What is the meaning of my existence? Dialogue leads to self-discovery.



Soumendra Narain Bagchi

OXYGEN THERAPY: BANE OR BOON?

While oxygen therapy has seen widespread use, especially in hospitals as well as due to self-medication by individuals, treatment with high concentrations of oxygen has long been known to cause damage to the lungs. This is termed as Hyperoxic Acute Lung Injury. The other term is oxygen toxicity. It was recognised as early as the 1960s and identified by terms like ‘respirator lung syndrome’, ‘pulmonary oxygen toxicity’, and ‘traumatic oxygen alveolopathy’ (Joffe and Simon, 1969).

As elaborated
(Cooper, Phuyal and Shah, 2020)

“The clinical settings in which oxygen toxicity occurs is predominantly divided into two groups. One in which the patient is exposed to very high concentrations of oxygen for a short duration, and the second where the patient is exposed to lower concentrations of oxygen but for a longer duration. These two cases can result in acute and chronic oxygen toxicity,





While oxygen therapy has seen widespread use, especially in hospitals as well as due to self-medication by individuals, treatment with high concentrations of oxygen has long been known to cause damage to the lungs.



respectively. The acute toxicity manifests generally with central nervous system effects, while chronic toxicity has mainly pulmonary effects. Severe cases of oxygen toxicity can lead to cell damage and death”^I

Oxygen exposure after approximately 12 hours leads to lung passageway congestion, pulmonary edema, and atelectasis [i.e., partial collapse or incomplete inflation of the lung] caused by damage to the linings of the bronchi and alveoli. The formation of fluid in the lungs causes a feeling of shortness of breath combined with a burning of the throat and chest and breathing becomes very painful, and progressively the lungs fail to clear itself of mucous.^{II}

The effect on other mammals was also known for a long time. ‘Dogs exposed to 100 per cent oxygen generally die after approximately seventy hours. Normal human adults are believed to be more resistant than small laboratory animals to the adverse effects of 100 per cent oxygen but are nevertheless susceptible. Pulmonary symptoms may occur after only six to seven hours of such exposure; there is substernal pain, cough, and decrease in the vital capacity...^{III}

Elaborating on the mechanisms of damage, Jackson (1985) wrote:

“The biochemical basis of oxygen toxicity is increased production of highly reactive, partially reduced metabolites of oxygen, including hydrogen peroxide and free radicals, by cells in hyperoxia. ... The pathologic changes of oxygen toxicity are not specific and resemble those of the adult respiratory distress syndrome. Many drugs used in the care of patients, including bleomycin, nitrofurantoin, and corticosteroids, may exacerbate oxygen-induced lung injury.”^{IV}

The most serious warning was written by Jackson, that “No effective pharmacologic means exist for lessening pulmonary oxygen toxicity in humans.”^V

The pain stages of oxygen toxicity were detailed by many. For example, Huber & Drath, 1981 write:

“Thus, at exposure tensions of 1 atm or less, the lung is usually the first vital organ to respond adversely to an increased delivery of oxygen; at exposures of greater than 1 atm, the central nervous system damage occurs concurrently with (or may even precede) lung damage. The ultimate end-point of toxicity, therefore, most commonly is a pulmonary-related death with oxygen administration of 1 atm or less, and a mortality due to combined pulmonary and central nervous system failure caused at higher exposure tensions.”^{VI}

Even otherwise, the use of Supplemental Oxygen (SO) has been identified with higher mortality by other doctors. Analysis of survival data of 864 340 trauma patients led to the conclusion that,



“The administration of SO was associated with a higher incidence of in-hospital mortality and ARDS”^{VII}

Ventilators have been in the news as the media has been highlighting the failure of various State governments to provide enough ventilators. However, looking at the literature on ventilators is equally prejudicial to health and survival of patients. The use of mechanical ventilation may cause injury to the ventilated lung (Slutsky and Ranieri, 2013) as explained below:



This position undermines the value of human rights of those seeking emergency medical help, especially the poor and the vulnerable, gasping for oxygen on the periphery, not knowing for sure whether getting it is a boon or a bane.



“...many patients eventually die after the initiation of mechanical ventilation, even though their arterial blood gases may have normalised. This mortality has been ascribed to multiple factors, including complications of ventilation such as barotrauma (i.e., gross air leaks), oxygen toxicity, and hemodynamic compromise... More recently, there has been a renewed focus on the worsening injury that mechanical ventilation can cause in previously damaged lungs and the damage it can initiate in normal lungs.”^{VIII}

Ventilation-induced pulmonary oedema is essentially the result of severe changes in the permeability of the alveolar-capillary barrier.^{IX} The steps of how the injury takes place is presented (taken from Parker, Hernandez, Peevy, 1993)

Ventilation with high tidal volumes can increase vascular filtration pressures; produce stress fractures of capillary endothelium, epithelium, and basement membrane; and cause lung rupture. Mechanical damage leads to leakage of fluid, protein, and blood into tissue and air spaces or leakage of air into tissue spaces. This process is followed by an inflammatory response and possibly a reduced defence against

infection. Predisposing factors for lung injury are high peak inspiratory volumes and pressures, a high mean airway pressure, structural immaturity of lung and chest wall, surfactant insufficiency or inactivation, and pre-existing lung disease.^X

What is not discussed is the high probability of hospital-acquired pneumonia (HAP) and ventilator associated pneumonia (VAP). As discussed by Vallecoccia et al. (2020), about the infections acquired by the patient after getting admitted to hospital, termed as 'Nosocomial pneumonia'.

“VAP and HAP affect a significant proportion of hospitalised patients and are characterised by poor clinical outcomes.

Nosocomial pneumonia is one of the most common causes of infection among patients admitted to the intensive care unit and is associated with life-threatening complications and death in hospitalised patients [1]. Nosocomial pneumonia is defined as an infection of the lung which develops in patients admitted to the hospital for ≥ 48 h and includes ventilator-associated pneumonia (VAP) and hospital-acquired pneumonia (HAP).^{XI}

Contrast it with non-invasive therapy of prone breathing, which has been circulated by ICMR only in 2021, and hardly followed in private hospitals. The reasons for private hospitals not engaging in prone breathing therapy are not deliberated in this draft. What is important is the finding:

About 70% of patients with ARDS and hypoxemia have improved oxygenation when they are placed in a prone position.^{XII}

These revelations about oxygen therapy are as disturbing as the case of the alleged mock drill at Shri Paras hospital at Agra which might have caused 22 deaths as reported. It has exposed our frailties and institutional unpreparedness to confront such medical complexities. This position undermines the value of human rights of those seeking emergency medical help, especially the poor and the vulnerable, gasping for oxygen on the periphery, not knowing for sure whether getting it is a boon or a bane.

(This draft has been prepared by Soumendhra Narain Bagchi, presently engaged as Associate Professor in XLRI Jamshedpur, in his personal capacity. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the view of the institute or of any other person in the institute.)

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Dr. Jancy James
jamesjancy2008@gmail.com

Building up a Collective Memory 'THE AGE OF THE PANDEMIC' (1817 -1920)

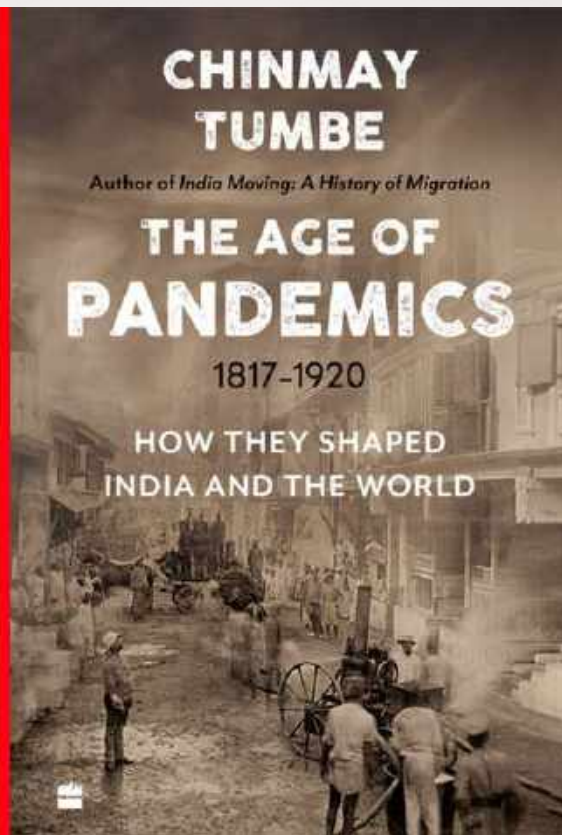
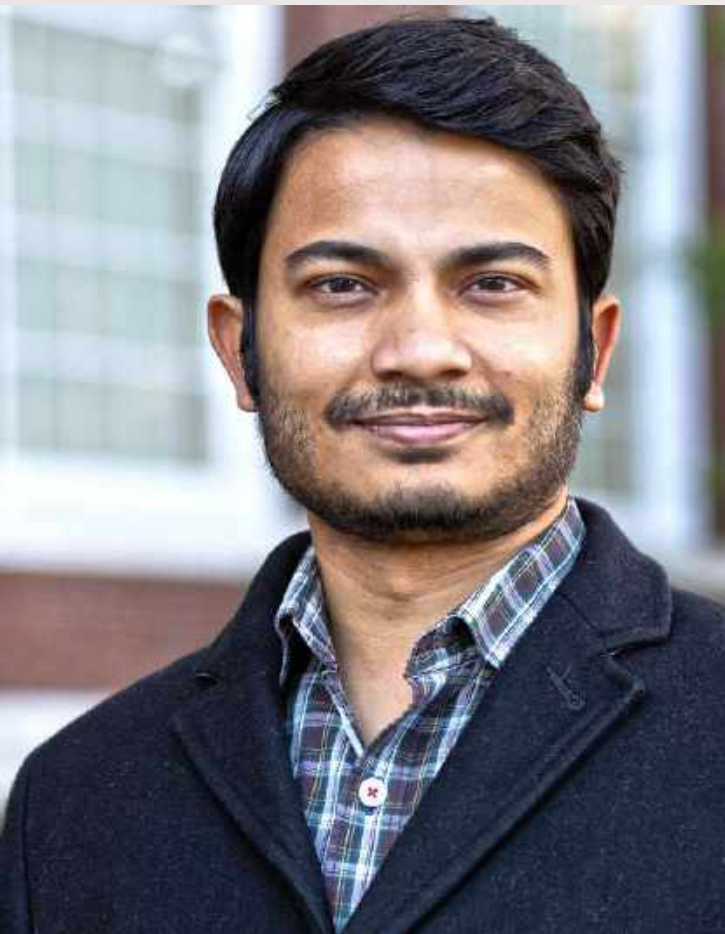
(How they Shaped India and the World)

The Age of Pandemic' (2020) by Chinmay Tumbe is a brilliant treatise on a very insufficiently revealed phase of Indian demographic history. It focuses on the impact of pandemics on society during 1817-1920. As the subtitle indicates, this is also a comparative study of the ravage caused by the onslaught of various pandemics and the survival of society in different parts of the world during this period.

The most interesting aspect of this book is the inevitable comparison and amazing similarities that the reader is drawn into between the happenings in the current

Covid-gripped world and the experiences of people affected by the pandemic more than a century ago. The author has used a simple, yet comprehensive style of presentation and narration drawing resources from all disciplines and many experts and scholars associated with epidemics, public health, research, and demography.

'The Age of Pandemics' is an attempt to build up a collective memory of a forgotten past of the Indian experience of pandemics, while we are in the middle of such a catastrophe. Cholera, plague, and influenza had caused devastation in many parts of the world. The European consciousness carried memories of them, especially of the Black Death Plague into its history. They impacted European demography, scientific research, public health activities, political strategies, and social planning. The author claims that this book is a timely examination and retrieval



of our forgotten past vis-à-vis a pandemic, which will be 'helpful and useful to counter current and future pandemics'.

More people all over the world have died of pandemics than due to wars between 1817 and 1917. The death toll has been calculated as 70 million. India was the epicentre of this mortality crisis causing 40 million deaths, owing to three major fatal pandemics: cholera, plague, and influenza.

Europe was mostly affected by the earlier episodes of pandemics in the 6th and 14th centuries. But Asia became the worst victim of the pandemic in the 19th century. This tragic condition advanced into the first quarter of the 20th century also. Very much like a teacher in a classroom, the author provides interesting explanations and analyses of seemingly simple yet significant and basic matters.

For instance, he distinguishes between epidemic and pandemic, quoting the 21st century dictionary. The epidemic is confined to a limited geographical space where it may even be an endemic phenomenon, whereas, a pandemic is an epidemic occurring worldwide or in a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people. So, the key theme of the pandemic is its simultaneous worldwide transmission, more than the severity.

Declaring an epidemic as a pandemic is closely related to international relations, transportation systems, immigrant population, trade, and business. 'Often, pandemics went unnoticed as pandemics in history because they used the simple definition of at least two continents being affected by mass mortality through the transmission of disease. Those pandemics left their marks not necessarily in statistical registries but in literature, art and culture, on tombstones and even inside the tomb'. The pandemic came silently, without much

dramatic impact unlike catastrophes like war, natural disasters, and famine.

The author has made deft use of many research findings by other scholars for the array of data, charts, and maps in the book.

Here are a few milestones in pandemic history.

1817 – Onset of cholera pandemic

(Killing 50 million people worldwide between 1817 and 1920)

1866 – Third International Sanitary Conference held in Constantinople.

1894 – Third plague pandemic

(First and second in the 6th and 14th centuries)


1918 – The influenza pandemic

(There was a milder attack of the same in 1889)


The author has lived in three cities - Bombay, London, and Florence - ravaged at one time or the other by the plague, which gives a special authenticity to the statements in this book. Of course, a considerable portion is devoted to the narration of the evolutionary nature of the impact of pandemics across the continents and down the years. At a time when the global population was 250 million (6th century) the 'Justinian plague' took the lives of 10 percent of the people. Then the mass mortality was at its zenith in Europe.

About 70 percent of the global population at that time belonged to Asia where the pandemic impact was only marginal. The second wave of the pandemic (1346-53), an episode dubbed as Black Death, Great Mortality, Great Pestilence, or the Universal Plague wiped out 20 percent of the global population.

After discussing the global scenario of pandemics historically in the introductory chapter, 'Pandemics of the Past', and the subsequent chapters, 'Cholera' and 'Plague',



The most interesting aspect of this book is the inevitable comparison and amazing similarities that the reader is drawn into between the happenings in the current Covid-gripped world and the experiences of people affected by the pandemic more than a century ago.



the author unloads a colossal reservoir of information on the ravages caused by 'Influenza' (Chapter IV) on the Indian subcontinent.

This epidemic had landed the world in a pandemic situation causing large-scale fatalities with huge geographical spreads in 1578, 1579-30, 1732-33, 1781-83, 1830-31 and 1833. But what happened due to the influenza pandemic between 1918 and 1920 was unbelievably tragic.

The pandemic wiped out 20 million human beings (2 percent of the global population) in a matter of a few months. Chapter 4 begins with a 'preliminary report on the influenza pandemic of 1918 in India'.

As the worst affected country in the world, we lost 6.4 percent of our population which was 50 percent of the global deaths. In Mumbai, the mortality due to flu created panic. Around 768 people died on the same day on October 6, 1918. There was one death every two minutes. Gujarat, Punjab, and Delhi were not spared. 'The Ganga was swollen with dead bodies'.

Mahatma Gandhi, who lived in Sabarmati Ashram, also had his share of sufferings. The flu killed his grandson and daughter-in-law. Kasturba had to bring up three motherless children of their son at the ashram.

The Epidemic Diseases Act, February, 4, 1897 instituted by the Viceroy of India Lord Elgin had come into effect. Indigenous health measures were also recommended. Life in western India was traumatic in the last quarter of 1918. Schools were closed, exams were postponed, and cinema theatres were shut down for three months. Many undeserving students got through with pass certificates granted by generous evaluation.

The influenza pandemic of 1918-20 was the greatest single demographic shock the human species has ever received. When all systems were affected by the killer pandemic, the data reporting and registration section had also been broken down along with the police force, public health support, educational institutions, business, trade, and farming.

Hence, the earlier data of mortality was inaccurate, and a great deal of research was required for upgrading the same. Here is a quote from the book indicating the massive loss of human lives in the influenza pandemic of 1918: 'Considering today's global population, 8 billion, its 2 percent is 150 million deaths which are unlikely to be the result of the Covid-19 pandemic' - a statement that confirms the enormity of the influenza pandemic and the impossibility of its recurrence in the present.

As young parents died in large numbers, government creches were opened for influenza orphans. Bombay Bacteriology Laboratory came up with a vaccine. People expressed their disgust with the government actions to build memorials like the Lord Wellington Memorial when they were groaning under the burden of many kinds of losses.

Just like the protest at the construction of a new parliamentary building in Delhi

A relevant discourse that stimulates association of our present plight with the experiences of a catastrophic past, thereby inspiring us to new ways for survival and peace.

today, the public protested the lockdown declared by the government.

The desperate return of internal immigrants to their families, longing to die in one's native grounds calls for comparison with the situation in India today.

In the last part, there is an insightful description of the politics of the pandemic. It presents the tension between economics and epidemiology, at a time when the country was under the rule of a foreign empire. The attention, sympathy, support, and preventive measures from the ruling power were beyond our control or intervention. More than a century later, when a new pandemic has gripped the world and continues widespread devastation, 'The Age of Pandemic' gives invaluable feedback in our approach and resilience to the present catastrophe.

Charged with a deep sense of history and with more than 600 references from various sources, an extensive bibliography and the impressive quantum of statistics, this book is both informative and interesting. A relevant discourse that stimulates association of our present plight with the experiences of a catastrophic past, thereby inspiring us to new ways for survival and peace.

(Dr. Jancy James is a former Vice-Chancellor, Mahatma Gandhi University and the Central University of Kerala, and Professor (Retd), Kerala University)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pax Lumina 2(4) / 2021 / 78

Dear Editor,

May 2021 bimonthly issue of Pax Lumina was very apt, timely and challenging one. All the articles in it were mission oriented with prompt and positive way of responding to the needs of the time. It is really shocking to know that our youth faces social reality where they are marginalized through unemployment, lack of education and so many other unfair realities. Yes, it is at this critical time of Covid-19 pandemic we are called to announce hopeful future to our young people in all our places of ministry. My sincere thanks to the committed editorial board and all the creative contributors for bringing out an excellent issue of Pax Lumina which is true to its meaning: quest for peace and reconciliation in the world of today. AMDG.

Richard Mascarenhas SJ

Bidar- Karnataka

Dear Editor,

Thank you so much for the Pax Lumina may 21 issue. I can very well imagine how challenging it must have been to bring it out amid the escalating Covid-19 cases, unpredictable lockdowns, and inclement weather. The effort symbolizes the commitment of a dedicated leader.

KSS Reddy

Dear Editor,

Wherever there is injustice, oppression and suppression of dissent, youth will be alienated. This issue of Pax Lumina discusses the manifestations of alienation in a very comprehensive manner.

But, the million dollar question which remains is who will restore the moral arc of the universe, how it will be restored and by when. We are, after all, finite beings.

Jagan Mathews, Kochi



Dear Editor,

"Alienation of the Youth," a very critical and sensitive occurrence happening down through generations and across various strata & segments of the society has been focussed effectively in your issue of May 2021. "Hypocrisy and complacency of the adults" send waves of outrage and rebellion in the young minds. The reaction of the youth, even through peaceful methods, is often spurned & ridiculed leaving bitterness in their minds impacting adversely their personality development resulting often in adverse impact on the society at large.

With more of nuclear families, the elder generation has a major responsibility towards posterity by helping the generations to learn to 'remember the Creator in the days of their youth'.

Regards,

KA Joseph, Kochi

Dear Editor,

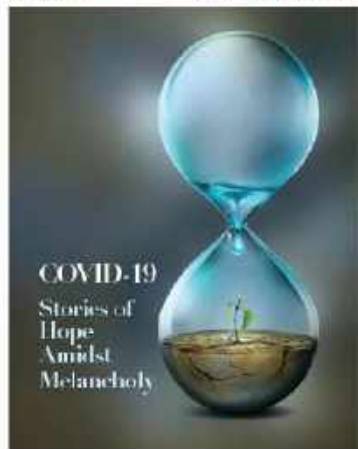
The youth are, indeed, under immense pressure created by socio-economic situation of each country. For me, the take away points are that the need of the hour is empathy, peaceful coexistence and embracing change. Thank you for sharing the edition and as always it has broadened the horizon of my heart and mind.

My heartiest congratulation to the entire team of Pax Lumina.

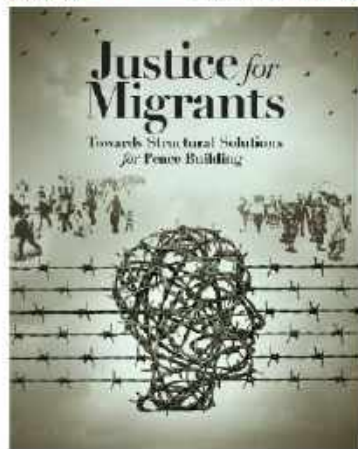
Thank you

Shruthi H., Trivandrum

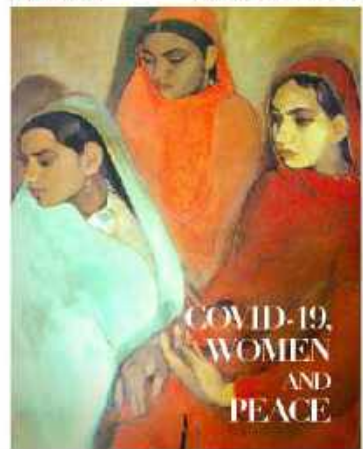
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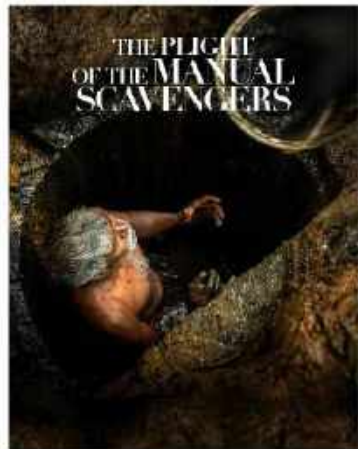
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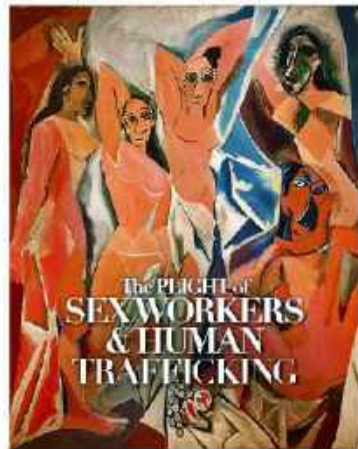
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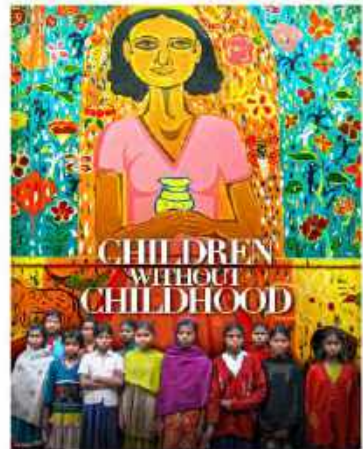
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