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PROFESSOR GANESH N DEVY Democracy in the Virtual World

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK ULYSEAS



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Fisherman repairing his nets. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor
markulyseas@liveencounters.net

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CONTRIBUTORS

PROFESSOR GANESH N DEVY
DR NAMRATA GOSWAMI
MARK ULYSEAS
EDUARDO GONCALVES
SUZANNE STONE
RANDHIR KHARE
JOSÉ TRUDA PALAZZO, JR.
PERCY AARON
BARRY DELANEY
PETER DALY
VU TUAN HUNG



Professor G. N. Devy, was educated at Shivaji University, Kolhapur and the University of Leeds, UK. He has been professor of English at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, a renowned literary critic, and a cultural activist, as well as founder of the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre at Baroda and the Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh. Among his many academic assignments, he has held the Commonwealth academic Exchange Fellowship, the Fulbright Fellowship, the T H B Symons Fellowship and the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for *After Amnesia*, and the SAARC Writers' Foundation Award for his work with denotified tribals. His Marathi book *Vanaprasth* has received six awards including the Durga Bhagwat memorial Award and the Maharashtra Foundation Award. Similarly, his Gujarati book *Aadivaasi Jaane Chhe* was given the Bhasha Sanman Award. He won the reputed Prince Claus Award (2003) awarded by the Prince Claus Fund for his work for the conservation of craft and the Linguapax Award of UNESCO (2011) for his work on the conservation of threatened languages. In January 2014, he was given the Padmashree by the Government of India. He has worked as an advisor to UNESCO on Intangible Heritage and the Government of India on Denotified and Nomadic Communities as well as non-scheduled languages. He has been an executive member of the Indian Council for Social science Research (ICSSR), and Board Member of Lalit Kala Akademi and Sahitya Akademi. He is also advisor to several non-governmental organizations in France and India. Recently, he carried out the first comprehensive linguistic survey since Independence, the *People's Linguistic Survey of India*, with a team of 3000 volunteers and covering 780 living languages, which is to be published in 50 volumes containing 35000 pages. Devy's books are published by Oxford University Press, Orient Blackswan, Penguin, Routledge, Sage among other publishers. His works are translated in French, Arabic, Chinese, German, Italian, Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu and Bangla. He lives in Dharwad, Karnataka, India. www.bhasharesearch.org

PROFESSOR GANESH N DEVY

Thesis 2021

Democracy in the Virtual World & the Times of Artificial Memory

1

Power, at its best, is in the structure and form of an overwhelming rumour; at its worst, it is mimesis, but a copy of what has been power at some distant time in the past. For a rumour to be a rumour, there has to be a field for its spread, which, in this case, is the credulous audience. Mimesis, in order to be a credible mime asks for an as yet unforgotten precedence, something in the past that somehow worked. The credulous audience for power that is rumour needs to perceive itself as 'one' of some kind, of whatever kind, a state, a nation, a movement, anything that is capable of dynamism and not entirely in the grips of a stasis.

The perceived oneness of the credulous audience generates an intangible horizon of expectations. All those in this perceived 'one' entity know that the horizon is there, but no one can name it with any complete precision. Power at its highest brilliance lifts up the intangible horizon; at its lowest, it dips the intangible horizon.

Every change in the holder of power necessarily requires change, on part of the 'audience', in the perception of what power is and can be. The perception is nascent when such change is imminent; but change is impossible when the perception is closest to being sensed as delusion, not quite delusion but close enough to be seen as delusion. The perception of change is conditioned by the psychology of the perceivers, their political orientation and their tolerance to collective hallucination. Therefore, in order to perpetuate power, those in power attempt to deepen the proclivity to hallucination that the ruled people have. Media, once seen as a pillar of democracy, is known to induce hallucination by a mix of not speaking, speaking and speaking out.

Professor Ganesh N Devy

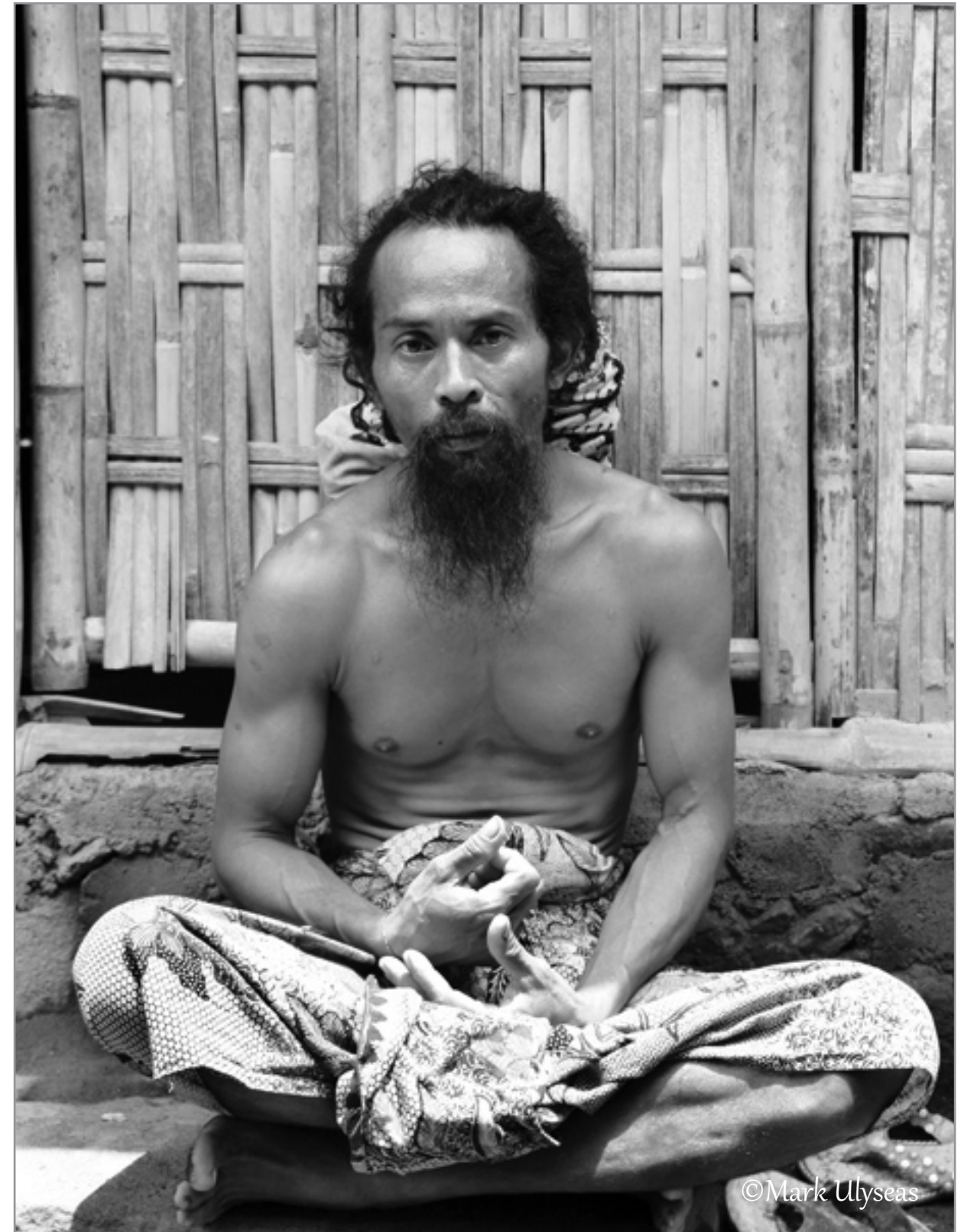
In order to counter formation of such nexus, two methods become effective: Lifting the intangible horizon of people's expectations in such a way that the rulers start losing nerve; and, Changing the goalposts between speaking and not speaking. Media management is not the question of scale but of skill. It requires a deep understanding of what amounts to silence and what the horizon of expectations are. It requires acute ability to sense what silence is and how it relates to speaking.

2

Thinkers all over the world are seriously worried about the future of democracy, at least the kind of democracy that the world had dreamt of during the twentieth century. Similarly, there is an anxiety if the human control over large social and political systems can at all be continued in view of the great advancement in Artificial Intelligence. Central to both these large questions is the question of how we grasp the mutual engagement of democracy and machine memory.

Natural Memory, in order to be memory, first needs to predicate a notion of past. One does not know if the limitless expanse and emptiness through which the process of the creation of the cosmos and the subsequent process of evolution of life have progressed, can be attributed with a time dimension. But, having conceptualised Time and its segments such as the present and the non-present time, Memory likes to make an engagement with the past its prerogative. Having come into existence, Memory asserts its identity by striving to infinitely extend the past backward to an ever-receding point of origin. This it does, as Memory is a generative process, a lot more than it is a process of mere collection and record of what is or was. The idea of an infinite past, though a mere hypothesis, turns the ever receding pastness into 'something', a 'that' or an 'it' an object for curiosity, though such a pastness is only a hypothesis. The indescribable 'it', without attributes and without any further past is, then, imagined as power. In turn, it also begins to be seen as the source of all forms of power, spiritual or material, either in the order of God or in the order of Government.

For primitive human society, power emanated through the word of shamans, for it was the shaman alone who was believed to possess a superlative ability to remember all, something that the others did not have. In societies that accepted kingship as a valid form of power, the king was believed to have a kind of a divine sanction to rule and was believed to be the holder of memory of the precise moment of the birth of this arrangement. The King's subject people were not considered worthy of such a divinely sanctioned ability.



Shaman. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

The idea of democracy took birth in the desire to rebel against the idea of ‘That’, ‘It’, ‘the pastness beyond past’, and anything that was outside the reach of man’s rational abilities. Though the specific historical particulars differ from nation to nation, the desire for accepting democracy as the form of government has a shared universal narrative. It is a new social and political arrangement which is bound to have an uneasy relationship with a mystified and deified past. Besides, the historical moment of arrival of democracy as an arrangement of power, which coincided with the birth of rationality as the foundation of science and modernity as an eco-system of sensibility, place a further stress on the uneasy relationship between Memory and Democracy. For many centuries in the past, Utopia was seen as the mythical future. In the era of democracy, future ceases to be a mere myth and starts becoming the source of power, a function that memory had performed in pre-democratic ages.

3

It is difficult to say if the historical coincidence of the rise of rationality as the essence of knowledge and the rise of democracy as the essence of power-arrangement is reason enough to argue that the emergence of the technology driven non-natural memory is in any tangible way linked with democracy. Sigmund Freud’s analysis of dreams points to the working of suppressed natural memory as the mother of dreams. It is difficult to say if, in an analogous way, Artificial Memory, the AM or the memory chip, has an ability to spawn dreams of the future in the era of democracy. The AM is organised and systematic. Unlike natural memory, it does not predicate a past, and certainly not an interminable past. It does not mystify and deify that infinite past, which is essentially but an idea. The AM is self-sure and does not require for its self-justification the idea of a creator God, a long forgotten moment of its creation and a point of origin, albeit never to be fully known. The AM is itself its origin. It itself is god.

Democracy, with its attendant mental ecology of modernity and its uneasy relation with the idea of the past does not easily grasp how it can deal with Artificial Memory. While it requires the future as a myth, it does not know how it can generate that myth in the times of AM. That is going to be a long struggle and an entrenched debate that human societies will have to negotiate in the decades to come. Meanwhile, the AM, which by its very condition of being what it is, neither being able to generate myth nor able to give birth to dreams, can only produce rumours, illusions, hypnotising chimera or mesmerising terror.

Short of dreams – as distinct from rumours and illusions – for the future, the democratic order will continue to limp forward unless humans think seriously of the implications of the disjuncture between dreams and AM. At present, most governments in the world, including the government of India, is over- busy using the AM to discipline order and control citizens. In that process, they are facilitating the supremacy of the AM over democracy. It is, however, too late in history to think of knowledge and society without an overwhelming presence of the AM. In the twenty-first century, democracy can redeem itself not by seeking to extend the grip of technology over psychology, not by calling to aid the ‘inner strength’ of democracy. That has faded out a few decades ago, not just in India but in most other countries.

Democracy can, and one hopes will, redeem itself not by an obsolete mystification of history and memory. It can be redeemed by grasping the absolute contradiction between Natural Memory and Artificial Memory. The party that is obsessively interested in making ‘past alone’ as the main plank of its politics is quite hopelessly out of tune with the historical shifts in the trajectory of memory and its impact on the forms of government. Similarly, politics which is entirely technology driven has a view of the future that can only hasten the decline of democracy. In the 21st century, the pro-democratic politics will have to bring gods and robots face to face and confront one with the other in order to rebuild the future as a myth and invent AM that is capable of a sense of its past. They need to meet and transform themselves for a long continued life of democracy. The virtual world has posed an unprecedented challenge to our known ideas of space and time. It is over-busy providing legitimacy to non-matter as Real and Existent and reducing the material into incompletely existent. Citizens, therefore, cannot any longer be citizens unless they are in digital form free-floating in virtual time and space. And, because they are substantially digital, the idea of equality no longer is found relevant to sizing them.

4

Political energy, applied in the past by visionary thinkers and mass leaders to bringing citizen and citizen within a single matrix of class, race, gender, is not compatible to a society which understands no difference--- while it materially exists but digitally disappears from view--- and has yet not been replaced by new forms of political energy and transformative visions. The visions we see as transformative today are bogged down with a burden of dry numbers, data-sheets, graphs and a narrative related to numbered bodies and have no space for views and perspective that measure distance comparatively and progress in broken lines of the local and personal aspirations.



Stone relief, Bayon temple, Angkor, Siem Reap, Cambodia. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Identity politics, therefore, can no longer be the driving engine for any movement that seeks to transcend the narrowness of identities. The society depicted in digits fails to grasp what is narrow and what is not.

Nation, in its earliest form, was the people. Nation, in its subsequent ideological forms, became the past of a people and the future of the people. The past imagined as a being spread over a very long span of time becomes challenge to memory and begins acquiring the form of myth, which is irrationally compressed and imaginatively transformed time. The future, as against the past, spread over an endless time, becomes a challenge to imagination and acquires the form of fantasy or utopia, which are compressed and fantasy driven re-statements of the idea of time. Therefore, a nation can live in real time only when it has a range of myths recognised by the people as their own and a fantasy or utopia owned by the people as of their own making.

5

Artificial Memory lacks – at least so far—the myth making ability. However, the technology based image making (imagination) is surfeit with fantasy.

In any tussle between the ideas of democracy inherited from the 20th century and the emergent ideas of democracy in the 21st century, the ideas of nation will undergo a radical shift. Those ideas will attempt to subvert the mythical and try to mould them in the form of fantasy.

In real time, fantasy cannot endure if it is entirely alienated from myth. How can the future tense in any language function effectively unless that language has a sense of the past tense structures; as with languages, so with political discourse. Therefore, in real time, merely technology driven power structures can but generate inadequate expression of the self of the people, the nation. It generally slips off the fantasy –terrain that it uses pervasively as the statement of its rational for being what it is. However, such power structures will not be able to return to their origins and earlier forms since history is a one-way traffic and irreversible.

The way forward, the only way forward, for the technology driven powers is to surrender to the idea of nation as its people; but, ironically, at that point in historical time when such an idea of nation will have been exhausted.

The other alternative before such powers is to move in the direction of dissolving the idea of nation by generating a counter-narrative. The future for the people world over is to move in the direction of opening the possibility of rescuing the world from the idea of nation as people. It is within that paradoxical possibility that the new battle lines have to be drawn by those who do not wish to remain bound by over-used and out-dated political jargon.

6

Class consciousness', a term widely used by Social Sciences, though useful in the times when it first began to be used, appears now to deny micro-specificities. Consciousness, in its intelligible form, is an attribute of an individual. It is predicated upon existence of life defined in terms of functioning of an individual's brain. A given 'class', in its form as a group, cannot be said to have life of the same order as individuals in that group have. In the context of a large group, the term consciousness at best can be used as a metaphor. What a group does as action can at best be described as engagement and an intellectual and emotional investment for inter-subjectivity. Yet, under no circumstances, that can be described as 'life.' The class consciousness is essentially a metaphor useful for developing an argument and a narrative.

Historians, challenged by the complexity of their subject, take recourse to this metaphor. Social analysts use it only when viewing their subject from a distance. As soon as either of them get closer to the subject for finer analysis, what initially appears as 'class' starts appearing like a basket full of contradictions, paradoxes, a set of sub-classes and even as a throng of individuals. As such, the use of the term 'class consciousness' unmistakably signals procedural and disciplinary limits in its analysis. The metaphor acquires meaning only in the presence of its antonym which, in this case, is not 'non-class' or 'classlessness' but 'some other class'. However, on scrutiny, the antonym too is seen to face exactly the same difficulty for it to be useful for a sound analysis. The idea of 'class' has its historical roots in education system(s), as it is born in a 'class room'. Independently, it has its roots in economics of want and denial. Yet, what is denial is a question, answer to which may fluctuate from age to another age.

Caste is an identity that individuals, at least in India, acquire passively. No individual has the control over the caste group within which she or he is born; though a few try to consciously transcend it of their own volition.

In either case, the caste experience, being a lived experience, is less abstract than the class-experience. However, the caste consciousness is not any consciousness; it is the naming of the identity association experienced by an individual.

7

Federalism is natural if nature has brought together vast territories and kept them together through mutual interdependence. Federations which have diverse ecological conditions, may tend to stay together for a long historical period. Federalism resulting out of conquests of other nations by a given nation stay in place so long as the force that conquered those states continues to be adequately forceful. The former USSR collapsed because the conquered entities were 'nations' in and by themselves and their explicit or tacit consent to be ruled was missing during the process of forming the federation.

Federations born out of a gradually evolving entity can be lasting provided the sense of identity of its individual units is not overtly ethnic or linguistic. If the identity acquires primacy, such a federation becomes less than convincing, as has happened in the case of the European Union. The Indian federation is not entirely territorial or natural. It is not a creature of a conquest. It is not as fragile as the European Union is. What then is the catalyst for the federation that India is? Several waves of population settling down slowly over long stretches of history, creating different languages is one pillar of the Indian federation. Immense geographical and climatic diversity causing the emergence of distinct cultural zones is the second pillar of the Indian federation.

Governments in India that ignore the historical and geographical context of India's formation can be detrimental to Indian federalism. In other words, when Indian governments attempt to overwhelm the Indian federation, India's federalism moves towards centripetal dynamics and the federation can turn fragile and shaky.

Cultural diversity, ecological diversity and linguistic diversity become less self-sure in times of any despotic regime. If the regime starts posing nationalism as an alternative to federalism, the unity of India comes under a tremendous stress. Therefore, a totalitarian regime can be challenged by highlighting India's diversity, pluralism and its intrinsic federalism.

8

Power, which constitutes the entire spectrum of the dominated and the dominators, requires, in order to be constituted in that manner, the consent of the dominated for such an arrangement. As a scientific field of study, Psychology looks at the desire to be dominated as a mental abnormality. It also interprets the desire to dominate as an abnormality. Together they form a continuum of illness. Were such an abnormality to become the norm itself, it would require a collective effort for its concealment so that no one calls it an abnormality. Various methods of concealing it used in the past and the present have taken the form of rituals. All and every ritual associated with all and every form of domination is an attempt to conceal the widespread mental illness and turning what is essentially an abnormality into a norm. In democracy, representation of people is an ideal and a dream; but the processes formalised to actualise the ideal slip off the ideal. In course of time, the formalisation intended to effect the ideal ends up as a ritual. As the gap between the ideal and the ritual increases, representation gets replaced by covert or overt domination. Primarily empty rituals replace the relation between the represented and those who are supposed to represent them. Though it may look logical that if these rituals are unmasked, debunked and somehow made irrelevant, society may manage to return to the original arrangement born as an ideal. However, that logic has a deep flaw in it; such an assault on rituals of presentation may weaken those rituals as well as the ideal that they purport to embody. In the process the idea of democracy itself may suffer a wound impossible to heal. Recovery of democracy is possible not by attacking the aberrations that have entered it but by reasserting the original idea. Mixing the two—attacking rituals and affirmation of the ideal --- can only perpetuate the mental illness that the spectrum of domination has been.

9

Every manner of reassertion of democracy needs to question not how people are represented but by foregrounding what people want represented. Therefore, the business of the civil society should be not exposing the aberrations but restating the dream, not trying to clean the ground sullied by the devious rituals but by lifting people's sight to new and higher horizons of expectations. This task is very different from the task assigned by Karl Marx to the class capable of becoming society's critical consciousness.

In fact, the task cannot be performed by a class; it can be performed by individuals who refuse to be any class. Reinvention of democracy calls for public intellectuals who can place themselves outside class, race, and gender and, most of all, the momentary rush of events of the day.

10

Power can become active only through an implicit or explicit consent of the ruled, even if the consent is expressed through a mere ritual, optically correct but semantically distorted; In exceptional cases, power receives its sanction by inventing a platform or a modality making such the expression of such consent irrelevant. During the 20th century, the source of validation of power used to come from the following:

- Constitutions, democratic, dictatorial, or mixed
- No constitutions at all, if a venerated convention has been in existence for long
- Military invasion of a country and a tacit acceptance of it by the community of nations.
- Military or civil coup by a group within a given nation
- Sudden revolution by people driven by an incipient ideology or a regime-fatigue.
- The rise of an economic class or theological group claiming being majority.

Several large scale political changes in the world over the last three decades indicate the rise of some previously unknown modes of regime change:

- A sudden ecological disaster, climate change or other natural calamity
- Overpowering of people's natural intelligence by use of artificial intelligence
- Use of biological weapons, internally or externally.

Given the above, the probability range for control of power during the 2020s—at least till the Indian population reaches its peak and starts declining — includes the following:

- Constitutional Democracy
- Constitutional Dictatorship
- Religious Majoritarianism
- Technology based control of citizens' sensibilities
- Focusing on Climate Change and Ecological Challenges

All other modes such as Satyagraha/ Movements, etc are clearly improbable or self-defeating.

11

The present regime in India has been employing a combination of three of the above modes, in order of their effectiveness, in order to wield power: A. Technological control, B. Religious majoritarianism, and C. Constitutional Democracy.

The BJP government in Delhi is still not fully equipped to scrap the present constitution due to its not having absolute majority in the Rajya Sabha. Therefore, holding one more general elections is an unavoidable compulsion for the BJP. Opposition parties are not in a position to fully counter and defeat the BJP for several reasons. The chief among these is that they operate within a relatively narrower range of probabilities. Therefore, the objective of the opposition parties should be ideally to restrict the BJP to less than two thirds seats in the Parliament, which can give it an absolute majority necessary for major constitutional amendments. The civil society needs to focus on resisting BJP's technological superiority. The critical class of opinion makers have to reconstruct and redesign the sensibilities of the majority community and reduce its theological inclinations. Yet, all of these to happen, when they should happen, is a big challenge.

12

The movement of Europeans towards the world outside Europe began at the time when the hold of Catholic religion was beginning to decline. The rise of colonialism and the rise of Protestant movement not only just coincided, but they were also interconnected. The rise of science based on rationality and the decline of the idea of omniscient god were not just historically simultaneous but were also deeply interconnected. What colonialism found in the colonies was material wealth which European powers decided to drain. In return, the European powers transported to the colonies many things including some elements that were becoming out dated in Europe, mainly the church and ideas of divinity. Colonialism, from the perspective of Europeans, had objectives related to material wealth and emerged in the context of material deficit. Colonialism placed in circulation an over-inflated idea of spirituality of the colonies. However, nothing in the political, social and cultural life in the colonies during the 17th and 18th century indicated an overwhelming spiritual and theological life. Yet, the colonies responded to the colonial image of their self and imbibed a hallucinatory self-image as a spring of religious profundity in turn, imagining the long discarded theological schools as the core of their being.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

Hinduism, a large scale fiction, is a colonial product of this nature. It is in the manner of consoling the colonies for the material deficit being exported by the colonialist to their subject colonies. Several visions of the future were produced during the 19th century and the 20th century. It is a matter of discussion if any of them had the vision of India's future as a materially prosperous country. The dominant philosophical influences in India during these two centuries were primarily social and humanistic and not political-economic. In order to reverse this history, India will have to re-enact the theatre that was enacted in Europe in the early phase of colonialism. By implication, any and every philosophy that harps on India's religious character will necessarily generate lack of engagement with the material and the economic.

13

Twice in recent history religion centre BJP attempted to project itself as economically super competent government. In both attempts, the adventurism failed. Shining India could not be sufficiently convincing for the voters; and 'sabka vikas' has hardly been the main core of the Modi regime. The deep inter-relation between the material deficit on the one hand and over-statement of spirituality explicitly positioned in political sphere by the RSS-BJP on the other hand has an unmistakable stamp of the colonial legacy on it.

14

The widening middle class in India is not entirely a product of increase in the income levels of its citizens. It is also in a large measure the result of the food sufficiency and textile sufficiency that India attained for a while. It created a population not exactly rich but, at the same time, not exactly poor and, therefore, resembling middle classes elsewhere, yet not in material facts quite the middle class as seen through the lens of social analysts. The upper layer in the wide spectrum of the 'middle' class in India is not given to over-statement of its religious identity, though it is deeply attached to various theological sects and practices. The lower section of the 'middle' class is indeed ready to place theological identity among its ways and means of attaining prosperity. Science, but mainly technology, and material wealth are the primary interests of the upper layer. Therefore, they feel easily attracted to the neo-liberal economic order and the benefits it brings to them.

The lower level middle class is interested in the public affirmation of theological identity in order to achieve up gradation in the social hierarchy (what is called Sanskritization) and the potential benefits it may bring to them in future.

Any political formation keeping the middle class in focus involves the risk of generating in the long run a clash and conflict between science-technology on the one hand and identity and theology on the other hand. This cannot be avoided in politics shaped from the perspective of the right wing-middle-class-majoritarian democracy.

15

In the corona induced economic down turn, the OBCs now in the lower section of the middle class are likely to begin to pass on the burden of keeping alive religion as a political argument to the poorer and pauperised classes, tribals, migrant labourers, farmers, the unemployed youth and housewives whose families are destroyed by the pandemic. The OBCs are likely to shift their political loyalties towards theologically non-explicit and materially and technologically more explicit politics, the politics that demands wider spread and access to education and healthcare. The aspiring OBC class, therefore, will come in a clash with the upper layer of the middle class. Those who desire to dismantle the right wing regime in India will have to work on the cross-section of the OBCs and the upper classes, and at the same time taking science and technology to the poorer classes.

16

The beginning of the year 2000 had brought great excitement among people in all continents. That was the year marking the beginning not just of a new century but a new millennium. Many names were suggested as historical tags for the new century; but probably the one that was received with the greatest enthusiasm for the 21st century was 'the knowledge century'. Two decades is not such a long span of time; but time, indeed, has humbled humans, for no one talks of the present century now using that term. The world has meekly accepted to look askance at what is in store for homo-sapiens. At this juncture, the future looks so embattled. We are surrounded by so many newly unfolding war-fronts.

The widening middle class in India is not entirely a product of increase in the income levels of its citizens. It is also in a large measure the result of the food sufficiency and textile sufficiency that India attained for a while. It created a population not exactly rich but, at the same time, not exactly poor and, therefore, resembling middle classes elsewhere, yet not in material facts quite the middle class as seen through the lens of social analysts. The upper layer in the wide spectrum of the 'middle' class in India is not given to over-statement of its religious identity, though it is deeply attached to various theological sects and practices. The lower section of the 'middle' class is indeed ready to place theological identity among its ways and means of attaining prosperity. Science, but mainly technology, and material wealth are the primary interests of the upper layer. Therefore, they feel easily attracted to the neo-liberal economic order and the benefits it brings to them.

There are news-reports about a strange war that appeared in several newspapers in Karnataka last month. These reports covered an on-going war between elephants and humans. Some 800 elephants roaming in what is known as the 'elephant corridor' of the Western Ghats have opened a systematic war with the human habitants there. It has been recorded by the forest officials since 2014. During it so many humans have been maimed by elephants and so many elephants have been shot dead.

The tension between the two warring sides is so acute that the forest officials in the Hasan District have decided to install sensors for alerting the inhabitants to the presence of elephants in the vicinity. A siren starts sounding when these sensors pick up elephant presence and humans run to the nearest safe-shelter reminding one of Londoners getting into tube stations when Hitler's military planes hovered over the city during the Second World War.

Just a month before the news about the elephants in the forests in India came, one had read about the outburst of bush-forest fires in Australia. The geographic spread and the frequency with which those fires erupted were mind-boggling. They spread over nearly 110,000 sq kms and had in a single week caused the death of 33 persons. The sheer number of trees destroyed by these wanton fires runs into millions. Australia is not the only continent where forest fires have besieged humans. North and South Americas, East Africa and South-East Asia have witnessed increase in the frequency with which forests are getting gulped by uncontrollable wild fires.

17

A Harvard Professor of Astronomy Avi Loeb claimed earlier this year that the floating object spotted in the outer space in 2017 was not natural but launched by another intelligent species. In his provocative book published in February *Extraterrestrial: The First Sign of Intelligent Life Beyond Earth*, Loeb warned the world that to not take the existence of an alien extra-terrestrial species seriously could prove a fatal mistake for us. The object he discusses is given the name 'Oumuamua', a word from the language of an indigenous community. Loeb's argument is that the orbit through which the object moved did not follow the laws of gravitation. It clearly showed that a 'non-gravitational force' was directing its movements. He believes that it is a spaceship powered by solar power generated by using huge mirrors set on its body. His conclusion is the existence of extra-terrestrial aliens, a subject for science fiction and movies, can no more be seen as just a figment of imagination or fantasy. Another Professor has brought in even more disconcerting news for humans. Professor Idan Segev of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and his team of scientists are busy forming artificial human-brain cells. His research will feed into placing the intelligent machines at par with the most innovative humans. Combined with the rampant use by State powers of artificial intelligence for surveillance, the scientific advancement visualised by the researchers in Israel, unfolds before us the spectre of having a mix of intelligent machines and humans as the 'ruling class' in the coming decades.

The Corona virus disease spell has made the shortage of oxygen for medical purposes big news. But, just before the outbreak of COVID, we had seen that schools in Delhi had to be locked down as there was not enough oxygen in air for children to breathe freely. Air pollution at an alarming level is no longer news for any part of the world. But before the big economies of the world find a solution to this seemingly irreversible problem,

David Beasley of the World Food Organisation has given a stern warning that over 83 cr people in the world, that is one in every ten humans, have entirely lost their food security. Already agriculture and fishing as conventional methods of food production have become entirely unviable livelihood choices for the generation born in the twenty-first century. The utter disregard of the Indian government for the farmers' discontent is not just an expression of its characteristic arrogance. It is also, to an extent, a reflection on how low agriculture now ranks in the economic policies of governments.



Stone relief, Hampi, Karnataka. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

What do these apparently diverse calamities threatening human existence indicate? Whether arising out of threats posed by microscopic viruses, radical environmental changes, artificial intelligence, extra-terrestrial interference or out of sheer human arrogance towards nature, indifference to suffering of fellow humans and insensitivity to the signs of the resulting degeneration, the nature of wars that humans have to face and fight in near future will be such that humans have never known in the past. The wars fought by us centuries ago, at the beginning of the second millennium, were mostly faith-based. They were crusades or jihads. The wars fought during the nineteenth century were nationalistic in character, based in ethnicity, language and contested territorial claims. The wars fought during the last century were driven by ideologies combined with economic interests, whether they were wars caused by Fascism, Communism or Capitalism. The wars waiting for us on the horizon are of a different character and a different order. These will be wars for or with environment, with the forces of the natural evolution, with non-human intelligence and with life and objects that belong to a different framework of matter and motion. Sadly, governments that humans have are still in the old world mind-set, prisoners of terribly dated political ideologies analysis focused on faith-based divisions, territorial contestations and narrow nationalism. Though the proponents of Cosmo-Democracy have made a beginning of thinking about political systems necessary for equipping humans to fight these new wars, their voice is still very feeble and has not reached beyond a very small circle of political scientists. But, time is ticking fast.

18

On all horizons in view there are unprecedented wars waiting for us. It is now for humans as a single species to unite, learn adaptation, respect the logic of evolution and manage to survive; COVID and much beyond it through this war century. In India we have the great task at hand of cleansing the minds of people of the poison of communal hatred spread by the RSS. We have also to bring in a government that is sensitive to people's needs and perceptions. We have to think of how our federal structure can be given the centrality it deserves and the idea of India as a plural and diverse society can be safeguarded. We have to work towards restoring the institutions that secure democratic checks and balances in the system. We have to make education and basic health-care accessible to everyone as their fundamental right. We have to see to it that the media regains its freedom. And, we have to ensure an equitable livelihood opportunity to those whose economic condition deserves urgent attention by the state.

Most of all, giving women the rights that legitimately belong to them is an urgent obligation on all of us. These are big challenges. There are equally big challenges posed by the non-human world. Protection of natural environment and keeping ecological balance are the foremost among them. Protecting individual privacy and dignity in the face of the vast advent in the field of artificial memory and artificial intelligence is also as daunting a challenge.

19

During Margaret Thatcher's regime, the conservative British habits of mind made England believe that would be some let up in the government's anti-poor policies. That has not happened during the last four decades. After the dismantling of the former USSR, many had hoped that Russia would actually become a welfare state prompted by an open society. That hope is dead a good quarter of a century. An economically compounded Europe was initially seen as the transformed future of the nation state, and the brief spell of Euro-Communism was seen as rebirth of the idea of equality. Far from it, at present nearly a dozen European countries are experiencing a rapid rise of the political right-wing influence. One had hoped that long wars in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan would end by generating new models of balance of power. Instead, they resulted in spawning the ugly face of militant theocracies and a range of non-state formations thriving on terror and violence. The world today looks more sordid, far more terrifying and unsettled than ever before. The sphere of influence of ideas of peace, amity, evenly shared progress, reason, balance and restraint has been continuously shrinking. It is as if, like the great economic depression forming the prelude to the second-world-war, there is a kind of a great political depression presenting itself to the community of nations as a prelude for something terrible to come.

The nineteen-eighties had brought to the world a fleeting vision of a one-world phase of the community of nations. Increased food sufficiency, better transport and oil tracking, more easily accessible healthcare and the promise of free flow of information were in the background of the German unification. In our country, those years were marked with the telecom and TV revolution. Despotic rules and dictatorships, where they existed, had started looking like expired ideas by mid-eighties. Liberal economic ideas were becoming ready to free the spirit of enterprise and creativity and loosen the stifling regimes making them supple and flexible. The fear of nuclear wars had started evaporating like some forgotten nightmare. The world thought that the future wars would be wars on malnutrition, disease and illiteracy.

International agencies were getting ready to spell out their agendas for the Millennium Development Goals and 'X for All' kind of collaborative programmes. However, through the last three decades the mood has changed, changed altogether, and as w. B. Yeats said a century ago, 'a terrible beauty is born.'

There is a cryptic definition of democracy which wits 'democracy is a rumour not as yet disproved.' In our time, it is indeed becoming only a rumour, in Chile, Russia, U.S.A., Nigeria, Egypt and even in our dear own country. During the last few years, world over there is an inexplicable rise of an anti-democratic sentiment. This is explained by thinkers with a left leaning as the capture of the state by the corporate. Gandhians explain this as a predictable consequence of unchecked greed. The neo-liberals explain this as a passing phase of the clash between technocratic ethics – 'transparency' and 'fast-growth' – and the political order prone to 'populist' economic drives. There are also explanations stressing on the deviant personality traits of individuals, whether Donald Trump, Recep Erdogan or Narendra Modi. What is difficult to explain is why so many of them and all at one time? George Santayana had described his times as the world 'on a moral holiday'. Following him, one can probably say that the world today appears to be 'on a political holiday'.

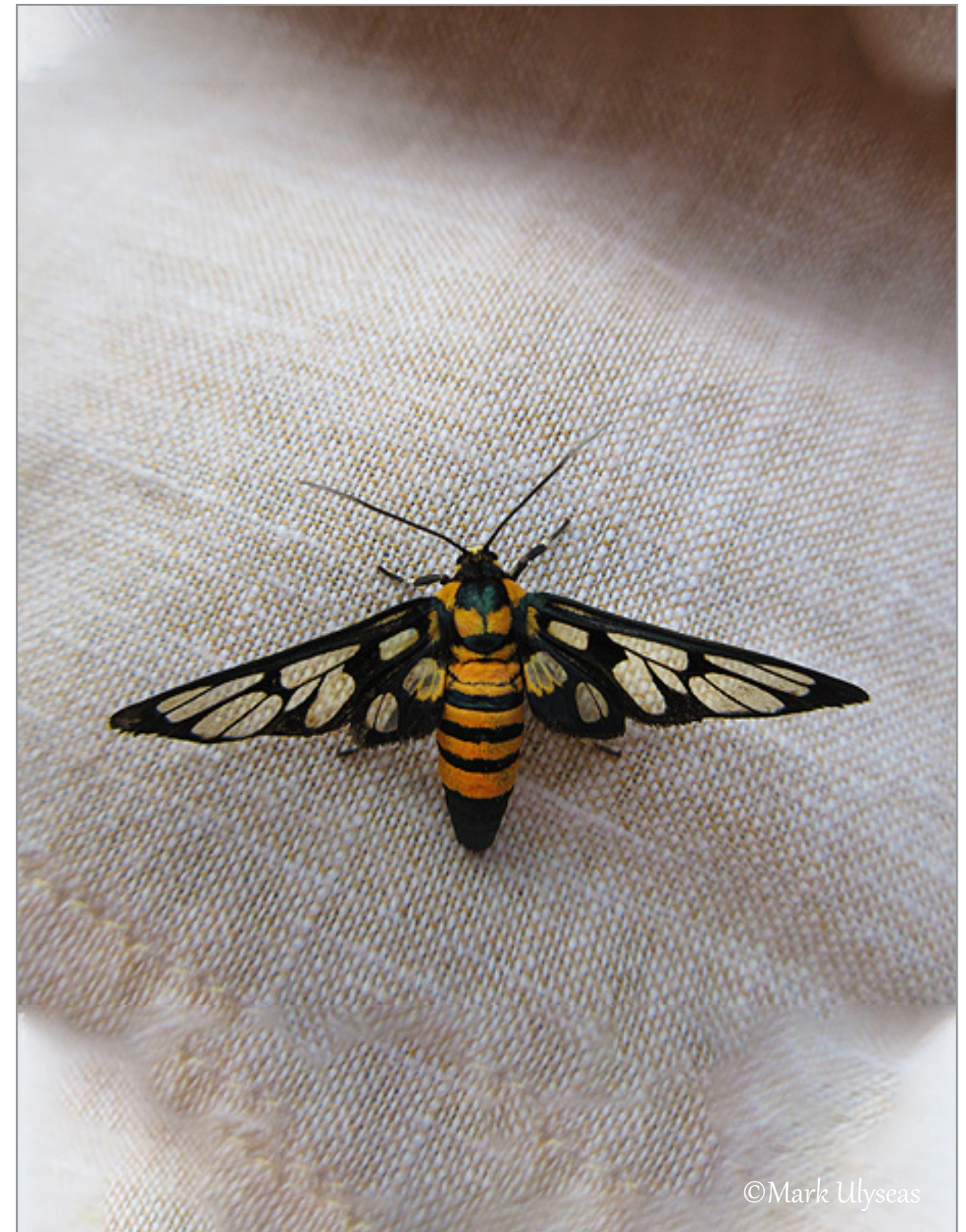
20

It is time for us to return from our political holiday, time to unmask the system, free it from the rituals that have replaced democracy and people's representation and time to face the challenges head on. It is time for us to understand that humans have to come to terms with artificial intelligence, on the one hand, and with non-human life on our planet, and even beyond on the other hand. It is time for us to rethink and revitalise the idea of democracy, as an integral part of the global and even the cosmic arrangement of life. Cosmo-democracy is the term being used for such an arrangement. It is time for us to think of rights beyond the rights just of the majority, just of adults and just of humans. We need to invent ways of respecting and protecting the rights of all marginal communities and all minorities in every country, the rights of children and the rights of non-human life among all species in the world known to us and in the worlds that we still do not know but may come to know in near future, and also the rights of what is still not life—such as the AI— but is fast moving towards acquiring life.

21

In order to meet these challenges squarely, we need to come together on the following points:

1. Our political vocabulary is hopelessly outdated.
2. Our political understanding can never be complete unless it integrates with a scientific view of the vast cosmos that surrounds us. It cannot be complete unless it takes into account life other than human life.
3. Systems so far created by us have remained lop-sided because they have not fully found out the ways of dealing with diversities and pluralities.
4. We cannot bring about any fundamental change unless we propose for ourselves and adopt a working system of global governance, not as a community of nations but as a community of peoples, communities and cultures.
5. Democracy is a gift given to us by the previous generations of thinkers and leaders. We shall have squandered it away if we do not leverage it for moving forward to an idea of cosmocracy.
6. Politics is not about gaining or consolidating power but about gaining freedom for all from the bondage of outdated thought, slavery to a narrow identity and loyalty to sinking horizons of hope and expectations. Our job is to lift up those horizons.



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Dr. Namrata Goswami is an independent scholar on space policy, great power politics, and ethnic conflicts. She was [Research Fellow](#) at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, a [visiting Fellow](#) at Peace Research Institute, Oslo, Norway; La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia; and [University of Heidelberg](#), Germany. In 2012, she worked as Jennings-Randolph Senior Fellow at United States Institute of Peace, Washington D.C. and was awarded a Fulbright-Nehru Senior Fellowship that same year. In 2016-2017, she was awarded the MINERVA grant awarded by the Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense to study great power competition in outer space. Her book on *The Naga Ethnic Movement for a Separate Homeland Stories from the Field*, was published by Oxford University Press in March 2020. Her co-authored book on *Scramble for the Skies: The Great Power Competition to Control the Resources of Outer Space* was published October 2020 by Lexington Press, an imprint of Rowman and Littlefield. She is currently working on an academic book project on China's Grand Strategy and Notions of Territoriality. She has published widely to include in [The Diplomat](#), the Economic Times, [the Hindu](#), [The Washington Post](#), [Ad Astra](#), [Asia Policy](#), [Live Encounters Magazine](#), [Cairo Review](#).

DR NAMRATA GOSWAMI

China under Xi:

The Institutionalization of the Communist Party of China

In April 2020, Baogang Guo highlighted the academic term, 'partocracy' with Chinese characteristics in his article, "A Partocracy with Chinese Characteristics: Governance System Reform under Xi Jinping."¹ Guo specified that 'partocracy' captures China under President Xi Jinping's leadership, and not western concepts like authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Under Xi, there has been a concerted effort to institutionalize the Communist Party of China (CPC) into every facet of Chinese governance. Xi asserts that his goal as Chinese President is to bring back the party and its legitimization process into every aspect of Chinese life, creating a central node of governance and guidance structure. Critically, Xi is undertaking an effort to 'institutionalize, legalize, and rationalize' the role of the CPC into what he calls a modern socialist state with Chinese characteristics.² The focus of these new terminologies is on regime resilience and creating a more effective, transparent rule by law, not rule of law, of Chinese life.³ This, Xi, stresses, creates predictability, stability and fairness thereby ensuring that meritocracy is the key enabling factor and corrupt party officials will have little capability to engage in underhand dealings and bribes. This also means that the loyalty to the CPC has been again inscribed into the Chinese constitution, with Xi creating the impression of a modern, adaptable CPC of more than 90 million members.

What does this Mean for China?

Partocracy as an analytical tool implies that the CPC is fast emerging as the institutional governance mechanism of the Chinese party state, where stringent rules of admission into party membership, merit-based promotions and sessions of indoctrination for CPC members to Xi's philosophy is becoming the norm.⁴ This Chinese governance structure, based on the centrality of the CPC, is reflective of the CPC's complete control of China's state resources and the military. While connections to the revolutionary CPC leaders of the 1940s still has relevance to include President Xi, whose father Xi Zhongxun, was among the first generation of Chinese CPC leaders, the focus under Xi is on meritocracy and potential for hard work. Xi has also made fighting corrupt officials within the CPC as an important goal.

Dr Namrata Goswami

Xi underscores the importance of institutionalization of the CPC into every aspect of Chinese life unlike even how the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) played a role in the life of erstwhile Soviet Union citizens. To this effect, he has offered 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era'. The 'Xi thought' is now inscribed into the Chinese Constitution and Xi has established himself President for life unlike his predecessors who gave up power after a decade long stint, except for Mao. Xi has also elevated himself to the stature of Mao.



Portraits of President Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong feature on souvenirs on display at a shop near the Forbidden City in Beijing
Photo: Reuters

Towards that effect, in 2018, China set up the National Supervisory Commission (NSC) that had the power to arrest anyone on suspicion of corruption, with no access to legal counsel upto six months.⁵ The NSC was established by the National People's Congress (NPC) regulated by the Supervision Law of the PRC.⁶ The NSC is a powerful body with direct reporting to the NPC, making it equal to the State Council, the Supreme People's Procuratorate and China's judiciary. The NSC is now the supreme body for anti-corruption superseding all other state or provincial anti-corruption bodies and works in close collaboration with the Central Commission for Discipline and Inspection (CCDI) of the CPC.⁷ Chinese citizens, accused of corruption, faces investigation by the NSC to include non-party members, public employees, those engaged in scientific research and education, managers of state-owned enterprises, and the health sector. The NSC reflects the dominant role played by the CPC in state wide governance mechanisms highlighting Xi's ideology of party dominance in China's political and social life. While the focus of the NSC is on prevention rather than punishment,⁸ the concerns of overreach, illegal detention based on party loyalty issues, false corruption charges brought on dissidents, and the fact that legal counsel is denied for six months, creates a situation of fear, with the NSC's insipient entry into law enforcement roles.⁹ Politically, the CPC has access to the vast resources of the Chinese state without any change in regime, and Xi therefore stresses on regime resilience and legalization of the processes to create a future where the CPC becomes ubiquitous with the Chinese state.

Xi's Philosophy

In order to understand the wide-ranging structural changes underway in China to include Chinese governance, the overarching role of the CPC, and its control over the military and state resources, we need to understand Xi's philosophy for ruling China. Almost all Chinese Presidents had a governing philosophy to guide their stint at the highest level of decision making. Deng Xiaoping played a critical role in developing China into a modern force and help guide it out of the devastation of the Mao Zedong era to include the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution that left millions of people dead. Deng highlighted the critical importance of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' which meant 'reform and opening up' of China's economy while maintaining the party state as espoused by Vladimir Lenin. Deng shifted the focus of the Chinese economy to manufacturing under strict economic guidance, but he was also amenable to CPC intraparty reform until the events of Tiananmen square of 1989 put an end to the party reform enterprise.

Deng, however, did not offer the Chinese system of governance or saw China's role in the world as shaping international politics at the systemic level. In 2000, Jiang Zemin offered his philosophy of *The Three Represents*. The CPC opened up its membership beyond just one class to those engaged in business and other productive activities, with Jiang stressing that "the Three Represents is imbued with the same spirit as Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory, and it reflects new demands on the work of the Party and the state arising from developments and changes presently occurring in China and the world over. The Three Represents is a powerful theoretical tool for strengthening and improving Party building and promoting the self-improvement and development of China's socialist system...the whole Party must always maintain the spirit of advancing with the times and constantly extend Marxist theory into new realms; it must give top priority to development in governing and invigorating the country and constantly break new ground and open up a new prospect in the modernization drive; it must fully mobilize all positive factors and constantly generate new strength for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation; and it must improve its Party building in a spirit of reform and constantly inject new vitality into itself."¹⁰ Jiang Zemin was of the perspective that the CPC needs to be adaptive and represent overall Chinese aspirations and modernization, expanding its reach across the Chinese citizenry. President Hu Jintao stressed on harmonization, and scientific outlook on development, moving away from a deep focus on Marxist Leninist Mao Zedong thought, to a focus on building legitimacy of the CPC based on modernization, scientific temper and socialism with Chinese characteristics.¹¹

Enter Xi. Unlike Deng, Xi stresses on the need to move the Chinese economy from manufacturing to technological innovation and services. He aspires to establish China as a lead actor in international politics, propelled by the guiding role of the CPC, who he views as synonymous to the role Chinese emperors played in the lives of ancient China, and to create an economy where Chinese domestic consumption helps propel it to becoming the lead economic actor by 2050. Xi underscores the importance of institutionalization of the CPC into every aspect of Chinese life unlike even how the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) played a role in the life of erstwhile Soviet Union citizens. To this effect, he has offered 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era'. The 'Xi thought' is now inscribed into the Chinese Constitution and Xi has established himself President for life unlike his predecessors who gave up power after a decade long stint, except for Mao. Xi has also elevated himself to the stature of Mao. Xi's thought highlights eight fundamental priority areas.

First, by 2035, China has to develop into a modern socialist country aimed at national rejuvenation, prosperous and scientifically advanced.

Second, tackle inequality in Chinese society by focusing on equitable growth under the watchful eye of the CPC, whose role for philosophical guidance is enshrined into the Chinese constitution under Xi.

Third, Xi makes it clear to the Chinese people that the only future path for development and prosperity is through the theory and system of Chinese socialism.

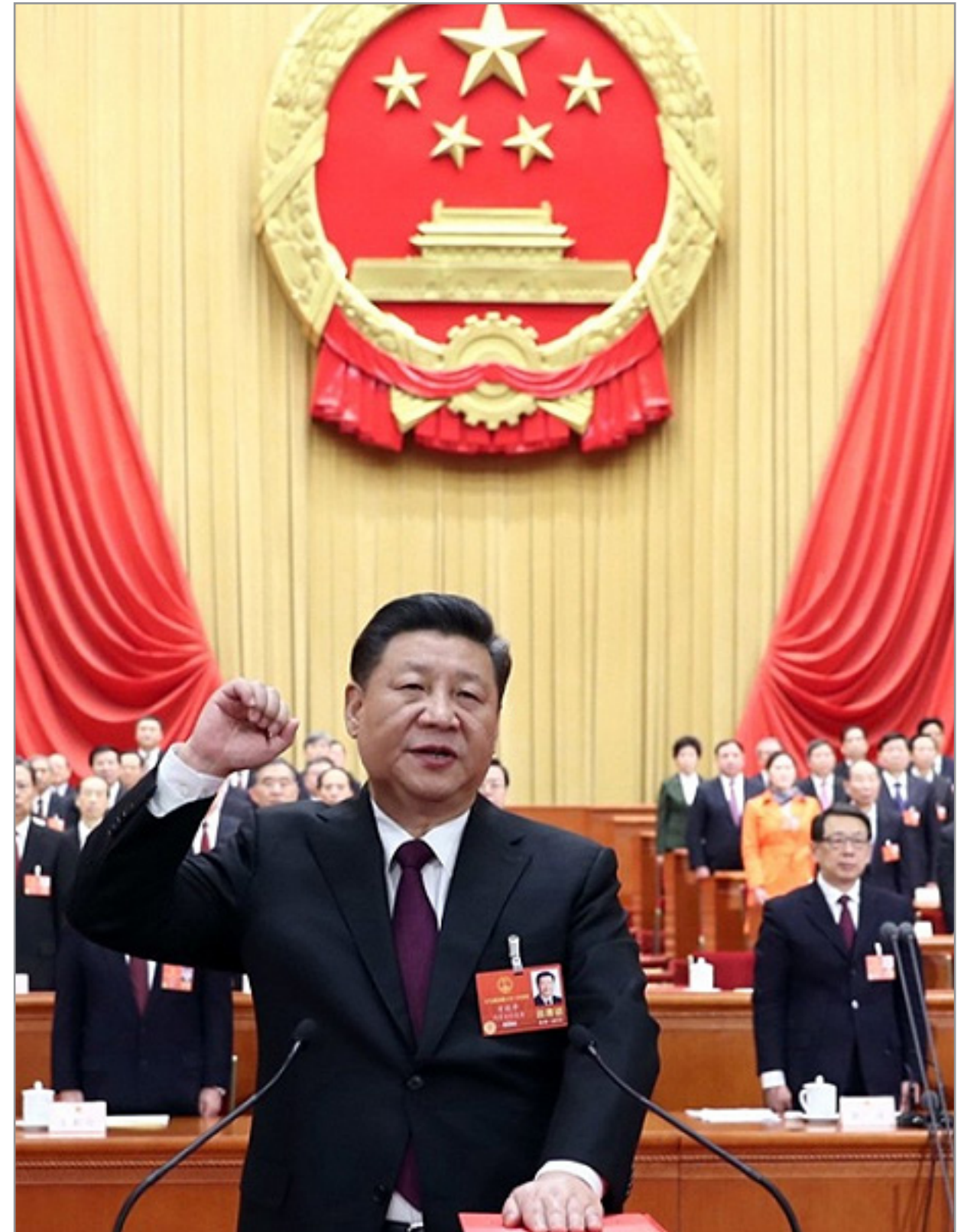
Fourth, Xi highlights the need for reform and modernizing the CPC for effective governance.

Fifth, the need for such governance must be propelled by rule by law, essentially a socialist rule by law with strict control laying with the CPC and the institutions that merge with it across all levels of Chinese society.

Sixth, to create a strong China, it is the CPC's job to build a strong military, to include China's space military capacities, "the Party's goal of building a strong military in the new era is to build the people's forces into world-class forces *that obey the Party's command*, can fight and win, and maintain excellent conduct".¹²

Seventh, to showcase China's role in the world and as a leader in international politics, offering an alternate set of institutions like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in direct challenge to American primacy. This is where Xi departs from earlier leaders like Deng and Hu, by asserting the growing global role that China is playing and will play in shaping the future of humanity.

Eight, "the CPC leadership is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the greatest strength of the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics; the Party is the highest force for political leadership. The thought sets forth the general requirements for Party building in the new era and underlines the importance of political work in Party building."¹³



Photograph from Google.

While developing China internally is one aspect of Xi's thought, the most strategically consequential aspect of Xi's thought is his focus on Chinese national revival and international leadership backed by military power. It indicates a China that is now assertive about its global role and assuming leadership across domains to include high technologies.

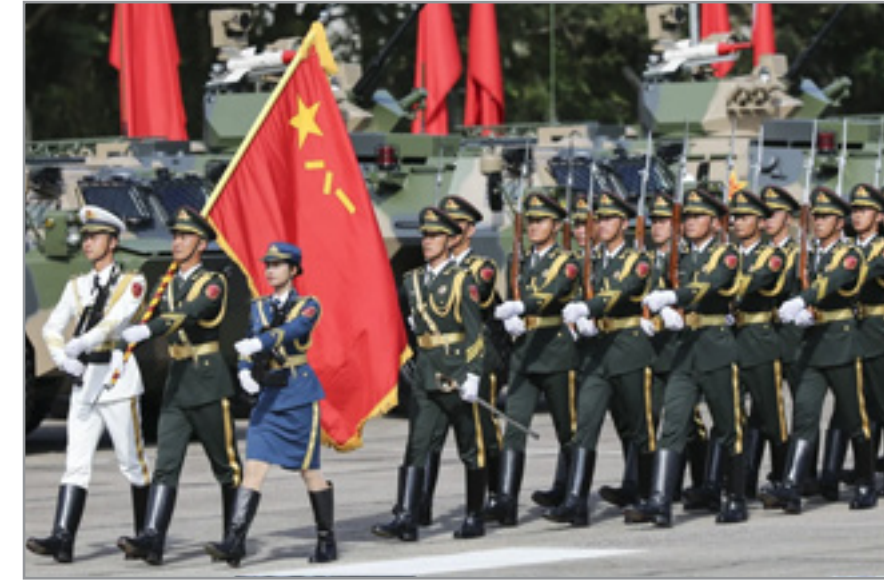


Photo: Scmp.com

These eight blocks of Xi's thought are supported by fourteen principles which includes envisioning a new rule by law-based governance, meritocracy, improve living standards, promote national reunification (read Taiwan), uphold the absolute rule by the CPC but also ensure a rigorous governance over CPC members.

Towards this end, Xi has, since 2013 when he assumed power, strengthened the role of an institutionalized CPC, with party representation in almost all institutions in China, and indoctrination into Xi thought as is revealed by CPC Central Committee's Publicity Department and Organization Department issuing a circular in February 2021 for all CPC members to study 100 questions and answers on Xi's thought.¹⁴ Xi has also tightened his hold on China's military and space program, as well as strengthened Artificial Intelligence enabled autonomous surveillance capacities of Chinese society. Very similar to Mao's Little Red Book, Xi's Thought is now published as a book and is mandatory for senior Chinese state officials, discussed in academic seminars, mandatory for student study as well as a resource for indoctrination of the Chinese military into his thought.

While developing China internally is one aspect of Xi's thought, the most strategically consequential aspect of Xi's thought is his focus on Chinese national revival and international leadership backed by military power. It indicates a China that is now assertive about its global role and assuming leadership across domains to include high technologies. For Xi, the China based on his thought is a China based on strict adherence to the leadership of the Communist Party grounded on the academic concept of partocracy, and adverse to western style democracy and rule of law based on transparency, free press, individual rights and liberties. For Xi, in matters of individual rights, the CPC takes precedence, and those who dissent are treated harshly within his conception of rule by law. This structural effort by Xi surpasses all our understanding of previous oligarchies, like the Soviet Union, where collapses at the highest political level led to disintegration due to the inability of the CPSU to institutionalize its role across the country based on effective governance and rule by law. This is where Xi's CPC departs from its predecessor like CPSU with structural systems-based legalization, legitimization and rationalization.

The China under Xi significantly differs from the China under Deng or Ziang or Hu with Xi's effort to institutionalize, legalize and rationalize the role of the CPC into China's modern socialist governance structure with deep seated societal implications for the future. This is the China under Xi that we need to contend with, a CPC leader led country but with even greater impact on international politics and the rule of law as envisioned by liberal institutionalists and the western international legal regimes. Because for Xi and the China that is emergent, it is China led rule by law. not rule of law, that we will have to deal with as we move into the future.

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Mark Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photo-grapher. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. It is a not for profit (adfree) free online magazine featuring leading academics, writers, poets, activists of all hues etc. from around the world. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry*, which was relaunched as *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in March 2017. In February 2019 the third publication was launched, *LE Children Poetry & Writing* (now renamed *Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers*). In August 2020 the fourth publication, *Live Encounters Books*, was launched. He has edited, designed and produced all of *Live Encounters'* 217 publications (till July 2021). Mark's philosophy is that knowledge must be free and shared freely to empower all towards enlightenment. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*, *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. <https://liveencounters.net/mark-ulyseas/>
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MARK ULYSEAS

The Ministry of Social Media

You are free, and that is why you are lost. - Franz Kafka

Welcome to The Ministry of Social Media, your avatar is being processed, please take a seat.

For your convenience, kindly read the following rules and information.

Once enrolled you cannot get lost. We can track you anywhere in the world, including your last resting place:

Governments must abide by the rules of engagement: permitting anyone to write or share views or news (presumed fake/otherwise) without recourse to censor as long as it doesn't offend the minions in the Ministry of Social Media.

The sole right of censorship is retained by the Ministry of Social Media, which will not provide any explanation as to the reason for censorship.

If a government does not abide by the rules laid down by the minions in the Ministry of Social Media they are summarily banished from the network and/or accused of endangering the freedom of speech and civil & human rights in the 'free world' (whatever this means).

All those who join the Ministry of Social Media cannot actually leave with their data because their data has already been mined and shared/sold for purposes of exploitation, like selling users things they don't need or, perhaps, something more sinister.

The Ministry of Social Media apparently overlooks the highly profitable and exploitive businesses that use its free services for sex and human trafficking, drug peddling etc.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas

However, on no account can one be remotely offensive when it comes to LGBT, WOKE folk, racism of any kind or use specific words or phrases that have been disapproved by the Ministry of Social Media. Even heads of governments are not spared.

The founders of the Ministry of Social Media have bestowed upon themselves extra-judicial powers that override all governments.

The Ministry of Social Media reserves the right to cancel anyone for omissions or commissions related to matters its minions deem unfit for the public arena. This includes facts, truth and other incidental aberrations of a sane mind.

The Ministry of Social Media offers a free service so it can exploit the users and weaponize its services to inflict its selective sense of reality. It seeks to avoid paying taxes in many countries to evade sharing its massive profits from its 'free service'.

All users and governments must be grateful for the stellar service provided by the Ministry of Social Media in preserving free speech, propagating civil & human rights and helping the world come together on one common platform to be exploited.

Overview of Reality

Reality is now relegated to a metaphysical world. And to reach this reality one has to trudge through the filth of Goebbels bastard offspring, The Ministry of Social Media. Offspring that spout an unending litany of half-truths/untruths expertly marinated with a few tidbits of facts so as to entice the viewer or reader to partake of the 'news', to eat it, to be contaminated by it and to release it ...like daily bodily excretions ...expect that nothing is flushed...it remains floating around while the viewer wallows in it unmindful of the stench of agendas. One would imagine that pigs are intelligent creatures.

Nothing appears sacred anymore. Religion, politics, poverty and entertainment jostle for space on the shelves of the media that roam, scavenging anything and everything, dragging it back to their lairs, then hastily reconstructing the garbage to resemble a nice glitzy version for suckers to suck on...viewers...the gullible mental invalids who find it far more comfortable to share the news links without making any attempt to cross check facts or to question what is being reported.

Colourful images and haunting sound tracks, reporters and anchors wearing masks of the masquerade ball announce with aplomb the news of their reality. Debates, discussions and the usual 'all sound and fury signifying nothing' are aired with a sincerity of a bitch in heat waiting on the roadside for a passing dog. And as if on cue viewers line-up for a quickie selfie. Every one of them wants their views on the news to be heard and accepted, and if this does not happen they unleash the trolls that in turn run riot on the net. Abuse is the mantra. And so is denigration, another exciting path, though much trodden of late.

The rules of the game are that there are no rules. The order of the day is to sell, sell, sell...viewership numbers outrank truth on any given day...as long as sponsors — political, commercial or religious, are willing to pay the price for such services. There is profit to be had in promoting insidious agendas.

Phrases almost always feature the hash tag to denote a universal acceptance, an acceptance that does not, initially, exist. However, with regular usage a phrase becomes the WORD. And then this WORD generates a following of believers. Anyone who challenges this WORD is marked offensive and denigrated by the juggernaut of users, the enlightened enforcers.

Spin doctors don't wear masks anymore; they can't be bothered, for they walk in the light of studio cameras. They know how to rehash and repack untruths into a credible reality and administer it to the public like nerve gas. Notice how many people are obsessed with the news as if it is pornography. The more violent and salacious the words and visuals the more viewers congregate to confabulate, to expound their own versions of reality.

The excessive odious reportage assumes an air of sweet jasmine on a cool summer night. Media is the surrogate mother of social media, Goebbels' bastard offspring.

Turning of the screws on the thumbs appears to have begun with the 'editing' and/or deletion of posts of free thinkers by social media gendarmes of the WORD and their pack of lexicon executioners. The management of minds is underway and there is no turning back, no way out, but in.

A heartfelt thanks to The Ministry of Social Media that provides users with meaningful contributions to the Community by tracking those vaccinated and unvaccinated for future use by its minions in the Ministry, governments, pharmaceutical companies and *others*.

Eduardo Goncalves is an award-winning campaigner, conservationist and author who has spent the past 30 years dedicated to fighting on behalf of the environment, defenceless animals, and the homeless. In 2018 he set up the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting. In 2019, every UK national political party included a pledge to ban imports of hunting trophies in its election manifesto. The UK government has now pledged to introduce legislation to ban trophy imports. The political sea-change has been large driven by a series of explosive books written by Eduardo which have been extensively reported in the media and which reveal the shocking truth about this cruel 'sport's' toll on animals - including some of the most endangered animals on the planet. For his latest book, *Undercover Trophy Hunter*, Eduardo posed as a trophy hunter and tracked down dozens of leading figures in the industry and their clients, winning their trust and in the process uncovering some of the darkest and most shocking insights into the industry's activities. <https://edgoncalves.wordpress.com/>

EDUARDO GONÇALVES

Ban Trophy Hunting

“The bullet slammed into the lioness and she spun in the air, falling against the electric fence behind which she was confined. Standing on the other side of the fence were her three young cubs – she had been separated from them an hour earlier. Another shot was fired by the overseas hunter. She slumped to the ground in a crumpled heap. Both times, the hunter shot from a vehicle. He then posed with the dead lioness and pulled at her mouth to show her teeth. Later, in the skinning shed, as the lioness's coat was removed from her body to become a 'trophy' for the hunter, milk from her teats mingled with her blood on the ground.”¹

In 1997, ten million TV viewers in the UK watched a documentary presented by legendary investigative journalist Roger Cook. It revealed the existence of a horrific new industry: canned lion hunting.

Aired on May 6, 'Making a Killing' exposed how lions were being illegally siphoned out of South Africa's Kruger National Park by hunters and landowners to acquire lions for this shocking new enterprise.

Tracey McDonald, who ran a hunting company with her husband Sandy, was secretly filmed explaining the process: “You just dig a little bit under the fence and you leave a little bit of rotten meat on that side, then you drag it with the blood running and the lion picks the scent up so easily and it just comes through.”

The documentary included shocking secret footage from a game ranch near Komatiport, on the south-east end of the Kruger bordering Mozambique, run by a businessman named Roy Plath. It shows a lioness with three cubs lured with bait placed on the bonnet of a truck and separated from her young. A hunter then shoots her from the truck.



Eduardo Gonçalves

Richard Peirce is a British wildlife author and documentary-maker. In 2018 he wrote a book called 'Cuddle Me, Kill Me' which investigated what the world of canned lion hunting currently looks like. It reveals how lionesses are treated like dogs in puppy mills, and that they are repeatedly forced to breed cubs by having their young taken away shortly after birth so that they go straight back into oestrus.

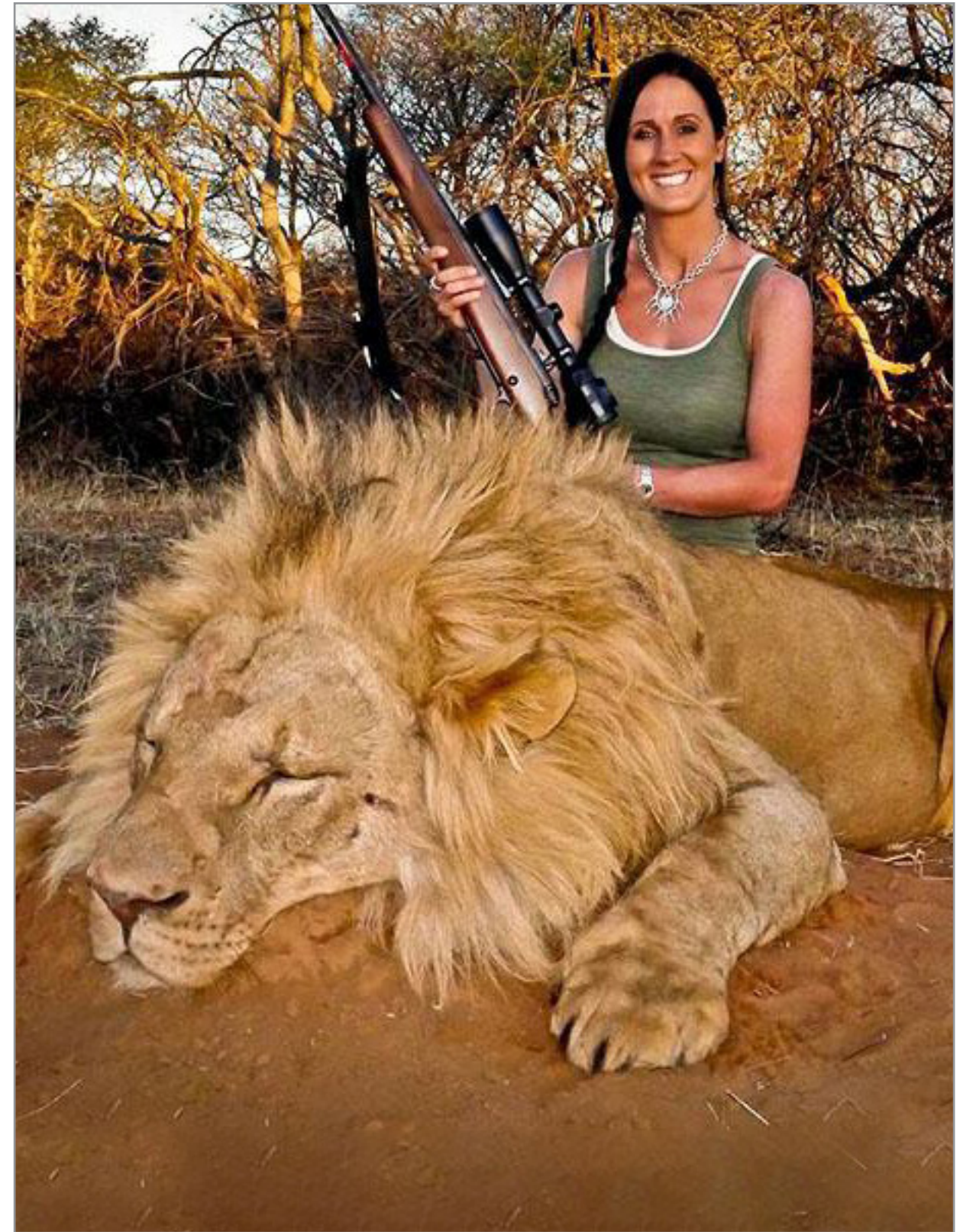
Researchers acquired evidence of a canned lion hunt in which over 12 shots are fired into the animal. The hunter is thought to have avoided a quick kill by shooting the lion in the head because he did not want to 'ruin' the look of his trophy. The team discovered people who were breeding white lions for hunters, and of a client's young son being urged to shoot a lioness. It eventually took 16 shot to kill her.

Another hunting operation claimed to have clients killing over 1,000 animals every year. During the making of the documentary, Cook is offered gorillas to shoot in Cameroon. Fixers tell him they can smuggle the gorilla's head to the Nigerian border so that 'Mr Rogers' can smuggle it back home more easily. He is also offered a tiger in Malaysia by a Spanish middle-man.

When "Making a Killing" was aired in 1997, there were perhaps just a dozen or fewer 'lion factory farms' in South Africa. Today, according to government officials, there are over 300. CITES records show that just 10 trophies from canned lions were exported from South Africa in 1997. In 2017, the most recent year for which full figures are available, 582 trophies from lions born and bred in captivity were taken home by foreign hunters – more than fifty times the number taken just 20 years previously.

Richard Peirce is a British wildlife author and documentary-maker. In 2018 he wrote a book called 'Cuddle Me, Kill Me' which investigated what the world of canned lion hunting currently looks like. It reveals how lionesses are treated like dogs in puppy mills, and that they are repeatedly forced to breed cubs by having their young taken away shortly after birth so that they go straight back into oestrus. He tells the harrowing story of a typical canned lion hunt. An American couple, George and Hilary, pick out their preferred lion from photographs provided by the hunt operator before flying out to South Africa. The animal, like so many others, had been reared in captivity and was a tame and easy target. The story begins with the pair entering the lion's enclosure in a vehicle with two of the hunting camp's workers.

"The lion was dozing when he picked up the familiar sound of a vehicle's engine approaching. He had lost the captive pride he had lived with and was alone in strange surroundings. But it was with curiosity rather than alarm that he lifted his head, and looked in the direction of the noise. He saw a vehicle stop a little distance away from where he lay, but didn't move as people got out of the vehicle and walked around examining the ground. The vehicle then drove off, leaving people behind who continued examining the ground before walking in his direction.



TV presenter and hunter Melissa Bachman posted this photo of herself with a lion she killed in South Africa, tweeting, 'What a hunt!' (Melissa Bachman via Facebook) <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/tv-presenter-slammed-photo-lion-killed-article-1.1519039>

“He was used to humans; they had been in his life every day since his birth. Indeed, his life had started with humans, who had bottle fed him after he had been removed by his mother. Humans were nothing to fear; in his early life they had been a source of comfort as well as food. His instinct was almost to get up and go and greet the people that now walked towards him.”

The hunter lifts his rifle, takes aim, and shoots it.

“A massive muscular contraction and the impact of the bullet lifted the animal into a weird, grotesque backward whirl as George’s second shot hammered into him. The lion now lay on its side panting and bleeding in the grass. With their guns at their shoulders, Pieter, Andrew and George approached in single file. George showed no emotion as, together with Hilary and the hunting team, he walked to the lion, which now lay dying with two bullets in its body.

“The mortally wounded animal lay on its side and was still breathing as it looked at its killers. ‘Finish him off with a shot through the eye, then it won’t show when the head is mounted’, said Pieter automatically as he looked down at the stricken lion.”²

Others recount similar experiences. “The lion cartwheels from the force of the bullet – shocked and confused it roars, turns and quickly limps off into the bush. ‘Shoot him again, shoot him again, shoot him again’, the professional hunter frantically urges, as the hunter reloads, firing into the trees.” The hunt is being filmed by a cameraman hired by the hunter. The video shows the lion lying dead and the American hunter walking up to him. “‘Hey you’, he says, ‘I’m sorry, but I wanted you’, before leaning down and kissing the lion.”

Every year, an estimated 6,000 lion cubs are bred in captivity in South Africa in order to satisfy demand from the trophy hunting industry and from the fast-growing lion bone trade. Once the hunter has taken the skull and skin of the animal he has shot – which is transformed into a trophy - the skeleton is turned into ‘wine’ and ‘cake’ and a range of other products with supposed medicinal products an which are popular in parts of South-East Asia.³ Some of those involved with the trade are known to be involved in illegal wildlife trafficking. Despite this, and warnings from conservationists about how the trade is fuelling wild lion poaching, South Africa has been granted special dispensation by CITES to continue this terrible trade.

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The industry is today a powerful one. When South Africa’s government attempted to regulate the industry, it was taken to court. The government had introduced a bill in 2005 which would have required captive-bred lions to be released into a semi-wild (but still enclosed) area a full 2 years before they could be hunted. The industry sued the Minister of Environmental Affairs. South Africa’s Supreme Court of Appeal overturned the law.

In 2019, officials from the Department of Environmental Affairs visited a number of lion breeding farms. They found that 88 of the 227 facilities inspected did not have proper permits to operate.⁴ In Free State - the province with the most such facilities - over half of the 111 farms were operating illegally.

Instead of taking punitive action, though, inspectors issued them with accreditation papers.

The South African government has now apparently agreed to end the breeding of lions for hunting. But what will happen to the estimated 12,000 captive lions currently awaiting a hunter’s bullet? A government report suggests returning them to the wild and that mass euthanasia may be the only solution. Surely, though, those who have profited from the misery of these great cats should be made to foot the bill of ensuring they can live out their days in dignity?

End Notes

1. “Horrors of ‘canned’ lion hunting” – Mail & Guardian, May 2 – 8, 1997, Gareth Patterson
2. “Cuddle me, Kill me – a true account of South Africa’s captive lion breeding and canned hunting industry”, Richard Peirce, Penguin Random House South Africa, 2018
3. “Cuddle Me, Kill Me” – a true account of South Africa’s captive lion breeding and canned hunting industry, Richard Peirce, Penguin Random House South Africa, 2018
4. “South Africa kicks the can down the road on captive predator breeding”, Ross Harvey, The Conversation 21 March 2019



WHY WE SHOULD ACT NOW IN DEFENSE OF WOLVES

An open letter to President Joseph R. Biden,
Hon. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, and
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Principal Deputy Director Martha Williams

Eric Dinerstein, Ph.D.
RESOLVE

Carly Vynne, Ph.D.
RESOLVE

Suzanne Asha Stone, MA
International Wildlife Coexistence Network

Sanjiv Fernando, MS
RESOLVE

Andy Tak Lun Lee, MS
RESOLVE

Photograph NPS/Jacob W. Frank
<https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery-item.htm?pg=0&id=cebbfa91-94e3-4e62-bf1d-1dca050c5d5f&gid=25C97BD8-155D-451F-675E208BE082FE26>

On July 1, the state of Idaho will begin an eradication campaign to slash the state's recovering wolf population from an estimated 1,500 wolves to 150. This intervention, approved by the state's legislature and signed by its governor, authorizes the use of bounties, traps, snares, night raids, hunting hounds, and even the killing of nursing pups and mothers in their dens. Such practices contradict 21st century conservation management that stresses the benefit of returning natural predators to the landscape, which in turn restores functioning ecosystems. This kill is to be undertaken despite widespread evidence that wolves pose no threat to the region's livestock industry and that non-lethal control remains the most effective means to reduce potential conflict with ranching interests. It is an act that is not only likely to be ineffective, even counterproductive, but will result in renewed persecution of a keystone species in the region's ecosystem.

Weeks after the Idaho legislature acted, Montana passed similar legislation seeking to eradicate 85% of that state's wolf population. And Wyoming still allows wolves to be killed across nearly 90% of the state. These decisions erase any chance of continued recovery of these wolf populations¹.

Action is needed now to prevent the killing of wolves and reinstate sound policy to ensure their protection and continued recovery. We the undersigned request the Biden Administration to: a) enact an emergency re-listing of the Northern Rockies wolf population to the Endangered Species Act; b) designate a fact-finding blue-ribbon panel of scientists and wildlife policy experts to examine the scientific validity of the interventions proposed by the three state legislatures and to explore alternatives to lethal control; and c) support a National Bison, Grizzly, and Wolf Protection Act to guarantee protection of such keystone species in perpetuity. A central tenet of this new act would recognize that, without the wildlife that is naturally part of it, there is no true protection for any place on Earth.

The actions taken by Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming stand in sharp contrast to the milestone achieved twenty-six years ago when the American public celebrated the reintroduction of wolves to the Northern Rockies region in Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho. The U.S. Department of Interior invested millions of taxpayer dollars to restore wolf populations that had dwindled to the point of local extinction in the Northern Rockies. This reintroduction and subsequent recovery were heralded as a conservation triumph and won the U.S. government international acclaim for preventing a species from going extinct while reestablishing its role as a keystone species in the region's ecology. Yet now, without significant cause, the State of Idaho and subsequently Montana and Wyoming are breaking their agreement to manage wolves responsibly and instead seek to reverse the recovery.

We view the new state-sponsored wolf control laws as: 1) a major setback for wildlife recovery in North America; 2) a misinformed and short-sighted policy that lacks scientific credibility and disregards successful, non-lethal mitigation measures to promote human-wolf coexistence; and 3) a decision by three states that runs counter to modern-day wildlife management and to the will of much of the American people who value wolves.

First, this issue places wildlife conservation in the United States at a crossroads. Through extermination programs sponsored by the federal government, bounty hunters had pushed wolf populations to regional extinction by the 1930s. The collapse of natural wolf populations had a destabilizing effect on ecosystems, illustrating that the wolf's survival was closely linked to a sustainable environment². It was only after three decades of vigorous conservation efforts since the 1970s—largely funded by taxpayers—that wolf populations began to recover and re-occupy 10% of its historic range in the continental United States³.

In Idaho, it was the Nez Perce tribe that served as the wolf restoration team monitoring the radio-collared wolves to help track their recovery. These efforts have been heralded around the world as a major victory. To allow three states to dismantle decades of recovery efforts will set back wildlife conservation in the western United States by decades, and it will discredit our nation's leadership in championing international recovery efforts, such as the forward-thinking initiative of protecting 30% of the U.S. and the Earth by 2030.

Second, the new policies that Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming have recently adopted were hastily concocted and ignore the scientific literature on wolf biology and management. Multiple field studies have concluded that large-scale wolf removal fails to reduce livestock losses in areas of recurring conflict. In fact, the killing of wolves destabilizes packs, limits their ability to take down natural prey, and ultimately leads to increased livestock depredation⁴. There are well-tested formulas for wolf management that promote harmonious coexistence of viable wolf populations and livestock without resorting to indiscriminate killing. Ironically, one of the most successful examples has been running for over a decade in Idaho, the Wood River Wolf Project⁵. This project is a collaboration of community members, livestock producers, NGOs, and county, state, and federal agencies whose mission is to promote wolf-livestock coexistence. Since 2008, the project has demonstrated in a 282,600-acre area around the Sawtooth National Forest that non-lethal deterrents are effective at protecting livestock, wolves, and other native predators.

Using non-lethal methods with only one exception in its 14-year history, the sheep producers in the Wood River Wolf Project lost only an average of five sheep out of 20,000 annually grazed in wolf range, a loss rate up to 90% lower than other grazing areas where lethal control of wolves was prevalent. Costs associated with the project’s annual budget average \$3 per sheep.

Third, the scientific literature provides ample evidence of how vibrant large mammal populations are key to the restoration and maintenance of healthy ecosystems⁶. The presence of viable wolf populations has been shown to influence carbon sequestration processes and therefore plays an important role in climate stabilization⁷. The culling of species that serve as our natural ecosystem engineers is in direct opposition to the protection of America’s natural heritage and an affront to the spirit of the UN declaration of the 2020s as the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Without the presence of key species in numbers, we are merely conserving scenery and not functioning eco-systems. Instead of exterminating wolves, we as a nation should be laying the groundwork for a *National Bison, Grizzly Bear, and Wolf Protection Act*, similar to the *Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940*. This proposed act is gaining broad support, including from Tribal groups. The goal of such a new act would be to sustain the gains achieved in recovery and ensure the long-term persistence of America’s most iconic large mammals. It would be a national act, with scientific underpinnings, that would avoid the arbitrary rulings of particular states and would coordinate wildlife policy, including for species whose home ranges cross state boundaries.

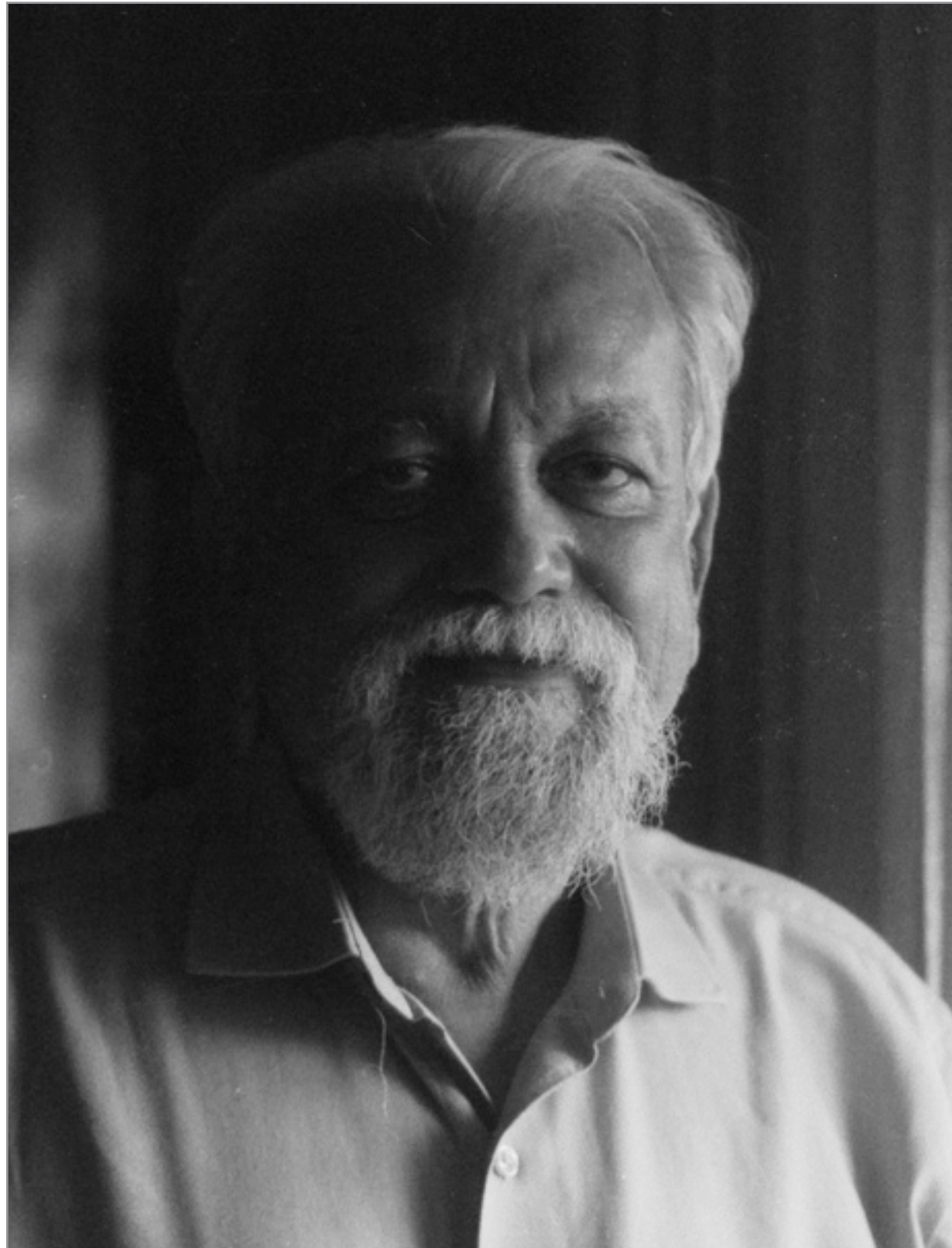
Fifteen hundred North American scientists signed this letter, one standing up for each wolf in Idaho who has no voice in its own future. But international scientists are watching what is happening in the Rocky Mountains and have joined with their U.S. counterparts to lend their voices to this letter. We ask you to act now: stand with the scientists and the American people who favor wolf conservation, reinforce the efforts of Indigenous peoples to protect our precious wildlife, and implement a vision where the diversity and abundance of life on Earth are secure⁸.



Wolves playing in snow. Credit: Ken Canning.
Photo courtesy Suzanne Asha Stone, International Wildlife Coexistence Network

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Randhir Khare is a distinguished writer, artist, teacher and theatre personality. He is the recipient of numerous national and international awards for his unique contribution to culture and education. His 36 volumes of poetry, fiction, essays, translation from tribal dialects and other writings as well as his seven solo exhibitions all explore themes of identity, belonging and the struggle to stay human in a violent and fragmented world. He has more recently spearheaded an initiative to enrich formal education through the experience of the arts. Randhir is a founding contributor to Live Encounters Magazine. <https://randhirkhare.in/>



Randhir Khare

RANDHIR KHARE

The Book That Changed My Life

I am told that 70 is not old. It is an age when people are still running half marathons and cross-country races and cycling from here to eternity and back and trekking deserts and climbing impossibly high mountains and pumping iron thrice a day besides a host of other frantically physical feats. I am also told that it's a time when people take to kicking up their heels for the last big time and buzz and flit around socially, on or offline, so as to catch up on lost time. And others continue to chase big bucks or hoard them or throw them to the winds of chance. They say it is also the time when some finally take to the mountains or the sea and fade into the sunset. Dogs are great companions at this time. They take their keepers for a walk and patiently listen to them talking to themselves and sharing secrets that even they hadn't been aware of until then. Each to his own.

As I near 70, nothing seems to have changed, except of course the reality that though my spirit is alive and kicking, my body has taken a beating and occasionally wobbles unexpectedly when I break into a brisk walk. But what has changed meaningfully is that I am beginning to consider more intimately the journey that I have travelled so far, not in its entirety but in each moment that I still remember. Surprisingly, I don't need to make an effort to remember because I have been gifted with the memory of an elephant and moments rise effortlessly from somewhere inside, reach the surface and float on the skin of the water. They drift around me and demand to be noticed. I acknowledge them, experience them, bless them and let them go. But hardly have they drifted away into the shade when others take their place and wait to be acknowledged, experienced, blest and set free. It has been an unending process which has helped me to understand and accept where I have come from and what I have experienced, however sordid, turbulent, humiliating and unsettling.

This understanding and acceptance has encouraged me to become increasingly lighter and more detached, helping my journey onwards. Of course, I will still struggle with regret, guilt, attachment, expectation and secret ambitions but I can't eliminate that and will have to deal with each in their own way.

Although I have lived through dangerously exciting times which have been fraught with intensely personal successes and failures and have witnessed wars, riots, terrorism at its worst and moments of unbelievable tenderness, I have never wanted to write ‘my story’ because my story is my story and not intended to be hung up like dirty linen in public. As Yevgeny Yevtushenko writes, “In any man who dies there dies with him, his first snow and kiss and fight. It goes with him.”

Don’t get me wrong, I don’t want to share with the sordid, never before told, story of my hidden life. I want to share with you the book that changed my life and brought me to where I am today.

That moment was embedded in my life nearly fifty years ago at a time when I lived in Calcutta. I had just gone into my twenties and was already on the way to living a so-called settled life with stable employment, on-going higher educational opportunities and a flourishing output of creative work. Inside, my life had become used, battered and repetitive, outside I presented an emerging public persona. Nobody knew who I really was. In fact, I myself didn’t have a clue.

I knew deep inside me that I had to do something – to touch life around me and set it afire for the better. How on earth could I do that if my own personal life was in such a shamble? I was in a dilemma. I would have to take one drastic step if I wanted to break out and leave everything behind and travel light and far and discover for myself what I had to do with my life.

Was it really possible for me to that? Dump my job and walk out? On the other hand, how long could I remain an artificial Jesus Christ and get nailed to the cross every other day with no hope for resurrection? The struggle continued, each time dragging me deeper and deeper into a blind well.

I remember that day...It had rained heavily all week, dark purple and black clouds rested their bellies on Calcutta’s rooftops and leaked out sheets of water that exploded on the streets in great slushy gasps like the downpour of bombs in nearby Bangladesh only a few years before. The air hissed and heaved with the splutter of stranded traffic, human invectives and the clatter and clunk of hand pulled rickshaw wheels as half-dead, near naked, men yanked their carts along, heroically bounding through murky waters thick with refuse.

Homebound, I watched the city dissolve in a haze of helplessness. I didn’t feel safe or privileged in any way, sitting indoors whilst the city drowned. I was drowning inside.

My own world was slowly collapsing like the great hunks of earth that gave way to the Hooghly’s waters and allowed it to denude the shore. My shoreline was dissolving and I watched with growing terror as my life rapidly shrank.

People around me at that time said that I lived a ‘lucky’ life. For someone as young as me in those difficult times of unemployment, I was doing very well - both materially and socially. I was respected as a newly arrived poet and the plays I wrote, directed, produced and performed in were being received very well. I had three entirely different circles of friends and switched from one to the other when I got tired or bored, a horde of acquaintances and ‘fans’, a so-called ‘best friend’ who walked with me for an hour every evening across the city down by-lanes, across the maidan, along the river discussing poetry and aesthetics, I had the intimate company of a beautiful athlete and sportswoman and an incredibly intelligent stage actress and of course I was a young executive well settled in one of Calcutta’s sprawling corporate houses. What else could I ask for? The cornucopia was overflowing.

Sitting at home whilst a deluge rocked the city, something snapped inside.

For the first time in my life, I threw my all-pervasive misplaced sense of responsibility out of the window and decided not to even try and make it to work. Instead, I got myself together for a walk in the floods. I took out my battered Duck Back raincoat, the one with a hood that nearly obscured my view, climbed into my rubber boots and headed out into the turbulent waters that swirled down the streets. I didn’t ask myself why I needed to do that. Looking back now, it seems that I was finally setting out to face what I had been avoiding all my life till then. Myself.

I had hardly waded for a few minutes through the flooded waters when my boots quickly filled with water. This made them so heavy that I had to drag my feet as I went along, slipping into potholes, hauling myself out and then soldiering on. When I was finally at the end of the tramline broken body of Elliot Road and I had reached a higher patch of pavement, I emptied the water and garbage out of my boots and headed down Wellesley Street towards Park Street. To be honest, I wasn’t sure what I was going to do once I reached Park Street, but it wasn’t relevant at the time. I was walking somewhere – that was important. Thoughts strayed through my mind like the windblown pigeons that were swept across the rainy sky overhead.

Suddenly I tried to get a hold of myself. I had to ‘do’ something. Thought of dropping in on one of my many friends, have a beer and talk theatre. Or call in on Shaila to see if she would like to share poetry, or music or her bed. Perfect day for that. Or maybe check out Dreamland one of my chai haunts to see if they were brave enough to keep open and sizzle their spicy triangular singharas. I tried valiantly to stop my feet from taking over. Husain Bhai was busy beaver away on his worn- out sewing machine. What brings you out on a day when even the angels are at home asleep? He asked.

Just walking.

In that filthy water?

Yes, was all I could reply.

And now you need to use my phone. Am I right?

I nodded.

You are out walking, so walking you should be doing, not phoning. He hauled himself out of his chair, stood at the threshold of his shop and launched a rocket of paan juice that arched into the rainy air, then landed on the brown swirling water, floated along for a while and then dissolved. *Your generation can’t sit still. See me, I can sit at my machine for an entire lifetime and feel comfortable. Do you ever find my shop closed? No. Even on days like these.*

When the angels are at home asleep. I quickly added.

I said that. Yes. Even when the angels are asleep. He winked at me. *So you are telephoning your angel?*

The instrument was in my hand. I had dialled Shaila’s number and I could already hear her voice on the line. *Hullo. Who is this? Hullo.*

I listened but I couldn’t go through with it. I had nothing to say to her. Her husky voice which could dissolve an ingot of steel now seemed impersonal, distant, strangely alien. I looked at the receiver like a dead bird in my hand, put it down, paid and left, wading through the flood waters.

When you meet the angel, give her my greetings, the old man called out after me.

I hit Park Street a few moments later and headed towards Chowringhee. Then a thunder shower stopped me dead in my tracks opposite Sky Room and washed me into a small half open second-hand bookshop.

Not for rain shelter fellow, snapped the owner. I raised my palm in self-defence, I’m going in a few minutes.

He looked out at the incredible downpour that had broken loose and drowned the streets, *when the rain stops, you go. Ok?*

Ok.

But the rain didn’t stop, it increased in its volume and velocity. The flood waters rose and poured into his shop, rushing around the base of the metal shelves and carrying away old magazines. Fortunately, the books were stacked two feet off the ground upwards.

Help me, he squealed excitedly, as if he was enjoying the spectacle.

What do you want me to do?

Take all these old magazines here floating around and throw them out.

Out where? I wanted to know.

In the waters outside.

Just like that?

Don’t ask so many questions. You want to stay out of the rain, right? So, you have to help me. Anyway, those magazines are useless now.

But they'll collect in the streets. I cautioned.

No they won't. Look at the current that's rushing off towards Chowringhee, they'll float down. Another heavy shower and they'll be off again and land up in the Fort William moat and when that gets filled up, they will float off and land in the Hooghly and when the tide goes out, they'll go like a big barge to the sea.

The fellow went on and on elaborating on the journey of the drenched unwanted magazines. I wasn't sure whether he was serious or joking. It had happened so long ago that I hardly remember all the details. What I do remember is the look in his eyes. It was like those of a child who was expecting a couple of sweets but landed up with an enormous chocolate cake. *I don't want those papers and magazines. That's old stuff. Even the raddi chap won't take them, they're smelling.*

Then you should have thrown them out a long time ago. I replied.

Where?

Anywhere.

Now you don't tell me what to do. This is my shop.

But I'm spending my time here like a jamadaar, helping you to clean up this place which looks like it hasn't been cleaned for centuries. My irritation had turned to sarcasm.

So you think you are smart, eh? He walked up to me menacingly, drawing his diminutive frame to its fullest.

I backed off. *Okay then, you take care of your shop. This is your business, not mine. I am going.*

He stood there in the swamp of dead paper, helplessly watching me put on my raincoat. I searched for my boots but they weren't anywhere around. *They just went out of the door,* the straight line of his lips turning into a grin.



Photograph credit - Vishal Joshi - <https://unsplash.com/@vjovic>

What? I scrambled out of the shop and splashed after my boots as they bobbed along on their way down the road. I caught up with them at Flury's corner. A drowned mouse was entombed in one of them and in the other there was a sanitary napkin.

What did you catch in them? A passing wader called out. *A fish? In this sort of flood, you could find almost anything.*

I ignored the fellow and stood there at the crossroads, water everywhere, flocks of drenched kites hovering in the air above me and the foul-smelling stench of Calcutta's guts enveloping me. I decided to return to the bookshop.

Hey where were you going fellow?

No where.

Later I found myself in his shop, helping him to dispose of the floating mass of paper. Even for a moment I didn't look out on to the street to attempt wishing the growing raft bon voyage. Instead I continued helping him to clear the floor of his shop. The deeper I sank into the experience of the task the more I began to enjoy the confusion. I stripped off the raincoat, got out of my boots, rolled up my trouser ends and shirt sleeves and laboured on like a galley slave.

There's a lot of porn stuff here. You want me to throw that out too? Or will you dry them out later? I called out.

I don't know how that got here.

Ah, I said, trying to help him out of the embarrassment. *Maybe your assistant was doing a side business.*

I don't have an assistant.

Your son maybe.

Why do you say 'son'? You think only guys are into this porn stuff? Anyway, I don't have either a son or a daughter. I have a wife but she's living with another fellow. Why are you asking me all these questions? It's really none of your business.

Sorry, I was only asking about these magazines.

Throw them all out, will you. His lips quivered. *Shit. Throw them all out.*

I wasn't upset with the man. There was something so sad about him that I started feeling sorry for him.

In a while, there was not a scrap of paper left floating in the muddy water whose level had receded with the ebbing flood outside. I picked up a battered bucket lying in a corner of the room and started baling out the water. It made me feel like I was in the belly of sailing vessel out at sea. Not a fancy one but a pretty big one. The crew had been washed away and only the two of us remained, heaving out water so that we could stay afloat. My imagination ran riot.

That's the way I am. Come on now, he changed the direction of the conversation, *grab a seat.*

From where?

Sit up there, he shouted, pointing to an empty steel desk in the corner. *I have some hot tea in a flask, share some with me.*

We drank two small glasses of tea each, he smacked his lips and chortled, *the shop is tip top now. Thanks, you worked hardly, very much hardly. Put your hand into that cash box and take whatever you want from it. In that drawer there. Take it and go.*

I'm not doing this for money. I replied.

But you helped me, you worked so hardly. Take it and go. There in that drawer there.

I flipped back the lid of the battered black cash box. There were a few coins inside. *That's a lot of money you have in there. Don't you think you should have put this in a bank? What if someone breaks in and steals all this? What will you do?*

He chose not to notice my sarcasm. *Take it all, he sniffed. All of it. I'll manage...and as a bonus, you can pick up any book from that shelf there. Any one, just one.*

I hopped off the desk and walked over to the high metal shelf. *How does one get to a book on the topmost shelf?* I asked.

Just shake the bookrack and the books will come down and you can choose the one you want. Ha, haa.

Okay man, I said to myself, a joke for a joke, now let's see where this one takes him.

He was still laughing when I rattled the shelf. A solitary book got dislodged and plunged down and whacked me on the head. I grabbed it before it hit the damp floor. He stopped laughing and stood there staring at me with his mouth open. I looked down at the book in my hands. It was *Fruits Of The Earth* by Andre Gide, an author I had not heard of until then.

There's just one left. And I'm okay with him crashing down, he said.

Not sure I want this book.

Suit yourself. But don't shake the shelf again. Take any other book lower down.

Do you know what books you have here?

So you think I don't? He asked. *Of course I know the books I have here in this shop. I own this bookshop. I know all the books I have here.*

So do you know which book fell on my head?

Of course I do, Fruits Of The Earth by a French writer who loved pretty boys.

Read it and find out for yourself. You are behaving as if I don't know my own books. Look at those shelves, go on, look at them. I can tell you the names of all the important books on each shelf...row by row. That one there, third shelf up – there's Harold Pinter's Dumbwaiter, Buchner's Danton's Death...

Ok, sorry. I backed off.

Aren't you rather stuck up for your age? He took off his spectacles and wiped the lenses with his kerchief.

What makes you ask that?

I think you've got two distinct selves running around in there, he peered at me over the top of his spectacles, one is the fellow who baled out all that water and worked like a horse. Someone real. And the other is a bit of a stuck up one.

And how many fellows do you have in there? I reacted.

I've seen a lot of them come and go. There's only one left and I'm okay with him.

And what sort of a fellow is he? There was an edge in my voice and that appeared to amuse him.

What you see, he said quietly but firmly.

Evening had settled on the waters outside. There was no traffic. A gang of urchins were trying to swim in the middle of the road – jumping and splashing and wiggling around. The river had levelled all. There was no big, no small – just one almost seamless flow of life. I instinctively put on my rain-coat and climbed into my boots.

I have another flask behind the shelf here. A hip flask. Neat vodka.

It's getting late. I mumbled.

For what? Your yacht hasn't arrived as yet.

I felt the overpowering urge to leave. I'm going.

You're going no where until you've read the opening pages of this book between sips of vodka. This book changed my life. It may change your life too.

As I flipped through the book, I stumbled upon the pencil marked lines - *I devoted three years of travel to forgetting all that I had learned with my head. This unlearning was slow and difficult; it was of more use to me than all the learning imposed by men, and was really the beginning of an education.*

Was I weighed down by all I had learnt? Yes, I was. And not just that. I was also weighed down by all that I had experienced and felt. I hadn't learnt how to travel light. I hoarded memories like a hermit crab and they had weighed me down, filled my life with an overload of every damned thing that I had gathered on the way. This constant gathering and hoarding was a compulsive disorder. I was actually out of sync with the world and my own life so I had created a protective shell around me, inside me. Memory helped me to create this shell. I was an elephant. A white elephant. This wasn't a gift; it was a burden. I had turned myself into a prisoner. A man condemned by the fullness of his own life, chained down by memory, unable to move down the corridor because my kurta sleeve was wedged in the door behind me.

Fruits Of The Earth kept speaking to me. *All choice, when one comes to think of it, is terrifying; liberty, when there is no duty to guide it, terrifying. The path that has to be chosen lies through a wholly unexplored country, where each one makes his own discoveries, and - note this - for himself alone.*

For the very first time in my life I felt a churning inside. Change. Change. I had to change. I had to rediscover myself, my purpose, myself.

I walked out of shop without my boots, wading through receding waters of the flood. I read in the glow of streetlights, in chai shops and on the dimly lit staircase of our apartment block. It was turning me inside out so violently that I couldn't climb the stairs and fell asleep half way up.....my journey had begun.



Photograph credit - https://unsplash.com/@tojo_09

José Truda Palazzo, Jr. is a Brazilian environmentalist, wildlife gardener and writer with a career spanning 43 years and 14 books published as author or co-author. He served for almost two decades in government delegations to international conservation treaties and is a co-founder of many conservation organizations around Brazil and South America, having led successful campaigns for the establishment of several Marine Protected Areas in his home country. José is also a Member of the IUCN (World Conservation Union) Task Force on Marine Mammals and Protected Areas and its Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group, a Life Member of the Australian Conservation Foundation, and a Board Member of the Brazilian Humpback Whale Institute. His next book, *Living Water: Marine Ecotourism, Communities and Conservation* will be published later this year by Australian publishing house Stormbird Press. More about his work and writings at <http://www.josetruda.wordpress.com/>

JOSÉ TRUDA PALAZZO, JR.

A WHALE WATCHING ME:

Ecotourism and wildlife encounters are essential tools for reconnecting with nature.

The wind is blowing hard – as it almost always does - across the blue-gray horizon of the Nuevo gulf in the Patagonian shores of Argentina. Yet the water surface of this immense enclosed body of water is rather flat, calmed by the protective high cliffs dotted by marine fossils which encircle it, especially here at the outskirts of Puerto Pirámides, the tiny village where the boats depart from.

I don't mind the wind, and in fact I barely notice anything else around but the big eye watching me from no more than three or four feet off the boat. It's a Southern right whale, a mother with its calf, and like 400 others of its kind moving around the gulf at this time of the year it doesn't mind the whale watching boats at all – in fact this particular one and several others actively seek interactions with the boats, circling around and putting its huge eye near the surface of the water to look at the curious apes floating around in this nutshell, making contented noises at every move by their gigantic ocean hosts.

The boat I'm in is operated by Captain Micky Sosa, son of Argentinian legendary diver Adalberto 'Peke' Sosa, and back at their office by the beach Peke's granddaughter manages the office. This is the longest-running whale watching family business in the world, having been around for five decades. In the time since Peke started taking tourists out to see whales, this still-endangered species has recovered happily in the waters around Puerto Pirámides. They - the whales and the Sosas - are the definitive proof that responsible whale watching does not impact the animals and can provide a long-lasting, sustainable source of income for coastal communities. Examples such as that of Argentina have popped up all around the world. In Mexico, the friendly gray whales of the Baja California lagoons even allow petting by mesmerized visitors who get out to see them in the small boats of local fishing families turned whale watching operators. But not only whales get to be visited and interact with people.



José Truda Palazzo, Jr.



A Southern Right whale mother and calf pair delights visitors at Península Valdés, Argentina.
Photo credit: Micky Sosa/Peke Sosa Avistajes.

Halfway across the world, in the western Pacific coral lagoon of Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia, Bill Acker and his native family take divers to see majestic manta rays every day of the year in the channels and around coral heads that serve as cleaning stations, with dozens of small fish picking up parasites and dead skin from the mantas as people watch and are watched from close quarters. And off the Filipino town of Oslob and at a remote bay of Cenderawasih National Park in Indonesian Papua, it is whale sharks that delight human visitors; the largest fish in the ocean are attracted by the provision of tiny fish as food by the locals and hang around divers for hours in a row.

There's absolutely no question that each of these experiences I just described, and which I've had the privilege of experiencing first-hand, are life-changing experiences for most. Being in the immediate presence of wild animals in their own environment, exhibiting no fear of the most destructive species on the planet – us – touches the heart of adult people in a way that documentaries and still images cannot. Further, if children are allowed to experience these encounters, it can shape their entire lives, their professional choices, their view of the world, their morals towards biodiversity and our duties as stewards of a living planet. It happened to me ever since my late father took me to Patagonia; it happened to my daughters and is happening to my grandson. Experiencing the beauty and power of Nature first-hand does create better, more responsible human beings. And we need that, urgently, as we again get out in the open in a post-COVID world which begs for our help to continue existing.

One would assume that everyone supports responsible Ecotourism and wildlife interactions like these mentioned above, and which cause no harm at all to the animals. However, out of many human activities in the wild, it seems to me that *non-extractive, non-lethal* ones are somehow those that attract an inordinate amount of criticism, especially from academia. You just need to google around a bit to find all sorts of papers published in allegedly reputable journals with scary titles and abstracts about the perceived horror of whale watching and the tremendous impact of ecotourism and etc. etc. etc., to the point where you are led to think that looking at fish will degrade their quality of life (no joke – I read an article saying almost that very thing).



Resident manta rays in Yap lagoon are watched on a daily basis by divers since 1986.
Photo credit: Brad Holland

I was made so uneasy by so many allegations of ‘harm’ in watching Nature that I decided to dig deeper, and what I found led me to write a book about the subject, coming up later this year. Not only it seems to me that the cost-benefit of Ecotourism activities and well-managed wild-life interactions, be it for conservation or socioeconomic improvements in local communities, fully justifies the activities; but also, *many of the ‘scientific’ papers alleging impacts of non-extractive uses do not actually determine real detrimental conservation effects of these uses.* There’s a surprising tolerance in accepting opinion and short-term studies as ‘evidence’ for impacts which experience in the real world contradicts. Some scientists warn of ‘serious’ whale watching impacts, yet *not a single species or population* of large whale targeted by whale watching around the world has suffered as a result of the activity; much to the contrary, *all* such populations have recovered steadily from the damage wrought by whaling, and most continue to grow after 30, 40 or 50 years of intensive watching. Bill Ackers’ manta rays continue to show up daily for diver interactions as they did in 1986 when visits began. And the whale sharks of Oslob continue to lead happy lives, oblivious to the throngs of snorkelers visiting them during mornings, or the rantings of ivory tower dwellers trying to prove they are being ‘harmed’ by it. (Alas, whale sharks in the Oslob region were killed by the locals before they became a tourist attraction. Talk about weighing cost-benefit of different uses!) Across the Caribbean, feeding sharks in front of divers also has replaced shark fishing and finning, yet ‘concerned scientists’ keep screaming bloody murder against it because... well, because they *think* it might perhaps maybe *quien sabe* somehow one day be harmful. Ask the millions of dead sharks every year whether they’d rather be watched or killed.

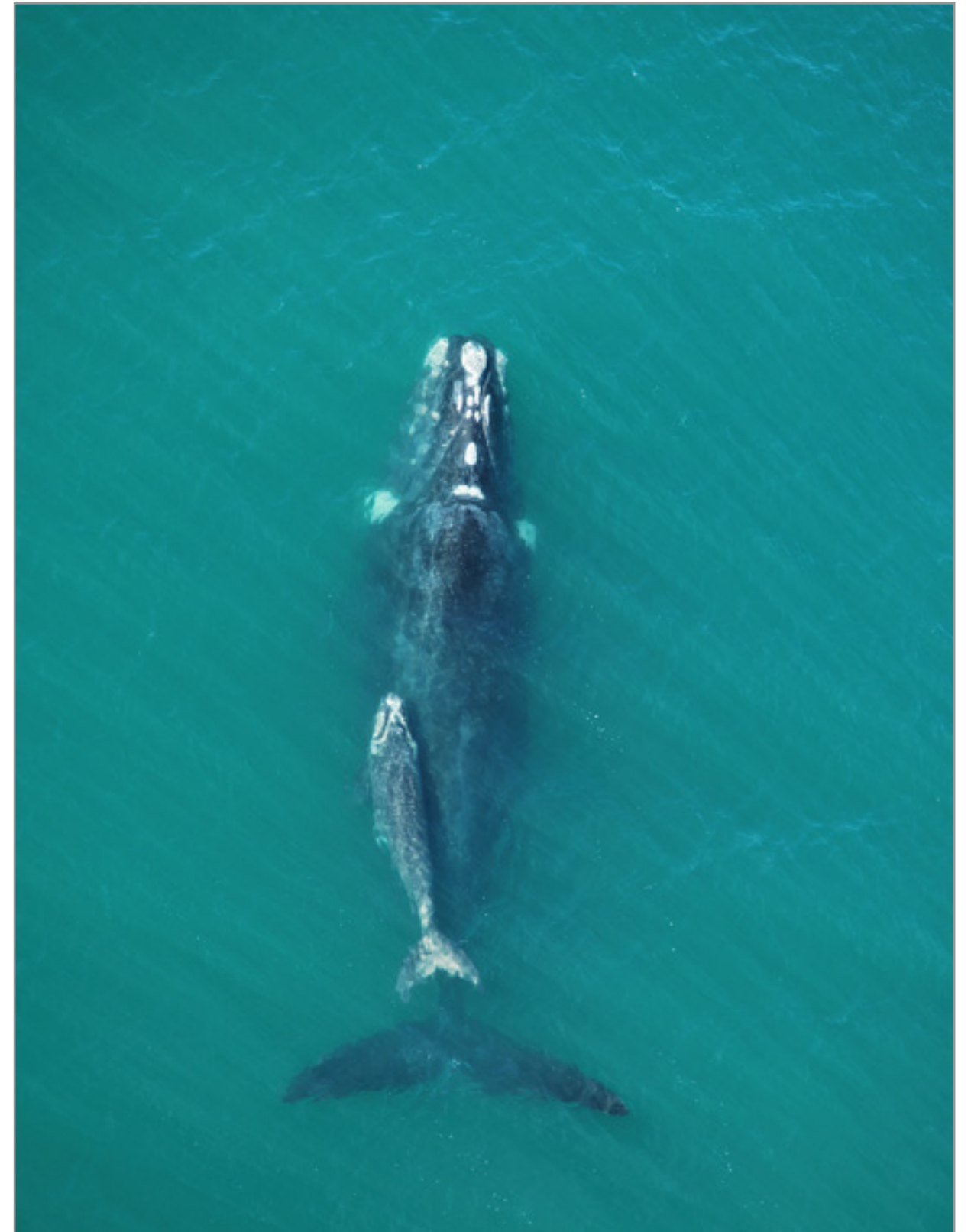
Still, government bureaucrats around the world whose field experience with wildlife is next to none are rallied by these papers with outlandish ‘impact’ claims, and oftentimes (including when directly and unduly prodded by ‘impact researchers’) embark on drafting and imposing layer upon layer of restrictions to regulate human-wildlife interactions, ‘based on scientific evidence’ extracted from these papers with very little factual grounds, making it ever more difficult for people to approach, interact with, and be changed by wildlife species after harm-less encounters.

Two important researchers seem to agree with me in that these abusive restrictions are not only unwarranted, but harmful to conservation when cost-benefit is considered. One is Dr. Roger S. Payne, Ph.D., father of modern non-lethal whale research and who, as whale watching was becoming an issue of concern back in 1990s, wrote a working paper for a seminar titled *What Will We Lose if We Overprotect Whales*, expressing his concern that over-regulation and the adoption of supposedly ‘precautionary’ restrictions on human-whale interactions would hamper the development of widespread empathy for the plight of these animals at the broader scale of human society. I call it the Roger Payne Paradox. Should we sacrifice the many, evident, real-world socioeconomic and environmental benefits of whale watching (or Ecotourism, for that matter) due to *perceptions* of potential impacts, more often than not anchored not in scientifically proven facts or experience, but in ‘moral’ or ‘ethical’ beliefs of certain groups of people?

The other is Richard Louv, award-winning writer and researcher of children and Nature, who in his best-selling *Last Child in the Woods* complains strongly about the excess of regulations preventing children from enjoying close experiences with Nature in North American public parks and green spaces. To me there’s no question about it: from climbing trees to watching whales up close, children deserve a childhood full of first-hand experiences with wild places, things, and beings.

Of course, chasing wildlife (or worse, using captive animals for entertainment-only purposes) is wrong. Of course, overcrowding national parks and trampling off trails is wrong. But that’s not what academic zealots are deriding; it’s legitimate wildlife watching activities with no proven harm. It is about time that cost-benefit for conservation and people, and real-world long-term results, are brought back into the equation. Looking at a live whale or shark up close creates Nature defenders, employs local people, generates social legitimacy for conservation. And we need these three things for a post-COVID recovery of the economy, yes, but also for healing minds and souls, and, ultimately, our planet.

Go out, let a whale watch you. By looking into her eye, you might be able to capture the essence of life and maybe, just maybe, a bit of the meaning of it.



Southern right whale and newborn calf, off Santa Marta Cape, Southern Brazil.
Photo Credit: José Truda Palazzo, Jr.

Percy Aaron is an ESL teacher at Vientiane College in the Lao PDR and a freelance editor for a number of international organisations. He has had published a number of short stories, edited three books and was editor of *Champa Holidays*, the Lao Airlines in-flight magazine and *Oh!* - a Southeast Asia-centric travel and culture publication. As lead writer for the Lao Business Forum, he was also on the World Bank's panel of editors. Before unleashing his ignorance on his students, he was an entrepreneur, a director with Omega and Swatch in their India operations and an architectural draughtsman. He has answers to most of the world's problems and is the epitome of the 'Argumentative Indian'. He can be contacted at percy.aaron@gmail.com

PERCY AARON

My thoughts on *Relationships* (Jogajog) by Rabindranath Tagore

The story was first serialized in the literary journal Bichitra under the title Tin Purush. When it was published as a novel in 1929, Rabindranath Tagore changed its name to Jogajog. Supriya Chaudhuri, the translator of this edition, the fifth in the series by Oxford Tagore Translations, opted for Relationships as the word nearest in meaning to the author's original choice. The book contains a note by Tagore as to why he chose Jogajog and the translator, in her longish introduction, explains her choice of Relationships.

The story revolves around the Chatterjees and the Ghoshals, two families locked in a feud that goes back some generations. While the former have fallen on hard times, the latter have seen their wealth grow rapidly within one generation due to the acumen and single-minded ambition of Madhusudan, the head of the Ghoshal family.

Bipradas, the scion of the Chatterjee clan is in declining health, physically and financially. Marriage has passed him by for a variety of reasons. Madhusudan is single too but now that he has accumulated great wealth, he wants a wife, but not just any wife. He has his eyes set on 19-year old Kumudini, the unmarried youngest sister of Bipradas.

Kumudini Chatterjee, the main protagonist, is *"beautiful, tall and slender like a stalk of tuberose; her eyes were not especially large, but they were deep black, and her nose was drawn exquisitely, as though made of flower-petals. She was as fair as a white conch-shell with two graceful hands whose ministering touch was like the gift of the goddess Lakshmi; one could only accept it gratefully"*.



Percy Aaron

This novel was written more than a hundred years ago and the main impression is of a suffocating caste-ridden Bengali society mired in rituals and mindless superstition. It couldn't have been very pleasant being a woman.

While it's not fair to judge a novel written about one hundred years ago by 2021 standards, I did find the characterization unconvincing, especially when coming from the great Rabindranath Tagore.

If her physical description is quite over-the-top, her skills in other areas are equally so. In chess, she is *"so skilled that Bipradas had to play with some caution"* and *"Bipradas's hobby was photography. Kumu too learnt the art"*. She knows Sanskrit, reads the classics and is an accomplished esraj player. One gets the impression that had she taken up tennis, she would have won Wimbledon.

Her brother Bipradas is *"handsome as a god"* and skilled in everything he touches, be it chess, the classics, Sanskrit, playing the esraj and hunting. Despite not being a very believable character, he does come across as likeable. One gets the feeling that had he been as good in business as he was in the arts, the family would not have been in such dire straits financially.

The hagiographic characterization does not stop with Kumudini or Bipradas. Their father *"was tall and fair-skinned, with a mane of shoulder-length hair and large finely-drawn eyes whose gaze bespoke unchecked mastery....."* He *"possessed great strength and a handsome body..."*

Besides having all these exceptional qualities, the 'good' people are invariably tall and fair-skinned, while the others are not. While *"Madhusudan was not ugly, he was exceedingly hard-featured. What struck one immediately was his dark face..... His wiry hair was as curly as any African's.... He was short... His arms were hairy"*. By character, he *"was obsequious in his politeness, his face lit up constantly in hospitable smiles"* especially when he was with English people. Shyamsundari, the widow of his elder brother, is *"dark BUT beautiful"* - as if these two qualities are incompatible. That she has an affair with Madhusudan is contemptible.

The lopsided characterization of the 'good' people versus the 'bad' people continues with little attempt to balance out the characters.

It is the mindless superstition that makes Kumudini such a bogus unattractive character. In a letter to the poet Radharani Debi, Tagore tries to explain his heroine. *"She had installed in the figure of her deity the complete ideal of manhood that inwardly, unknown to herself, had attracted her mind on the threshold of adolescence. In point of fact, she had given her womanly love in the guise of worship to that deity. This Kumu, caught up in the mist of her belief, imagined that it was her deity who had beckoned her through a proposal of marriage..."* This excessive religiosity is not piety but a sign of mental health issues.

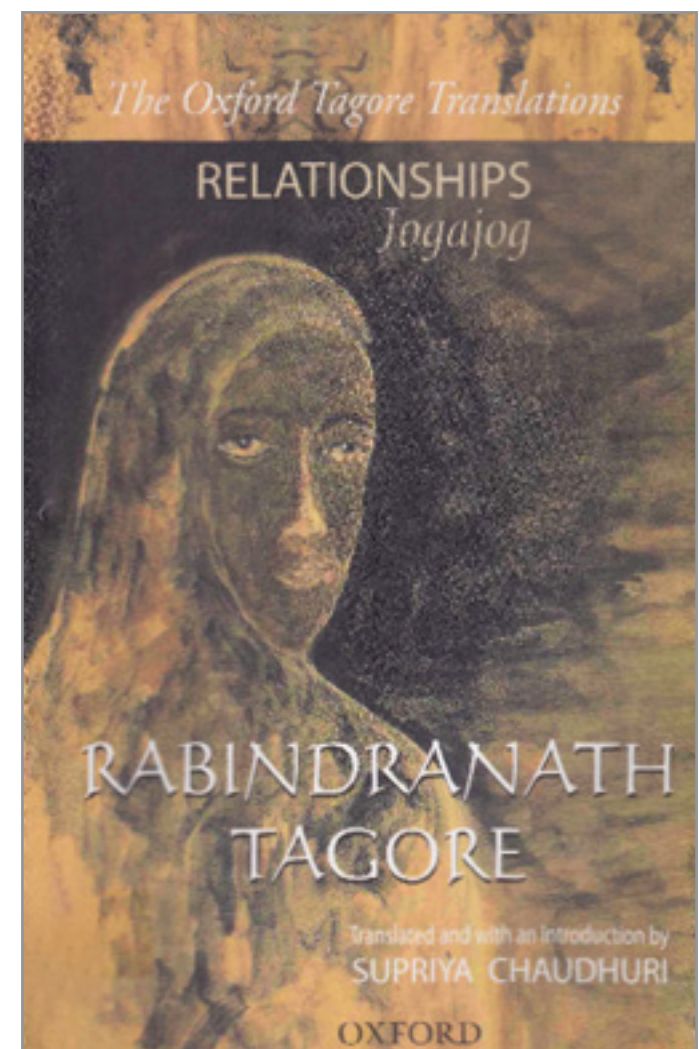
That she believes it is divinely ordained that she marry a man she has never met, then finds him repulsive, makes no attempt to communicate with him, and for whatever reason, makes him feel inferior, only makes her more unlikeable. I wonder if Madhusudan ever saw her smile?

"Ever since their mother's death, Bipradas had become entirely dependent on Kumu's care. ...everything was in Kumu's charge. He had become so accustomed to this that nothing pleased him in daily use unless it was touched by Kumu's hand". The admiration between brother and sister for each other is mutual. At best it's protective, at worst, incestuous.

This novel was written more than a hundred years ago and the main impression is of a suffocating caste-ridden Bengali society mired in rituals and mindless superstition. It couldn't have been very pleasant being a woman.

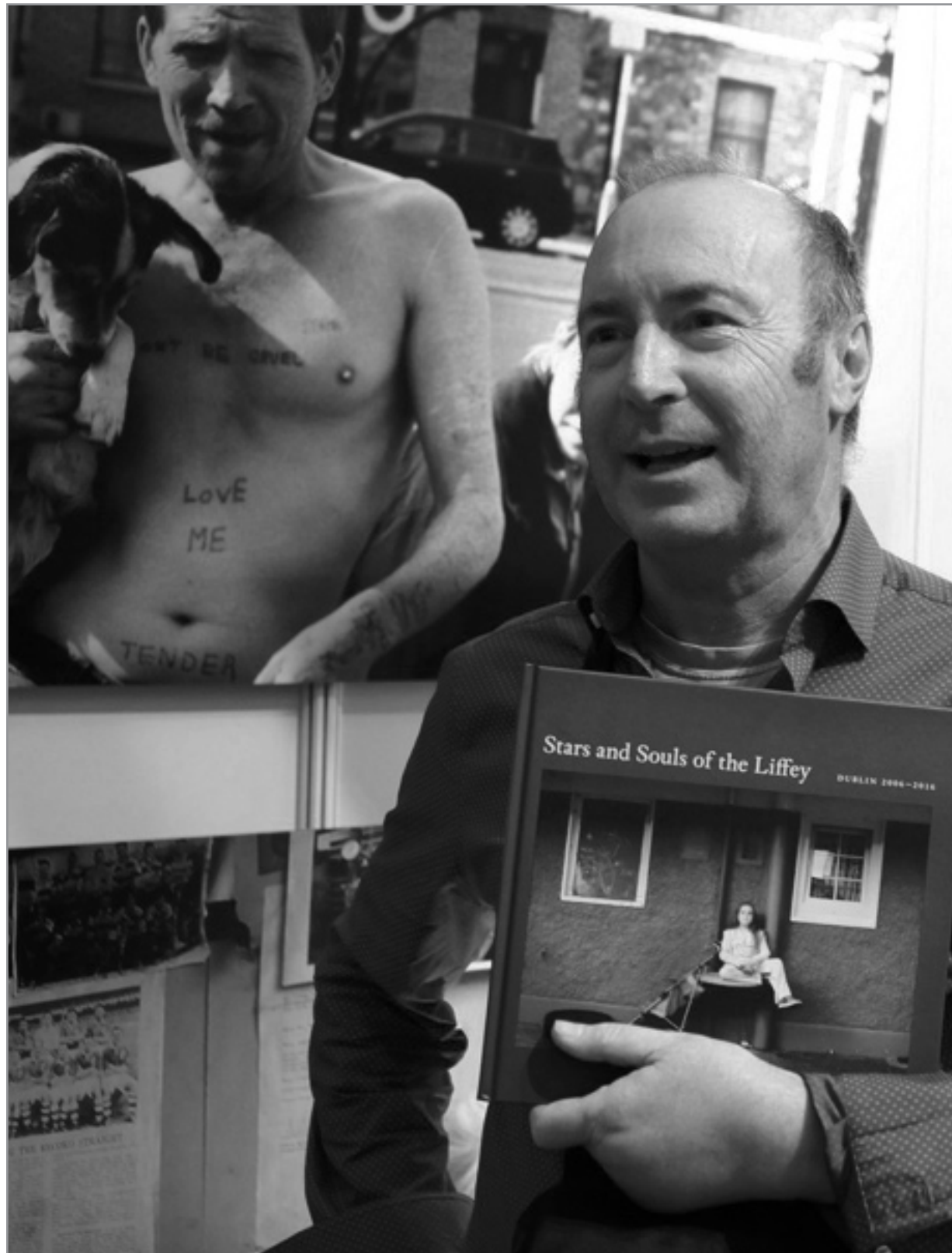
While it's not fair to judge a novel written about one hundred years ago by 2021 standards, I did find the characterization unconvincing, especially when coming from the great Rabindranath Tagore.

"For the nineteen years of her girlhood an intense sense of purity had enveloped and pervaded her every limb". Was Rabindranath Tagore's Kumudini meant to be a caricature of somebody he knew?



Book available at :
<https://www.amazon.com/Relationships-Jogajog-Oxford-Tagore-Translations/dp/0195676548>

Barry Delaney is inspired by the colour, energy and DIY attitude of punk. He fled the grey Dublin of the early 80s, to travel the world and fell in love with film photography. Eked a living doing various manual and technical jobs. Fifteen years later, Barry began taking pictures again. It started on the streets of Dublin, his home town, and moved on to other parts of Ireland and across the sea to America. In 2008, Barry won the TG4 Irish photographer of the 21st Century. Barry has had 4 solo exhibitions in Dublin. In 2019 he completed a retrospective of his inner city Dublin work in the historic GPO, Dublin. along with his debut Dublin book – *Stars and Souls of the Liffey* – later this year he is releasing his second book *Americans Anonymous*.



Barry Delaney

BARRY DELANEY

THE CUSTOM HOUSE GANG

Text & Photographs

In early 2006 I finally quit drinking and instantly my 15-year dormant love of photography got re-awakened. I had purchased a new Nikon camera as a reward and re-learnt the basics of photography and began shooting the streets of Dublin, where I was working a monotonous menial job. When work ended, I waited for the rush hour traffic to calm and began photographing the changing facade of inner-city Dublin; the old Sheriff Street morphing into the new IFSC, and its local communities.

As I looked through my Nikon viewfinder one summer evening, I spotted a rowdy gang of vagabonds drinking by the sparkling new deserted offices, here was the shot - they clocked me - Oi, come here, they hollered - I had a decision - overcome my fear and tell them what I was about or run back to the safety of my secure life - I approached with trepidation. Philip (the unmistakable leader) conducted the interview - we were from the same part of Dublin and connected - I was in. Throughout the summer of 2007 I photographed them every evening, from the Unwanted, I re-Christened them - The Custom House Gang - re-telling them my story on how I sobered up, building that trust. We shared a common rebellious streak. Between us we decided to have an exhibition. An exhibition for everybody, not just the usual Dublin set. Through many twists and turns that exhibition took place in December 2007 at Temple bar, Dublin.

Sadly, many of the gang members started to fade, and the project ended too. Martin Joyce, the muscle of the gang, died in 2009, one month after asking me to shoot his wedding to Michelle. We had one final exhibition dedicated to him, opened by the Lord Mayor of Dublin and Michelle - it even reached national news.

Here are the memories and characters of that crazy summer of 2007 and dedicated to all those Custom house gang members, especially Martin, Philip, Yvonne, John and Tom, who have now departed. The rest of us fight on.



Philip, leader of the pack.



Bonds of friendship.



John Love.



Forever lovers, Martin and Michelle.



Shadow boxing, Martin Joyce.



Tender moments.



Yvonne, angel of the Liffey.



Christmas Day, Dublin.

Peter Daly, amateur photographer, lives in the West of Ireland. Since taking up the camera, I have concentrated on sporting events. Local press and clubs have included some of my work to accompany match reports. Recently, I had four photographs published in "The Toughest Season.....A Year Like No Other". It is a beautiful photographic narrative of how our national games, gaelic football and hurling, survived at local club level against the challenges of the pandemic keeping our young people focused and their sanity intact. With sports events limited, I began to concentrate on wildlife photography. I have discovered a whole new world. The sounds, the colours, the freedom are intoxicating. The photographic challenges are as addictive as they are therapeutic.



Peter Daly

PETER DALY

DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

Text & Photographs

Dreaded black clouds return,
 Light fades to grey, still awake,
 Restless, frightened,
 In the darkness I'm all alone,
 Trying to spark in the heavy air,
 Choking acrid fog,
 Clouded sadness,
 Screaming inside, deafness outside,
 Who am I, who cares, lost soul,
 Salt of tears blinding me,
 Where is everyone?
 Family, Friends, Neighbours,
 Burden of being, heavy on shoulders,
 No way out, desperation,
 Empty, alone, helpless,
 Confused thought, searching darkness,
 So many obstacles, failing life,
 Self-loathing, no escaping,
 Tortured mind,
 Hope fading,
 Drowning grip,
 No one can help now,
 Then a distant voice,
 Breaking sunrays, unmasking light,

Outstretched hands,
 Alone no more,
 Love empowering,
 Clarity of thought,
 It's ok, lost but found,
 Cherished feeling,
 Renewed belonging,
 Sun shining, fading fog,
 Darkness into Light.













Vũ Tuấn Hưng is a professional photographer and tour guide based in Hồ Chí Minh city. He is a tour guide for mainly German speaking tourists. His photographs feature in numerous publications across the world. If you are visiting Vietnam and need his assistance please email - vietnaminfos@gmail.com



Vũ Tuấn Hưng

THE CHAM - VIETNAM

PART -1, PHOTOGRAPHS BY

VŨ TUẤN HƯNG

The majority of Chams in Vietnam (also known as the Eastern Chams) are Hindu mostly live in Central Vietnam, while Southern Vietnam's Chams and their Cambodian counterparts are largely Muslim, as Islamic conversion happened relatively late. A smaller number of the Eastern Cham also follow Mahayana Buddhism.

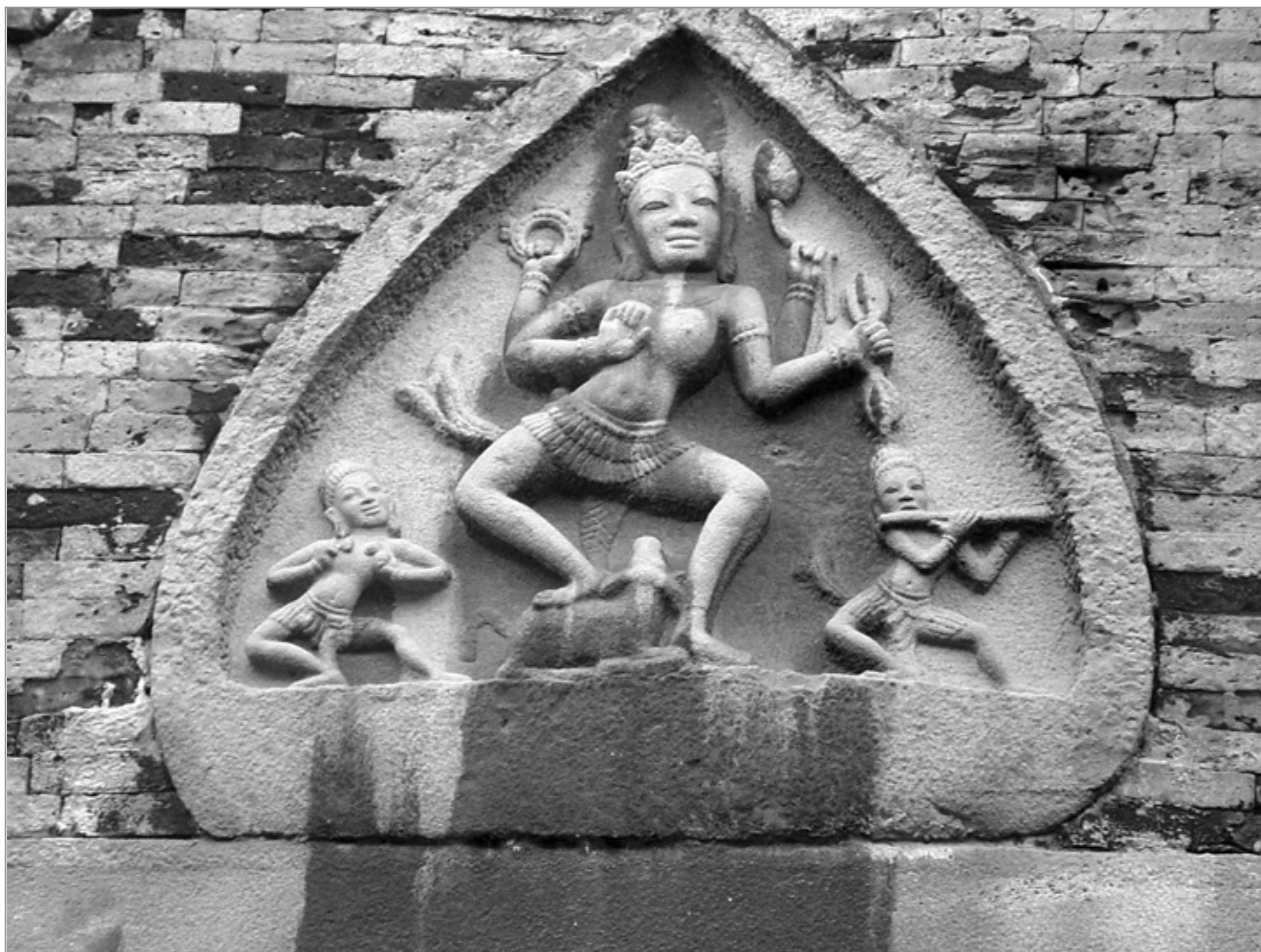
For a long time, researchers believed that the Chams had arrived by sea in the first millennium BC from Malaysia and Indonesia (Sumatra and Borneo), eventually settling in central modern Vietnam.

The first recorded religion of the Champa was a form of Shaivite Hinduism, brought by sea from India. Hinduism was the predominant religion among the Cham people until the sixteenth century. Numerous temples dedicated to Shiva were constructed in the central part of what is now Vietnam.

**<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chams>*



Musician Phú Sạng is also artist. He makes by hand the traditional wooden drums and clarinets.



Stone relief Po Nagar Nha Trang.



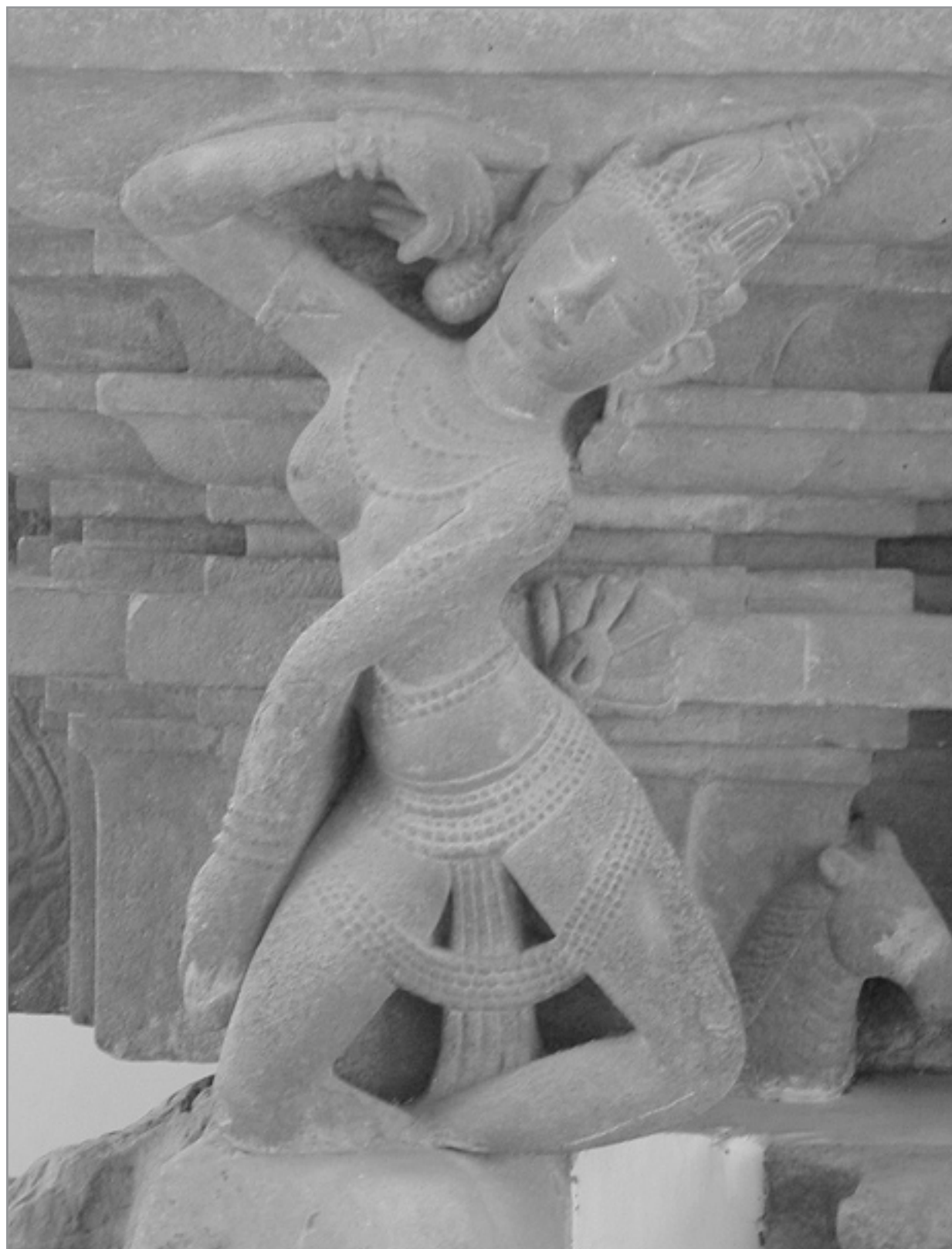
Stone Lingam and Yoni.



Lord Shiva.



Nandi, the sacred bull of Lord Shiva.



Apsara.



Lord Ganesha, Cham Museum, Da Nang.



Statue of King Po Rome and his wife.

2010 - 2020



Live encounters

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
JULY 2021

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK ULYSEAS

