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SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES

NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING 101

BHAGYA SHREE RAM

All bilingual people know the struggle of forgetting the meaning of a word in another language, only to awkwardly stop the conversation mid-way to Google the word. My Google translate has become way too familiar with my English to Tamil words translation, and vice versa.

We've all played around with Google Translate before; translating an English rhyme to Yiddish (a German derived language historically spoken by East European Jews) or Kinyarwanda (a language spoken in Southern Uganda) would evoke many an awed reaction at the robotic lady's magical ability to speak just about every language we'd heard of as well tons of others we hadn't.

So how does this actually work?

Drumroll please

Natural Language Processing!

Natural Language Processing or NLP is a field of Artificial Intelligence that gives machines the ability to read, understand and derive meaning from human languages. Most NLP techniques rely on machine learning to derive meaning from human languages.

There are 2 main machine learning techniques used in NLP:

Syntactic analysis - Syntax refers to the arrangement of words and phrases to create a well-formed sentence. In syntactic analysis, computer algorithms are applied to a sentence to ensure that the sentence makes sense grammatically. For example, this analysis makes sure that sentences like "Fell from the tree an orange." aren't displayed.

Semantic analysis – Semantics refers to the meaning conveyed by a text. In semantic analysis, computer algorithms are applied to a sentence to understand the meaning and interpretation of words.

NLP has an incredible number of applications, some of which are mentioned below:



Why is NLP difficult?

The rules that dictate the passing of information through natural languages (i.e human languages) are not easy for computers to understand. For example, someone complimenting a restaurant may mention on the website's review, "The waiter was awfully polite!". The Al might get confused by the fact that there are 2 words suggesting contrary tones ("awfully" – negative, "polite" – positive) used in the same sentence.

The AI might further malfunction when someone uses a sarcastic remark to pass in information.

Future of NLP

At the moment NLP is battling to detect nuances in language meaning, whether due to lack of context, spelling errors or dialectal differences. Although the future looks pretty challenging for NLP, this disruptive force is developing at a rapid pace; we are likely to reach a level of advancement in the coming years that will make complex applications possible!

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CURRENT INDIAN SCIENCE NEWS

SERIES 3-- CENTRE FOR CELLULAR AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY -- THE CCMB

GITA BHARATH

Let's play a guessing game --- How many variants of the Coronavirus do you think there are in India right now? I guessed five or ten. Do you suppose there maybe twenty, thirty?

How can we not be interested in something that concerns our very structure and well-being? The virus is made of almost the same compounds that make up our DNA.

After all, the virus is a tiny single strand of RNA having just these four pyrimidines (simple aromatic compounds):-

Cytosine, Guanine, Adenine, Uracil C G A U. But, hold on, ---

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) -Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), in a recent publication, presented an exhaustive analysis of over 5,000 Coronavirus variants in India and how they have evolved over the course of the pandemic.

Recently, CCMB's new Covid testing kits allow for dry swab tests, which are not only cost-effective but can deliver results faster than existing methods.

CCMB is an Indian fundamental life science research establishment located in Hyderabad that operates under the aegis of the CSIR. CCMB was designated a "Centre of Excellence" by the Global Molecular and Cell Biology Network, UNESCO.

CCMB was established in 1976 for research in the frontier and multi-disciplinary areas of modern biology.

The ongoing research programmes at the CCMB are in three major categories

- 1) High quality basic research in the frontier areas of modern biology,
- 2) Research relevant to societal needs, and
- 3) Application-oriented research towards commercialization.

All these include the areas of evolution & development, gene regulation, host-parasite interactions, membrane biology, protein structure, stem cell biology, neurobiology, bioinformatics, functional genomics, ecology and ecosystems.

They have numerous firsts to their credit:

CCMB developed the DNA Fingerprinting Technology in India; and made India the third country in the world to have its own fingerprinting technology.

It developed the universal primer technology that can identify the species of source animal from any animal product.

Discovered the heart disease mutation, carried by 6 crore Indians.

Developed the first genetically engineered, gene knockout mouse in India.

Developed a systematic screening and validation programme for anti-cancer drugs in India.

Commercially delivered, recombinant DNA technology-based diagnostic kits.

Discovered high yielding disease resistant Improve Samba Mahsuri rice.

Discovered native bacteria, Indibacter alkaliphilus used to generate enzymes and biomolecules in the industrial biotechnology sector.

Discovered the gene CPA1, which causes chronic pancreatitis, in collaboration with the Asian Institute of Gastroenterology.

CCMB has a series of videos called "What the Science" on its YouTube channel. The Ph.D. students of the institute have scripted and produced several videos based on questions from the public. The videos cover topics such as heredity, development of organisms, and the structure-function relationship of the proteins. The aim of running this series is to have quality content being presented by young researchers of the country for the social media audience. The comments received showed that the content has helped people in many parts of the country.

Running for 7 years now at CCMB, YIP, (Young Innovators Program) provides a platform for school students to spend an extended amount of time with scientists here. During this period, the students interact with young and senior scientists alike. They have discussions and activities to appreciate the scientific methodology. At the same time, they carry out experiments and build instruments to feel the excitement of doing hands-on science. They are encouraged to think of science in novel ways such as while writing fiction and engage with global concerns of climate change and antibiotic resistance through their interactions with ecologists and wildlife biologists, and microbiologists respectively at CCMB.

In 2019, the International Science and technology competition witnessed a participation of close to 2500 students in classes VIII-X in the previous rounds from an initial outreach of more than 4500 schools globally. Apart from various regions in India, students from Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait participated in the event.

LaCONES or Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species is India's only research facility engaged in the conservation and preservation of wildlife and its resources. It was established in 1998. It was dedicated to the nation in 2007 by President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam. It is also a part of CCMB. It is India's 1st genetic bank for wildlife conservation NWGRB (National Wildlife Genetic Resource Bank).

So, whether you are a young scientist or an Indian with an enquiring mind, the CCMB probably has the answers to your quest to develop your understanding.

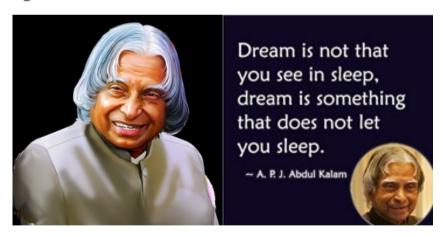
Source: CCMB newsletters.

SYNERGISING MISSILE AND MARINE SCIENCE WITH MEDICAL SCIENCE – A NOVEL, INTERDISCIPLINARY AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL THOUGHT BY DR. A. P. J. ABDUL KALAM

MURALI MALLIGA RAMAN

Dr. A.P.J.Abdul Kalam, the highly respected scientist, "missile man" and 11th President of India, has inspired us in many ways and his whole life itself is a great inspiration. The values of Dr. Kalam, his contributions, his vision for a stronger India and his attitude towards life, are indeed inspiring. He was not only the leader of India. He was the leader of the whole world. There are several impressive traits of this great leader and abiding by these values of Dr.Kalam, (1) be prepared, (2) be courageous & think differently, (3) be humble, (4) have a goal and (5) connect with people, will help us succeed and evolve as a better individual.

"Dream is not what you see in sleep, dream is something which doesn't let you sleep", "You have to dream before your dreams can come true" and "Dreams are important for the scientist whose name is as long as his achievements" are the beautiful quotes uttered by Dr.Kalam which portrays a very deep meaning. It means to dream with your eyes still open, from the depth of the soul. Here dreams mean the passion for goals and passion doesn't let us think of anything else rather than the goals.



Dr.Kalam was a specialist in composite material and he was developing many composite materials to be used in missiles. Kalam's vision was to see that these technologies and special materials were made available for civilian applications. With this thought, with this vision, with this dream, he worked towards integrating missile science with medical science which resulted in the invention of low-cost cardiac stent and low-weight calipers to be used in the healthcare sector. Regardless of its success, these two major inventions by Dr.Kalam for the healthcare sector and the poor were less discussed in media and literature.

Dr.Kalam, in collaboration with the cardiologist Dr. Bhupathiraju Somaraju, has developed India's first indigenous low-cost cardiac stent which was named as Kalam-Raju stent. To prepare this stent, a non-corrosive delta ferrite-free matrix of authentic stainless steel which was originally developed for use in missiles and naval ships was employed. The stent went through proper animal testing and approved for use in humans. On approval, the Kalam-Raju stent went to production and was implanted to thousands of patients under the guidance of Dr.Somaraju. Apart from the pride of first indigenous cardiac stent, the cost of the stent was also much lower compared to the commercially imported stents at that time. Although the medical field has progressed to drug-eluting stents, this invention was a landmark in its time. Kalam-Raju stent touched many hearts by the fusion of material technology to medical science. Many poor needy people are benefitted from the Kalam-Raju cardiac stent.

Another great innovation by Dr.Kalam was lightweight calipers for polio affected children. This reduction in weight was achieved by using glass reinforced polypropylene (a composite carbon-carbon thermoplastic material) which was originally developed and used in the nose cone of Agni missile to withstand high temperature, provide high strength and low weight. Kalam callipers weighed only 350 grams, while the conventional calipers weigh nearly 3-4 kilograms, thus reducing the weight of the caliper to 1/10th of the weight of conventional caliper. Over 50,000 children were benefitted from these calipers which significantly reduced their pain while walking.

Dr.Kalam's concern for poor patients and children has led to the invention of these stents and calipers. These two major innovations that were very close to Dr. Kalam's heart did not happen overnight. Since he had immense knowledge of materials being developed by Indian researchers in defence laboratories, he has synergised the application of those materials in medical science. Though Dr. Kalam was happy about these inventions, currently both of these have vanished from manufacturing and use, thus denying the poor and underprivileged the benefit of cost-effective devices. Restoration of Kalam's stent and calipers would be the best homage that we can pay to him. These can be revived and promoted under the Union government's self-reliant India (Atmanirbhar Bharat) campaign. Can we bring back Dr.Kalam's vision and innovations in healthcare?

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MAKING PLANT CONTAINERS AT HOME

PRINCE R BRIGHT

Everyone has seen different types of flower pots, in a variety of designs. But have you ever thought of making one at home? Making is quite cheaper than buying one. We can make all types of flower pots - small ones, big ones, hanging pots, and other types in our homes themselves. I create pots for our garden and I shall tell you how.

One day I thought of making a concrete vessel for keeping water for birds and I made one based on my idea. It was very ugly and rough. So the next day also I made one, it was much better than the first one then I made a few more and I thought they looked like plant pots. Then this idea came to my mind of making plant pots. I told this idea to my father and he told me how to make one.

Materials required:

- 1) Two buckets one small and the other one radius 1 to 1.5 inch bigger than the small one this is because the pot must be strong.
- 2) Cement
- 3) Sieved sand
- 4) Any kind of oil (cooking oil or vehicle oil)
- 5) A paintbrush
- 6) A wood piece
- 7) White cement
- 8) Putty blade
- 9) Sandpaper
- 10) Any color of paint

Procedure:

First, take the big bucket and rub oil inside the bucket with the brush and then rub oil outside the small bucket so that the pot could be taken out easily. Next, take a half mortar pan cement and a half mortar pan sieved sand and mix well by adding water little by little till the mixture becomes like a paste, then take the big bucket and pour some mixture inside the bucket.

The base of the pot must be around 1 inch thick so that it is strong. Then take the small bucket and place it inside the big bucket and ensure that the gap between the buckets is equal on all sides. Then take the mixture and pour it in between the buckets, then after filling all the sides take the wooden piece and softly knock at the sides of the big bucket and you can see that the mixture going inside and filling the gaps. By doing this we will get the pot surface without any holes and this makes the surface look shiny. After 24 hours, the pot will be ready. After 24 hours, first take out the small bucket gently. If it is too hard keep it for some more hours till it totally dries up and then slowly pull out the small one and take out the pot.

The next step is to coat the pot with white cement with a putty blade. Take white cement and mix it with little water and make it into a paste. Then take the putty blade and coat it on the outer surface of the pot. Then leave the pot to dry well. After drying take the sandpaper and rub on the dried white cement in order to make it smooth and then you can paint the pot with your favourite colour and even design it if you want.

Thank You all for reading my article on pot making.



SHORT STORIES & ARTICLES

VIDYA VRIDDHI – THE SPREAD OF EDUCATION

BHAGYA SHREE RAM

Vidya Vriddhi is a project founded in 2020 by Bhagya Shree Ram in conjunction with the Rotary Club of Madras Central. Bhagya is currently studying in 12th standard. The aim of this project is to equalize access to educational resources to students in the rural areas. This is done by creating worksheets in Math & English for primary and middle school students. These worksheets help the children grasp concepts easily and strengthen their foundation in fundamental concepts. To expand the reach, this project has partnered with 2 of India's largest NGOs. So far Bhagya's team of 60+ volunteers has created over 250 worksheets and over 400 students have benefitted from this project.

Why Vidya Vriddhi? According to statistics, 48% of kids in rural India cannot perform simple math functions and 64% of kids under the age of 15 will end up dropping out of school since they do not have the necessary support and resources to continue their education. 100% of these kids can be positively impacted by giving them a little help! This is where Vidya Vriddhi comes in.

The seeds of this project were sown when Bhagya and her twin sister began tutoring a few underprivileged kids in their neighborhood.

Students from rural, underfunded schools do not have access to good educational resources. This creates huge barriers especially since most of them are first generation learners. Vidya Vriddhi aims to bridge this gap by providing supplemental academic resources to students in rural areas.

In order to increase the outreach, Vidya Vriddhi has partnered with two of India's largest non-profits – Aid India and Bhumi. Vidya Vriddhi has been integrated under Aid India's Eureka School program and under Bhumi's Ignite program.

Vidya Vriddhi has a strong team of dedicated volunteers who come from the Rotaract Club of A.M.Jain College and the Interact Club of Lalaji Memorial School as well as the Annettes Club of Rotary Club of Madras Central. Since August 2020 when this project began, the 60+ volunteers have put together over 250 worksheets that have gone on to impact over 400 students in Kalpakkam and Kanchipuram.

Going forward, Vidya Vriddhi hopes to further expand their reach and impact over 1 lakh children and give these students the meaningful education they deserve.

Bhagya can be contacted at:bhagya.sram@gmail.com

Some of Vidya Vriddhi's volunteers

















Some of the students who have benefitted:



THE CHIMERA

CHAPTER 3 – THE JOURNEY

CHITRA RAMANAN

Sarah decided to watch her creator for some time and before stepping out of the safe zone. Her creator was seated cross-legged on the floor and her eyes were closed. She tried to sit and failed to attain the posture. She looked at her and wondered if her creator would be surprised or shocked and if she would welcome her with open arms. She had observed her creator hugging her loved ones and she wished to embrace her in that manner.

She was nervous and rehearsed what all she would talk to her creator. She tried to remember the questions she wanted to ask and wished she could have the tree around. She felt the familiar tingling sensation and decided to move on.

When she stepped out of the safe zone, suddenly she was gripped by fear. She touched the twig and it seemed to comfort her. The passage looked like a tunnel and it kept changing colours reflecting the mirror at the end of the path. She stepped in the tunnel and started walking. Slowly she felt the Chimera disappear and a new fragrance enveloped her. The tunnel sprawled like an endless road with no destination.

At last after what felt like an eternity, she came to the mirror. She touched it with her little finger slightly. It felt cold to her touch. She cautiously stepped it and the mirror took her in and shoved her to the other side. Sarah stepped out and looked around her. She saw a massive door with strange figures and tried to push. The door did not budge and then she saw a peculiar bell and pulled the rope. The bell jingled and loudly and she heard her creator's voice from the other side "Who is it?"

Sarah saw the door open and there she was, her creator, smiling and looking at her quizzically. "Hello Sarah, May I step in?"

ART WITH A HEART

DIVYA SHREE RAM

Art with a Heart, a unique project, is the brainchild of Divya Shree Ram in collaboration with the Rotary Club of Madras Central. Divya is currently studying in 12th grade. This project aims to brighten the lives of young patients.

This project has two phases. The first phase involved conducting an art competition which saw very enthusiastic participation from India and abroad. Over 200 entries were received and these were judged by eminent experts and art collectors. The artwork received included colorful paintings, pencil art and Mandala art. Due to the large number of entries received, judging was done in multiple rounds. 25 of these amazing entries were selected in the final round. In the second phase of this project, these winning entries will be framed and hung in pediatric wards of selected hospitals with the aim of making the hospital stay of the children a little happier.

The concept behind this project was based on a research article according to which artworks in hospital calms the patient making them less anxious thereby speeding their recovery. An experiment was conducted where paintings were hung inside the wards of a hospital. The patients were surveyed for a month, and a huge improvement in their health, mood and level of pain tolerance was observed. Divya, through The Art with a Heart project, wanted to apply the same effect to care- giving institutions in Chennai, and thought of doing so through the medium of an art competition.

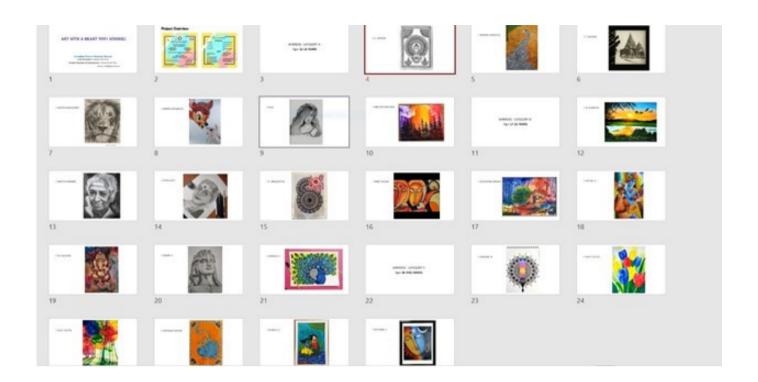
For the future, the hope is to make Art with a Heart an annual project. We can do our best to bring more cheer to people in hospitals, orphanages, old age homes, and other care-taking institutions. Divya can be contacted via email at: divya.rvdb@gmail.com



The Inspiration...

"There is evidence that the display of visual art, especially images of nature, can have positive effects on health outcomes, including shorter length of stay in hospital, increased pain tolerance and decreased anxiety."

Dr. Ulrich RS, Environmental Psychologist



BELIEVE THE PATIENT ALWAYS

N.U. GULVADY

It was a typical day at work in the BARC Research Centre. While attending to my patients, I got a call from my colleague, a scientist managing the Particle Accelerator at his workplace. He told me about a man getting electric shocks from any Godrej Almirah he touched and wanted to know if he should send him to me for a check-up. Since I already had a high workload of patients to see, I told my colleague I would drop by later to see the man. As an Occupational Health Physician, I felt it was extremely important to know the working area in addition to meeting the man.

When I went to my colleague's workplace, I learnt there was a particular sound coming from the Particle Accelerator. This man who complained of the electric shocks was trying to find out where the noise was coming from. The noise referred to by the man occurs whenever the Particle Accelerator is used by frequent cyclical alterations i.e. fluctuations of electric potential or voltages. As a result, the particle gets accelerated and causes the sound.

Upon looking at the man's feet, I noticed he was wearing beautiful Reebok shoes that were very well insulated. As a result of wearing those shoes, the man was getting fully charged since the electrostatic energy was depositing on him. The moment he touched any metal surface, the electric shock would jump from him to it. As a matter of fact, he was giving a shock to the Godrej Almirah as opposed to the other way round!

I recommended my scientist colleague to make a 1 square inch size of iron mesh and put it all around the area where he was doing the acceleration. This would ensure the electrostatic charge would get grounded and not come out at all. Since my colleague was under the impression the man was malingering, he wanted to send him to me for a check-up. However, this simple remedy helped solve the problem and remove his misconception.

With this real-life incident, I would like to convey a simple message to all the readers: Before coming to any judgment, it is always advisable to get all the facts by seeing the actual workplace.

WHY DO WE FEEL A CERTAIN WAY? - ASK YOUR HORMONES

HEMA RANGARAJAN

Hormones are chemicals produced by different glands across your body. They travel through the bloodstream, acting as messengers and playing a part in many bodily processes. They also regulate your mood. Certain hormones promote positive feelings, including happiness and pleasure.

The following flow chart will explain about the four happy hormones, their functioning and how their deficiencies affect us and how to increase their levels in human body.





· physical touch . laughter/crying daily to-do list socializing · cold showers · creating music/art · eat dark chocolate · long term goals massage · sunlight · food rich in L-Tyrosine · eat spicy foods · acupuncture · massage . listening to music · exercise/stretching exercise regularly · create something: * exercise massage · cold shower meditate writing, music, or art meditate

We can conjure a chemical formula for love!

C8H11NO2 + C10H12N2O + C43H66N12O12S2 / Dopamine + Serotonin + Oxytocin = LOVE.

It can be easily manufactured in a lab, but overdosing on any of them can cause schizophrenia, extreme paranoia, and insanity.

This chemical controls craving, addiction, reward, and motivation. The addictiveness to love can be compared only to that of a drug addict, responding to love as an addict would to needing a drug. Love does get you high, but in a different way. We, as humans, whether people like to admit it or not, are addicted to the idea of love and are constantly looking for that person to gives us those feelings.

Serotonin

Serotonin is commonly known as the "happiness" hormone. Its release acts as an antidepressant and is used in medicine to treat depression and anxiety disorders. This chemical controls moods and obsessive thoughts. Do you ever wonder why you can't stop thinking about someone you just met? Do you ever wonder why when you reject someone they continue to reach out to you? Or when you get rejected by someone, it almost feels like you want them more? I'll tell you a secret; you aren't crazy. When rejection plays a part in a relationship even more serotonin is released causing you to think more about a specific person. Then dopamine is released and you are craving the person's attention and you want the reward of success. The moment you're rejected, you grow more attached.

Oxytocin

Oxytocin boosts our immune system, makes us better problem solvers and makes us more resistant to the addictive qualities of dopamine. Unlike dopamine, which is largely responsible for instant gratification, oxytocin gives us lasting feelings of calm and safety.

Dopamine

Dopamine is meant to motivate towards a distant goal. It motivates you to start a new habit. Endorphins are the reason exercise is often suggested to help with stress. They're the reason why starting a gym routine can help you relax after a long day at work. The predictability of endorphins makes them especially useful!

To reiterate, here's a guick overview of these brain chemicals:

Dopamine - The (good & bad) habit former. An incredible tool when used appropriately!

Oxytocin - The hugging drug or "love hormone." Oxytocin makes us social and builds relationships with trust and loving feelings.

Serotonin - The "leadership hormone." - related to pride, loyalty, and status.

Endorphins - The natural painkiller. The runner's high!

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BIRD BRAIN

HEMA RAVI

'Bird Brain' is often used to refer to a silly person or a 'scatterbrain.' A whatsapp video gave me some insights and made me think more about birds' brains.

Firstly, let me briefly tell you about the video - It reveals a pond heron. The heron places a dead insect on water. At once, an unsuspecting fish comes swimming towards its food. The jubilant heron swoops upon its prey.

Action repeated a few times, the heron earns a juicy meal of fish within a couple of minutes.

I watched this video several times; fascinated. I wanted to know more about birds' brains. As a nature lover, I observe the birds in the neighbourhood; watch them pick up twigs, sticks and other 'building material' for their nests aka homes.

As a child, I recall how once, while we were at play, a crow's nest fell off a neem tree. Curious as we were, we applauded in admiration at the cup-shaped nest that had hay, dry leaves, feathers and wires (Aluminium wires used for clothes lines.)

One can gaze endlessly at the engineering marvel of the tailor bird or the weaver bird's nest. Even the tiny sunbird is adept at building its nest.

BIRD BRAIN???

"For a long time having a 'bird brain' was considered to be a bad thing: Now it turns out that it should be a compliment," (As per the study done by a Neuroscientist of Vanderbilt University)

Are Avian brains wired differently than primate brains?

The macaw's brain is the size of 'an unshelled walnut.' The macaque monkey's brain, on the other hand, is about the 'size of a lemon.' Interestingly, the macaw has 'more neurons in its forebrain' (the portion associated with intelligent behaviour!)

"We found that birds, especially songbirds and parrots, have surprisingly large numbers of neurons in their pallium: the part of the brain that corresponds to the cerebral cortex, which supports higher cognition functions such as planning for the future or finding patterns. That explains why they exhibit levels of cognition at least as complex as primates,"

Isn't this fascinating enough for further reading?

Lastly, before we call someone 'bird brain,' I suggest we think twice....

Reference:

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Sunbird in its nest with its chicks Photo Courtesy: Ravi N.

DAWN

JELLIE N.WYCKELSMA

When the moon and the stars hide behind ominous clouds, covering our part of the world in darkness, most people are asleep. All is quiet so it seems, but in the big cities life doesn't stop. Nightclubs and Discos are alive with loud music, until well into the night. Nature never takes a rest either. Rain lashed the country, refreshing but, flooding the lower lying areas. Rivers cascade, rushing towards the sea ...

We all hope for the wind to chase away those clouds, in time for the dawn, when the sun illuminates the sky with brilliant colours, giving us a few moments of peace on earth, and a little time to reflect. When we feel rested, and renewed with energy, appreciating dawn, like no other time of day.

But as the sun rises rapidly, traffic clogs the streets and freeways, where too often road rage rears its ugly head. We are part of the rat race again, hurrying off to work to start our new working day...

THE LONGEST DAY

JELLIE N.WYCKELSMA

Time is an illusion. It's invisible, you can't see, hold it, nor control it, yet it rules us from the day we were born. On our birth certificate it states on which day we were born, and when we pass away, that day is recorded too. How we spend the time of the days in between those dates, is different for all of us. On some days time seems to fly like a bird in the air while on other days, it crawls like a tired turtle, on a never ending journey.

Looking back at my life there have been a few very long days, where the end of the day never seemed to come. There is one day among those days, that I recall as the longest day in my life. We had been in Australia only three years, when in 1961 my father decided to spend four weeks of his holidays with us. During those days communication between the family back in The Netherlands and us was by mail; with light-blue aerograms. None of us had telephones.

The KLM flight was to arrive in the early morning at Essendon Airport. Victoria. We were there well before the arrival time, but then an announcement was made that the flight was delayed. More announcements followed as the delay was extended several times, until 11 o'clock in the evening.

We waited and waited and somehow that day didn't want to end. It was my longest day ever, but when we embraced, it was also the day with the happiest ending.

MANNEQUIN MONOLOGUES

MADHUMATHI. H

The voiceless broken souls, are like Mannequins. Behind the seemingly vibrant, cheerful forms might be hidden, unhealed wounds, muted tears...

There are voices inside their heads...

Of unheard monologues...

Seeking hammers to break the suffocation, shed the masks, and feel the Sky as their roofs...

Whiff of greenery and coral jasmine scenting their souls

The texture of winter, oozing through warm sunshine...

Under spotlights, some unheard voices unseen bruises are only concealed with more layers of suffocating masks; like a clogged acquifer, a mannequin's monologue, the self struggles to come to surface...

All they need, is a trustworthy non-judgemental heart to listen. A kind shoulder to lean on... Someone to just say, "Am there. Vent it out!".

We never know who is silently bearing an inexplicable ache... who is hiding a sea of tears... Let's be kinder. Gentler.



IRREPLACEABLE

NEHA S CHAKRAVARTHI

It's been four hours since daybreak and a week since I had a proper sleep. My eyes were transfixed on my sleep-smiling baby girl. A dreamer is what she's made of herself! "It's morning already?", she asked waking from her sleep. I shrugged in response. In reflex, she got up from the bed, pushing herself into the rush of the day. Whilst I was in deep thoughts, she got dressed up in an ochre-coloured shirt and grey pants. Her short-lengthed copper hair fell over her shoulders like a pearl rosary. She aced formal wears with ease; being comfortable in her own style added to her grace. Picking the tickets up from the table in her hands, she said, "Do I really have to go?" wrapping her hands around me. "I've always taught you to chase your dreams, Tanya, which means you should go!" She tightened the hug; I knew that I would be in tears like a love-lorn poet by the end of the day! I started, "If Dad had been with us...", she stopped me midway, saying, "he would've been proud!"

"Well, I've things to do before you leave!" I cheered her up, seeing her eyes glistening with tears. Pointing to the car's keys in my hand, I asked, "Who's turn?" "Obviously yours!" We drove to our usual spot, the secluded restaurant, which was twenty minutes drive from home. I had called a few of her closest friends for her send-off party or the brunch date, to be euphemistic. My emotions were traumatizing; I couldn't behave normally. Tanya was dancing with her friends like a maniac! It was irresistible for me to adore her antics. "This job's my dream!" I heard her. Since she finished her schooling, working in the States has been her everything. And she's making me proud by achieving it! After a good three hours of brunching, we decided to go shopping. "I'll do the driving," Tanya said. This girl who I remember snuggling into my arms as a kid has grown up so much; I felt proud! Having experienced every red and green of life all alone, she's now become a strong woman! Bringing me back to my senses, she said, "Enigmatic!" "Huh?" "I can't read you, your mind!" "Don't even try," I said.

"This purple one looks good on you, Tanya," I said. "Sweaters? I don't think I need one, mom!" I turned silent; she spoke again, "Your hand-knit one is just what I'm in love with!" hugging me from behind. "Fine then, ice creams?", I asked trying to keep my cool. "What about a drink?" Tanya said. "Drink as in... booze?" She nodded her head in agreement; I raised my brows, giving her an intimidating look to which she responded, "Mom, non-alcoholic at least?" I chuckled at her sudden change in expression. Being the explorer that she is, I have never wanted her to set boundaries for life. Her independence in thoughts and choice have mattered the most to me. Tanya is a person of a few words. "Did you think I would surprise you with my job offer letter when I asked you to fly down to Bangalore?" she questioned me. "Well, no! I thought you had some good news for me. I thought you would introduce your long-time boyfriend to me!" She smirked, saying, "He ran away from me hating my tomboyishness!" and chuckled. "Does that make you sad?" I asked. "No! You're my first and last love, mom!"

Opening the large French door of the balcony wide open, we perched on the comfy couch. "I'll miss you so much, Tanya," I said, sipping at the weird tasting beer, "Oh, yuck! This tastes terrible!" "Same here, mom!", she said leaving an impression of her kiss on my cheeks. "Does this make you feel sick?", I asked directing my finger at the large glass of beer. "Mom, don't worry. It's non-alcoholic, as I earlier said!" I felt her hair with my palms, "Don't be crazy about colouring your hair after you go to the States. Make good friends, eat healthy, don't stay up too late in the night. And remember, your mum will keep rooting for you all the time!" We laid on each others' shoulders. Silence was the fugitive as we were in our own deep thinking. "How could you be a perfect blend of everything, mom? Ever so flawless, strong, fearless... You know, that's exactly why I call you my rainbow!" I sat upright, paying attention to every syllable she spoke. "You bring the best out of me, show me what I'm capable of, do wonders to me with just being around. I would love to be captivated by your instincts, mom, and never be parted from you."

"We can never be parted, Tanya. For years, it's been just us, our little frenzy world. So now nor ever we could be parted. Tanya, the prime thing you've to remember when making new friends, is that you should throw the fear of being judged far away. Er... why am I saying that now? Whatever!" Tanya chortled, "You needn't tell me all these for the thousandth time, mom, for I would feel your presence anywhere I'm. After all, I'm Tanya Anjali!" I rubbed away the lone tear that skipped off my right eye. "Just like how you're part of my name, you'll be my heart and soul, mom!" I couldn't help reacting to what she said. It's been quite a long time since we had such heartfelt conversations. I'm pretty sure that's she must've noticed me shedding tears; she spoke, "It's getting too sentimental, mom! Come on, help me get ready!", she reached out her hands to me. She looked around her hostel room which was so dear to her reminiscing the lovely times she spent.

I drove her to the airport. I didn't let my emotions take over me this time; I was happy, excited, proud. Tanya checked in and got the boarding pass. Till it was time for her to leave, I stayed with her at the departure hall. I was determined up my head not to make it a tearful send-off. I wished I could cling to my baby girl forever, but destiny has other things in store for her and me as well! It was time for her to leave; this time, my weak heart gave up to the reality that I involuntarily teared up. My bold girl gave me a comforting hug and left. My eyes traced her steps till they could see. She took a right turn, and she was invisible from my sight. Heavy-heartedly I drove back to her hostel.

I swung open the door of her room and gazed at a picture of me she had put up on the wall, which brought a feeble smile to my face. Below it was written in bold - Thank you, mom, for being irreplaceable!

A TOKEN OF LOVE

SETALURI PADMAVATHI

Roshni has been staring at the people who are gliding on the busy road, observing them and learning a lot of things from the society. She was looking awesome in light pink salwar and kameez and her long hair gives a good impression to the viewers as it is moving on her forehead smoothly.

"Roshni, could you please help me in the kitchen?" Her mother asked.

"Yes, of course, mom!"

She ran to the kitchen hurriedly to help her in completing the favourite dish to all....

Roshni's father, Gaurav, an office clerk and mother is a housewife. They follow the traditional life and lead their life within their limits.

Roshni is a teenage girl who is very fair, tall and extraordinary with her brownish eyes. She is an innocent girl at times, but good hearted as she has a clean heart... undoubtedly, she's loving and affectionate to her family and friends.

She loves sitting in the balcony and reading short stories, novels and comics like a small kid.

It was Sunday. Roshni was drying her wet hair on the balcony. Suddenly, she could see a handsome guy waving his hands to her, saying "Hi......"

Unexpectedly, she too waved her hands with an innocent smile on her face...

Karam stared at her with lots of love and affection and thought..

"Is it love at first sight?".... hmm.... I don't know..."

Karam stepped further with a peaceful mind and many beautiful thoughts....

"Her smile and appearance are haunting me." he said to his close friend, Yesh.

Karam is an accountant in a well reputed company, earning a good amount which is sufficient to run a family in a proper way. He is good at managing things well.

He is a handsome guy, fair and religious person. He loves going to temples on important festival days and special occasions with his family.

His father, Karun is a small business man and mother, Keerthi a house wife who is always very loving and kind.

He feels something missing, if he doesn't see her daily in the evening.

It was drizzling and cool wind added to the weather. The mud from the earth smelt pretty good. The number of travellers had been decreasing on the road.

It was dawn. The sky looked dark as it was covered with a black cloudy blanket.

Karam returned home in vain on that day. The next day, he saw her once again at the balcony and felt extremely happy.

They both exchanged their phone numbers and visited a few places nearby secretly.

"Dad, I like Roshni and wish to marry her.... she's a beautiful girl and comes from a cultured family." Karam's voice was firm while he was speaking.

Karun and Keerthi heard him silently.

Keerthi was sure that her son chose a nice girl who could adjust with their family. Within a few months, they fixed their wedding with the acceptance of Roshni's parents.

Karam said, "I'm so lucky to marry you."

Roshni nodded her head, "I too" whispered softly.

They started knowing each other's habits, likes and dislikes.

"Hey! You're looking wonderful in this dress!" Karam hugged her affectionately. Thank you, dear! They realized that they love and understand each other.

"I wish to have a small baby, Roshni," Karam told her one fine day with a smile.

"Yeah! I too love kids very much."

The next year, she became pregnant and jumped with joy.

Karam comes home early to take care of her. He gave her rules and regulations to take care of her health. He also helped her in cooking at times.

"It was the sixth month. One day, she complained, "Karam, I have severe pain in my stomach. hmm"

"I'm unable to bear it."

He rushed her to hospital immediately.

She was 19, unaware of giving birth and pain during pregnancy. Doctor tested her BP and the baby's condition quickly.

Roshni was rolling with unbearable pain.

Karam got very worried. "Doctor! What happened to her?"

"I'm sorry! She lost her pregnancy!" Dr. Sheela explained the reason to him after half an hour. "Oh! God!" He was astounded to hear the news.

Karan wept badly and consoled his wife. His parents too were shocked with the news.

When she got pregnant for the next time also, she'd some problems and the pregnancy couldn't last for more than five months.

Both Karam and Roshni had decided to leave to a different nation and start their life newly with new thoughts.

"Don't worry, Rosh." "God is with us and we'll have a cute and healthy baby one day." Karam eased her worry to some extent.

Roshni was very much depressed with the failure of pregnancies constantly and unable to concentrate on anything.

New places and new friends gave them a good hope and advice to live happily.

For the third time, she got the confirmation of pregnancy by her gynaecologist.

They didn't want to take any risk in the new place. She was sent to her native after a few months.

"Rosh, take care of your health! Take medicines on time and have a good diet as well!" Karam reminded her repeatedly, hoping for the best.

She delivered a healthy boy baby at Bangalore in a well reputed hospital on one fine day. Karam reached the hospital with pleasure. He was on cloud nine to see the cute baby in her laps.

"Thank you, Rosh, for the wonderful gift! You suffered a lot to become a wonderful mom!"

Roshni smiled at him merrily.

Later on, they named him as "Dharam"

Time and tide waits for none. The boy grew up and made his parents happy with his all wonderful actions.

He is five now.... He is the apple of his mother and best student in his class with courage and confidence.

Karam and Roshni looked at him gladly.

"Dharam is a Token of love!" Karam mentioned with a satisfied heart.

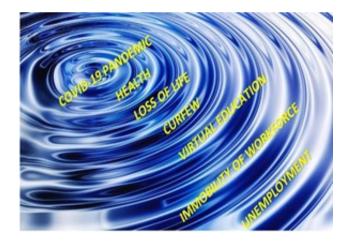
THE IMPACT OF A PANDEMIC – RIPPLE EFFECTS

SHASHINI.H

Trapped within four walls and forced to obey stern rules everyone has their own thoughts and worries. In this scenario, where the future remains a question, we all discern one thing: This pandemic has created ripple effects. The most vital of all is health. People have become vulnerable to the deadly virus leading to critical side effects like affecting the functionality of organs, causing fungal infections in few, skin problems in some thereby resulting in loss of lives in many. But is only health at risk by COVID-19? Stress is added in here, about education for under 25s and about livelihoods for those older than 25.

The current lockdown due to the concern of health causes the immobility of workforce causing unemployment. The longer this goes on, the more severe the consequences will become. Financial hardship leads to poverty, heaps of depression and businessmen without customers continue leading a savage life. Drop in purchase power causes demands to decrease, ultimately a decline in the economy.

On the other hand, education is moving tardily, and the term 'learning' has become 'virtual learning'. This merely shows how much technology is getting imbibed in us. Though it has costs and benefits, the benefits seem to be at an upper hand. Without technology, a whole academic year would have been omitted from history. Contrarily, online classes are a major cause of stress among students since they lack a structured learning environment and don't feel motivated without their peers. In addition, too much use of gadgets creates health issues.





In short, we can comprehend that this dreadful pandemic is acting like a stone that has struck the world and diametrically affects health leading to loss of life, creating the need to enforce curfew, making education virtual and halting the income in business houses causing unemployment. We all are fed up hearing things like 'wear a mask', 'maintain social distancing', 'wash your hands' and so on. But remember that 'this too shall pass' until then we must stick to the protocols. It's this simple: If we say yes to the vaccine and yes to caution, we can bravely say no to Coronavirus. Keeping each other safe is our responsibility. Even if we're separated physically, we must support each other and the slogan we must follow now is "Together we can beat COVID-19".

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

THANKAM NAIR

There is always an interaction between hereditary and environmental influences in personality development. Early part of an individual is more important for the formation of personality. Some of the environmental factors in the early stages that shape human life are home, school and peer groups.

At home various factors that influence are parental attitude towards children, preference for boy/girl, parental ambitions, death of parents, step parents, divorce, separation or being only child or number of children in the family, education of parents, socio economic status of parents etc. The factors which influence a student's personality development in school are curriculum, methods of teaching, co curricular activities, disciplined atmosphere of the school, personality of teacher and nature of peer groups.

Teacher's observation of a student should not be limited in the class room only, and he/ she has to give special stress on the health of the child because only a healthy student can concentrate more effectively in learning activity. The teacher should present the subject matter in varieties of ways to bring novelty in teaching. Moreover teacher can have more anecdotes, comparative discussions, visuals, to make them understand the topic. In human beings novelty creates curiosity and interest. Knowledge is another kind of motivation and improves content mastery in the learners. Competition should involve a degree of equality among contestants. Teachers should stress healthy competition and not hatred among students. And teachers, make it clear how to face failures and success in life. Let them know the value of sincerity, devotion and dedication, love, respect, punctuality, discipline and optimism. Teach them how to convert information into knowledge, and how to acquire knowledge through listening, watching, discussing and intellectual analysis. Let them not involve in cheap politics and destructive activities. Give strength, durability and beauty for their life. Never use sharp, cursing words. We should not allow them to spoil the peaceful environment of academic institutions.

Let every teacher be the guardian for their students. Let every student remember you, your words be in their memory for ever.

Parents role in personality development is the main factor, every parent should know that there are positives and negatives, happiness and unhappiness, gain and loss, ups and downs are part of life. Our children should feel that they are proud children of honorable parents and so parents have to be role models. They have to explain the importance of family, society, cultural and national values. Keeping home neat and clean, nurturing relationship with love, respect and mutual help so that children will get direct lessons. Teach them when and where to use their eyes, ears, tongue and mind for having a meritorious life. Give them all valuable knowledge. Teach them, Mathru devo bhava. Pithru devo bhava. Rashtra devo bhava.

Time management is the main mantra for the success of an individual. Utilize every single minute, be punctual, and when promise anything, fulfill it.

Human life is so precious, do good things for yourself, family and society. Love is most binding and makes your environment clean, pure through love and care. Let the quality of life be in the best direction, follow gentleness and humaneness. Openness and generosity of mind and heart are the true characteristics of a good personality.

Life is beautiful; enjoy it with creativity and values. Every problem in life can be solved. Do not brood over it. Sitting idle is not the solution. The root cause of all illness is our mental attitude-take everything positively. Face problems boldly.

Our attitude and beliefs make us successful.

POETRY



ETHICS OF LIFE

ARADHANA SHUKLA

Life is like a moving wheel
Do good, and always feel thrilled
You cannot change anyone
Sit free, and have hot bun
Live your life in your way
As it seems, to be the last day
Ignore all and forgive all
Go in shade, and play with ball
Take your life very light
As there is, no reason to fight
Life will shine like the sun
If you learn, how to get burned.

CHANTING-ULTIMATE SOLUTION

ASHA RAJ GOPAKUMAR

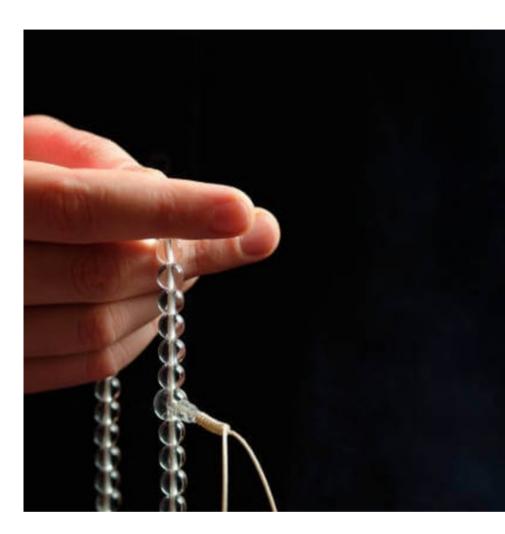
Chant, chant, chant.... The name of God. The ultimate solution.

Capricious this world is, Filled with sham and solipsism. Arduous to unravel, Segregate the altruistic, Living like a fading shadow.

Chant, chant, chant.... The name of God. The ultimate solution.

Detach from your agonies
Unfasten your despondency.
Open your mind to Him.
Keep your love and trust to Him.
Surrender at His lotus feet,
Like a bottomless well.

Chant, chant, chant...'His' name. 'He 'The Supreme Lord' The ultimate solution.



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THE HEART OF EVERY HOME

BHAGYASHREE MISHRA

Nurturing us within her warm womb Enduring those excruciating aches, She brought us into a world of delight Rocked our cradles, lulled us to slumber Knew our needs, even without words Each time, we trembled and tumbled Her delicate hands ran at our rescue The creator, nurturer and savior she is

If turbulent winds ever shook our wings
And disappointments encircled
Enwrapped in her arms, we often found
Our lost pillars of poise and patience
Pampering us to the fullest
Yet instilling in us, integrity and ethics
Guiding throughout, being our life's light
She is the mentor and inspirer forever

Having walked those extra miles
To offer us a righteous raising
An ardent supporter, enabling
Our distant dreams come true
A doer and an enabler she is
An armour against all ills and evils
A sigh of relief amid all gloom
The sparkle in our smiles
The shine of our eyes
The warmth in our well-knit bonds
She is the heart of every home.

Celebrating the hands that raised us, the laps that mollycoddled us and the hearts that hold us forever.

A POEM ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS SUPERHERO 2019/2020 VERSION

GITA BHARATH

I know what superheroes are supposed to wear
A mask, a cape, high boots, thick hair.
Today's superheroes still wear masks
But they wear different clothes suited to different tasks
Grocer and milkman, sanitary worker
The policeman, banker, and of course
The tireless, superhuman doctor and nurse
All trying to save all of us from the dangerous curse
Of the Coronavirus.

EXTREMES

JAYALAKSHMI

Life is an amalgamation of extremes Restless human life betwixt the brims Joy enchant beat of a second Pain entails, for years we pant.

Life, travail, with positive and negative waves Face them calm, never be destiny's slave Merge and mellow, shrink and sprout Moral sequences in nature, bright.

Tears and thrills entwined threads
Loss and gain continuance so myriad
Restful happiness turns us inert
Stress and strain mould us alert
Accept reality of trivial worldly mirth
Endurance of trust bliss of thousand sun's worth.

TAPESTRY

KAMAR SULTANA SHEIK

I had spread my cloth Caught in a hoop, Needle in hand. Alas! No pattern came To my dazed mind.. Bereft of inspiration I laid it down and fell asleep.. Ah, what was that persistent knocking? Oh, the raindrops were calling me Hitting on the window pane, Raising it, what do I see? A brilliant raindrop tapestry! Laid out there upon a waxy green leaf, Like a palm full of glittering stars... Lo! In no time I finished My embroidery! Upon the blue sky crystal bright, I embroidered the diamond-stars, And yet through the dark night, The vale below remained green.

THE CRAVING

KAMAR SULTANA SHEIK

I craved for something, What was it, I wish I knew! First I put into my mouth A piece of chocolate... No...it wasn't this... A piece of cream icing? Nope! Melted butter, then, soft? No-no. The salt in it repulsed me.. After all, I was tasting food After six long days! So what could it be.. It nearly drove me crazy! Until, something gold and clear Shone in the early morning sunlight! Ah, quicked I squeezed it, Into a bowl of chilled milk.. Crunchy cornflakes floated in it.. And now this golden ingredient Glided into it in swirls, One spoonful of it..And I knew! Ah, for the taste of milk and honey! Indeed, the food of paradise!

THE DILEMMA

KETAN PATIL

What are you thinking, for? What are you waiting, for? What are you expecting, for? What are you searching, for? I think of nothing more, but just Thinking about, people's behaviour Waiting, to see change in them Expecting, to behave like you In search of people, who will be down to earth But be alerted for this all Need not think, as thinking leads to depression Need not wait, as waiting disheartens Need not expect, as expectation leads to disappointment Need not search, as searching leads to vain attempt So let's get apart from it As all play their own karma, never be infirm Once we become venerable, it will become memorable.

AFTERMATH

LATHAPREM SAKHYA

Sleep evades me
I sit wide awake
I see the dark, red water
In all its fury rushing over
Engulfing the homes and lands.

Near the dilapidated house I spy the owner, with vacant eyes Words have died in him. So many faces tear drained The why's never answered.

Wrapped in hopeless despair
All their dreams washed away in water
Still unsure of rebuilding their nest.
Vacant eyes empty of hopes and dreams
Peer around hopefully for succour.

We onlookers, who escaped the deluge Equally diffident, stand midway aghast In reinstating the victimized, only to Glimpse the multitudes still wallowing In waters relentless, mocking them.

SUBLIME SATISFACTION

LEENA RAJAN

What all expressions, we have everyday!
We love sometimes, we quarrel,
We compromise, and forget, all important attitudes,
We turn machine like, if they are not in life, at times,
Wisely using them properly, heavenly our life tends,
We will be inhuman, with improper demeanour and traits.

If at all, we hate a person, his behaviour is to be hated, It is his behaviour, that makes him vicious, that needs to be changed, In his words, let there be changes, with his words, quarrelled Invariably forget his mistakes, which once will be corrected.

Love, his soul and, intimations, not his bodily vices for, Limitations are not to be mentioned with words severe, Loving words are panacea to sublime satisfaction's grandeur, Loftily, let him have bliss and solace with his personality's cure.

"IF POETRY IS A FRAGRANCE, I SHALL INHALE PARIJAT..."

MADHUMATHI, H

Coral jasmines perfume the prayers Of a nonchalant heart The silence is more eloquent, than The hymns How many memories, and dreams How many hopeful moments Burst like a bubble, a soft explosion Do the blossoms, carry the scent of tears, too To be felt, and heard Identifying the soul That smells like love... Brimming and flowing in abundance All the petals from the inner garden Blown towards the roots Surrendering to blend, bloom And some day Be absorbed by the Earth As a fallen flower, or Again smile like a praying bud. . .





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TRIBUTE TO REAL WARRIORS - DOCTORS AND FRONTLINE WORKERS

K. MONIKA

Adorned with a pretty and serene white

They came out to relieve us from plight.

Came out with healing hands and soothing words

To cure the pandemic world.

Working for hours and without rest

And there's no doubt they're the best.

Hiding the pains with a smile

And trembling to take the world to the next mile.

Pumping the heart with hope and trust

And remove the scars and dust.

They are on the fringe of the death layer

With family waiting with hope and prayer.

A super soul's dealing with strives

And protecting the precious lives.

While we remained frown in the lockdown

They've festooned us with compassionate crown.

Serving our life with optimism and toil

And everyday they're burning the midnight oil.

Removing the blemishes and gore

And it's not just a battle, but a war.

Putting their lives at stake

Amidst all the sadness and ache.

Pouring on you tons of love and gratitude

For your gentle and caring attitude.

Hats off to your struggles and sacrifices

In this pervasive disease crisis.

Working beyond and after sunset everyday

And hoping for a better and peaceful world someday.

Their undiluted courage and dedication

Is now serving for our nation.

Salute to the entire medical fraternity

And all the frontline workers will be there in our heart for eternity.

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THE TWO SHOCKS OF SCIENCES

ORBINDU GANGA

Ninth grade turned the tables
Around, science was no more
A subject, she became ferocious,
Colours discerned the burette
From the pipette, everything veered
The Greek and Latin way.

Stop cursing English!!!
She became queen's language!!!

Literature was the symbol
Of panache, she became an art,
She became dignified with plays
And poetry, some got tranquillised
Others had a good nap.

The first shock came
In the sixth grade with another
Science, making hay way,
The studies of social
Was no more social,
She clambered the hill
To whisper Geography,
She waddled through the time
Machine reminisced the history,
The mind predisposed to follow
The rules, civic sense endured,
Adam arbitrated with Smith
In their theories, to become united.

Reaching the ninth clouds Heaven dictated the terms, She evaded through The backdoors, to be with The board, being enticed, The cumulous remained
Staid for long, lightening
Glimmered, thunders growled,
Newton rolled the apple
To curse us, the predicament of physics,
Mendeleev weighed his heart
To distribute the elements,
Aristotle gave the prototype
To Plato, implementing a thought,
Theory of uncertainty
Were the premonitions to follow.

Charaka and Susruta Are archived, forgotten in past, Never touched being outdated.

Read for pleasure encouraged
The thought, to read outside the circle,
Reading along the shore
The two sciences are in forlorn
Being in synergy.

THE BEAUTY OF EXISTENCE

ROOPA SUBRAMANI

What's an image in the creator's mind?

That fashioned a mould with such beauty of a unique kind?

Filling this world in soulful creative ways,

Lending this bliss to every single onlookers gaze,

Infusing and percolating it's presence in every single atom that vibrates,

In a wild sacred dance that stealthily invigorates,

From the mineral, plant, animal, man and everything inanimate to the animate,

Sharing the very same divine essence that knows not how to differentiate,

And to see everything, 'As it is' without the least trace of willful resistance,

Is to rightly live and appreciate the beauty of this precious existence,

For they say that, 'Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder',

But when the vision is beheld from the eye of the heart, the whole seeing and the seen become ONE with the SEER.

And 'THAT IS', the true beauty of existence that lasts forever and ever!



A GLANCE OUT OF THE WINDOW

SETALURI PADMAVATHI

Whitish flowers lighten up the heart The heavy branches sway, as a part Pinkish flowers brighten up the land Evergreen bushy trees stare and stand!

Light green leaves on branches, a few Dark green leaves on trees, a good view Yellowish green leaves certainly shine Pale green leaves look pretty in a line!

Clean roads welcome travellers one side With systematic methods, they do ride Citizens who reside in a developed city Blessed are those who live in sociality!

Progress states the state of any nation The mankind's discipline makes formation A great view of the city is the soul's elation It's not at all one man's wonderful creation!

RAIN

SUJATHA SAIRAM

Rains - Beautiful and mysterious as well,
Deep in love with the so-called monsoon.
Adding up to the beauty of the locale,
Drenching it with showers of blessing,
Fortunate are those who receive it in abundance.

Mother earth provides it a room in her lap, Nurturing and transforming it into lakes, vales and lagoons. Fertile fields and splendid vegetation -The gifted children of the rain Draw a portrait of rain -the elixir of life.

But my heart weeps for-That moment isn't far when this elixir would be poisonous. World draped in modernity has failed to recognize, The gentle admonitions of threat - floods, drought, pandemic, Time we get more thoughtful before the rhythm of nature goes non sync.

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OUR SQUIRREL DIED TODAY

VIDYA SHANKAR

SPLAT!

That must be the squirrel which had claimed
Our A/C outlet to make his home
Since the summer of 2010
When we had but hardly a week installed the air conditioner.

SPLAT? But that's so unlike the squirrely sounds The riotous rodent makes when, in the mornings He takes over our balcony, and our mango tree Making a game of all his frisking From tree to house to tree again Stamping his feet, swishing his tail, and going A persistent rat-tat-ttttttt Scratching at our wooden window frames As if he owned our house, not we.

SPLAT? But that's not the sound of his bark Arguing with the crows and the parrots that come To peck at the fruits of his mango tree.

Nor does he go SPLAT as he plays who-scampers-fastest With his fellow squirrel friends!

SPLAT! That sounded ominously dark!

Gingerly tip-toeing, I strain my curious eyes
Through the mesh door that we use
To divide our territory from his.
I can see him lying motionless just outside.
Maybe this too is one of his games, so I make a noise
Hoping it will send him scampering onto the balcony grill
Giving me one of his vexed expressions.
He doesn't.

He is gone
He who had, for over a decade
Made unavailable to us
The air conditioner we had saved up to buy
But couldn't ever use

He is gone now

Because he would be tucked in it every night.

He who, our friends and neighbours said
Ought to be dislodged or even killed
So we could our well-earned air conditioner use.
But we hadn't. We had allowed him to stay on
While we sweated it out through Chennai's heat
Learning how to strengthen ourselves from within
So we can live un-conditioned to the conditioner.

He was gone now And as my husband took his lifeless body away A tear slid down my cheek in farewell.

"So, you can use your air conditioner now."
No, not yet.
That was a life gone
And every death
Creates a vacuum that calls for respect.

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