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Parā

Evolution of an idea into the form of language

Due to the pandemic, publishing this edition of Parā was a unique challenge. Changing semester schedules, distance and the numerous other difficulties our team faced slowed its release, and for this we apologise. At the same time, despite it all, we pulled through, and I thank everyone involved in this project, for finding ways to connect as a community and create together.

-Neha Rino, Editor
How we miss our campus life...

Editorial

The last year has been marked by loss and despair—the likes of which most of us did not know how to experience. I’m just an editor, and an important skill when wielding language is to know when an experience is simply too vast and varied for one to fashion into words, and I acknowledge the same humbly. Even so, I am writing this to defend hope for the future, as much of a long shot as it may seem.

Lately, the answer to the question “Can it get any worse?” has each time been a resounding yes. And yet, I hold hope. Life at CMI has changed into something almost unrecognisable. CMI was many things for me, like walking to and from lectures together, or lingering at mess lunches to chat about everything and nothing. It was sitting wide-eyed at conferences one does not have the prerequisites for, and the sound of the elevator music in the new building. It was late night club meetings in LH1, and Tessellate and joking with the mess staff as one waits on a cheese maggi. It was smiling at a lady guard as we passed in the hostel, and ear-splitting CS matches in the complab and scribbling ideas on blackboards while huddled together in a discussion area. It was sharing coffee on the ledges of the hostel at dawn, and playing with the dogs, and waiting for a lotus in the little pond to bloom and so many other things. All of these were things that we were not prepared to miss so soon.

Our batch of students has grown to be one that is increasingly prone to nostalgia for the way things were. There are worries about how long this can go on, and of how much of this can be borne. And yet we feel most for those who joined us only last year. I do not know what it must be like, not to know what to miss, this past year. If you, reader, are one of our newer students, then I know you will find ways to form your own cherished experiences, but I do wish we could have passed down more joy, and tradition, to you. Things will be different when you get to CMI, but I trust that you will forge something wonderful when the time comes.

The past year has held more grief than any of us know what to do with. And yet I hold hope, because of discord server after discord server that popped up and was kept alive in the hopes of emulating the public spaces we lost. I hold hope because of how friendships have blossomed even over Zoom and because even in the smallest of batches a course can slowly bring people together through learning and discussion. I hold hope because online seminars did their best to be engaging and fun and even sometimes goofy to simulate the warmth of a lecture hall, and because we had the opportunity to sit together and listen to poets and writers speak about healing and change. I hold hope because of the night of wonderful music and camaraderie we got to share last December, and all the other ways I saw us reach out to each other this past year.

We at CMI are a community of learners, and learning and art go hand in hand in hand. I believe we can learn to care, and connect, and grow even in these times, because we have been all this while. A magazine such as ours is a collective labour of love. This is a year when anyone would be excused for not knowing how to find the time and energy to create art, and share it, and yet we did, and I am grateful to each and every person who contributed and helped. Prof Seshadri once said he wanted to see CMI as a centre of great scholarship of all disciplines one day, and I hope we eventually make him proud, through initiatives such as this.

I wish you, the reader, comfort in this time of loneliness. I wish I knew how to ensure we’d all get to see each other again. I hope you find art, whether here or elsewhere, that helps you hold, and make sense of, our present times. But for now, in this moment, we find ourselves connected still, and that is enough for me to hold hope.

Neha Rino
The club was formed in August '18 at Chennai Mathematical Institute. We are a group of literature enthusiasts. We meet together on a weekly basis, discuss different forms of literature, share our own literary creations and have lots of fun. We also try to organize writing workshops and events whenever we can. We are proud to present this magazine, a product of one of our brainstorming sessions. We hope you have as much fun reading it as we had putting it together for you all.
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The warm air fills the emptiness in my chest
And runs deep through the lungs to the heart.

Silence, like smoke
And smoke, like silence
Fills the room.
You open the window to let some out.

A cold gush of air,
The noise from your neighbor’s television,
The scrutiny of unfamiliar eyes,
All enter.

At the window pane sits a shot-glass half full of water.
We extinguish our first cigarette in unison.

Six and a half minutes
Is all it took
To conveniently bury in Oblivion -
The warning on the cigarette box,
Certain people,
The longing for the Lost Love,
Mistakes of the past,
And our incompleteness.
Before the sizzles in the shot-glass cease,
You light another cigarette.

You and I are different.
You'd smoke three while I am good with just one.
Perhaps because
You have more to remember,
More to forget,
More reasons to smoke.
Perhaps to burn,
The accumulation of centuries of toxicity,
Way more pernicious than some cancerous tar.

While I only smoke
To put my lips to Poison,
To play with fire,
And to spend some moments with you.

I stare at you thinking of these differences,
And of the eternities it takes
For the gestation of ash and smoke.
Six and a half minutes.
You light up the last one for today.
The smoke from the first cigarette
Had liberally poured out of the window into the night.
The smoke from the second
With its tenacious scent
Marked its territory on your pillowcase.
The one from the third
Veils your face in a kaleidoscopic cloud of gloom.

Perhaps these are the three ends to our story
Or maybe metaphors in an untranslated language.
Perhaps these are prophecies
Revealed only during the ritual of smoking,
Or mere mirages conjured by a mind on nicotine.

And while I reflect on the absurdity of these possibilities,

My fantasies,
Smeared in the ashes of your cigarettes,
Whirl in an ecstasy,
Dancing like the Lord of Cremation Grounds.
The Epiphany
Yajur Phullera

Something in the rain, in thunder
The measly worm wiggling about and under
Reminds us that we do not own
Even a single piece of this earthly throne
In the rising sun, the setting moon
As time moves from night to noon
Reminds us slyly
Of all things heavenly
In the moment pause
We must
And listen to the ocean’s gale
Remind ourselves that
Next semester we will fail.
Saji Varughese has been with the institute since 2007. He joined as the manager of the catering company that managed our catering.

When he joined, he looked no older than one of our students and we used to wonder if he will be able to manage a team of cooks and helpers let alone handle the students. We were surprised when he delivered more than our expectations. He has maintained the quality of the food all these years while adding new dishes according to the taste of students and staff members. Over the years he became professionally independent and started his own catering company.

Saji’s talents are not limited to managing a catering company. He has several other skills. Long before we saw automatic floor cleaning machines, he made one by attaching several brushes to a large discarded aluminium plate and re-fitting an old air conditioner’s motor to make this plate rotate. The plate was attached to a handle so it was easy to operate. This contraption was used to clean the kitchen and dining area for some time.

He has made several other things, including art work from waste material. Unfortunately, we don’t have photos as this was in the days before mobile cameras.

Saji has a way with flora and fauna as well. He actively participates in the greening efforts of the campus, sometimes even lugging saplings in trains and flights from his hometown in Kerala! Did you know that he has designed and installed a full fledged drip irrigation system, towards economical use of (recycled) water, for most parts of our campus?
In the summer of 2014 his cousin found a big bird’s egg while dismantling a construction crane. Saji fooled a pet pigeon into hatching the egg! An Indian Spotted Eagle chick was born on campus! Needless to say, the baby eagle bonded very well with Saji and was very friendly with him. It used to snap at everybody else who came near it and we could hear its beak close with a loud snapping sound if we went anywhere near it. It was clear that if our finger was within reach it would be cut into two pieces! In contrast, whenever Saji stroked its head it would behave like a puppy enjoying the attention.

The fellow was well fed and grew fast and flew away in about two months’ time.

In October 2019, an exhausted migrating Indian Pitta fell into our campus. The bird had suffered a broken lower beak during the fall. After consulting some experts, Saji fixed the beak by sticking plaster. He kept the bird in a room and mentored it for about 10 days. It regained its strength and flew away.

This story appeared in the online version of The Hindu on 10 January 2021, titled, ‘How to help an Indian Pitta in distress get back on to its wings’.

It was not the first time that an Indian Pitta fell from the sky into our campus. In 2017 another one had fallen but was lucky to not get injured. It was fed water by Saji and it flew away after a few hours of rest and recovery.

In the summer of 2020 Saji raised an abandoned Mynah chick. The baby Mynah used to fly around the campus looking at everyone suspiciously with an expression as if asking “what are you doing in my space?”. Sadly, someone pilfered the bird.

There are many more things left unsaid about Saji. Perhaps, another time!

- Rajeshwari Nair (Pictures by R. Nair and Mess staff members)
दूल्हों का बाज़ार

अध्यात्म आनंद

रविवार की सुबह, अपने मिश्रा जी नहा-घो खर कहीं निकलने को तैयार थे। बहुत देर झंडाज़ार करने के बाद जब
मिश्रा जी और उनकी बेटी मीना तैयार हो खर न आये तो झंडा से आवाज लगा कर उन्होंने बुलाया, "अजी सुनती हो! अरे जल्दी करो। बाज़ार बंद होने के बाद ही चलोगी क्या?"

असल में आज मिश्रा जी अपनी मीना के लिए योग्य वर ढूंढने शहर के प्रसिद्ध दूल्हा बाज़ार
जा रहे थे। बेटी की शादी की उप बीती जा रही थी और लड़का था की मिलने का नाम नहीं
ले रहा था। हालांकि मीना इंजीनियर थी, ये थोड़ी सार्वजनिक थी और मिश्रा जी ज्ञाता देख
देने के समर्थन में न थे और बस ये ही बात आदे आ रही थी। इस सिलसिले में अपने
अशुभ चितक रिश्तेदार से हार मान चुकने के बाद, और रस्तों जी के सुअर
पर उन्होंने 'दूल्हा बाज़ार' जाने का मन बनाया था। रस्तों जी की लड़की के
लिए भी यह लड़का उचित पूर्व पर वहीं से मिला था।

अब तक दोनों माँ-बेटी सम्पूर्ण साज-सज्जा और शृंगार करके
आ चुकी थी। तीनों जन अपने मंज़िल के लिए निकल पड़े।
जब वे बाज़ार के गेट पर पहुंचे तो पाया की उनके जैसे
सैकड़ो लोग पहले से पहुंच चुके थे। भीड़ ऐसी थी
की एक बार तो मिश्रा जी ने गब्बी से मिश्रा जी
का समझ कर किसी और स्त्री
के हाथ पकड़ लिए थे। वो तो भला
हो उस महिला का जिसने स्तिथि
को समझा, बनाना आज हमारे
भोले-बाले मिश्रा जी
बेवजह पिट-पीटा
कर घर लौटते।
खैर काफी मशक्कत के बाद पूरे एक हजार एक रुपये का रजिस्ट्रेशन करा कर बाज़ार के अंदर घुसे। अंदर पहुँचे, तो ओर्केस्ट्रा पर भरीसा न हुआ। सबको अनग अलग काउंटर पर सूत-सूत में खड़े लड़के। उनके मैनके-पैकेज़र भी साथ में ही खड़े थे। अनग अलग प्रकार के लड़के। कोई लंबा, कोई नाटा, तो कोई गोशा। सबके काउंटर पर लड़के का नाम, की-फंकिया और उसकी कीमत लिखी हुई थी। किसी पर पंद्रह लाख, किसी पर अट्ठारह लाख तो किसी पर पच्चीस और तीस। कुछ ने तो साथ में बड़े अक्षरों में लिखा था-नान-नेगोशिएबुल। इतना रेत देख कर मिश्रा जी के तो होश उड़ गए। किसी तरह मिश्रा जी के हिम्मत बढ़ाने के बाद, उन्होंने पास से गुजरते हुए एक बदने, जो खुद बोसाया सा फिर रहा था, से पूछा,

"भाई साहब, ये इंजीनियर लड़के कहाँ मिलेंगे?"

जवाब मिला,"आगे जा कर डॉक्टर डिपार्टमेंट से दायें।"

तीनों इंजीनियर डिपार्टमेंट पहुँचे। करीब पंद्रह काउंटर्स एक लाइन से लगे थे। सब के सब इंजीनियर। कोई बड़ी कंपनी में काम करता है, कोई बेच टापर, तो कोई अमरीका-रिटा। सबकी कीमत बीस से पच्चीस के करीब थी। काफी ढूँढने के बाद मिश्रा जी को अट्ठारह वाला एक दिखा और चल पड़े उधर।

"आइये आइये सर, आइये मैडम, आओ शेटी।", लड़के के पिता श्री ने आवाज़ दी,"सर मेरा बेटा इंजीनियर हूँ। आइये देख लीजिये।"

मिश्रा जी ने लड़के के पिताजी को नमस्ते कहा, फिर दोनों परिवारों के सदस्यों के बीच भावपूर्ण नमस्ते का आदान प्रदान हुआ।
मीना ने काउंटर पर नाम देखा-पुकेश। मीना की नजरें 
पुकेश से मिली। दोनों ने मुस्कुरा कर एक दूसरे का 
अभिवादन किया। पुकेश की उस ठोसी ज्यादा लग रही 
थी, शायद इसीलिए रेत कुछ कम था। इसी बीच 
मिश्रा अपना माँ-धर्म निभाते हुए लड़के को हर एंगल 
से जांचने की बजूरी पूरी करते लगी।

"क्या करते हो बेटा?", मिश्रा जी ने पुकेश से पूछा।

"जी, ऐनआईटी से इंजीनियरिंग करके अभी एक 
प्राइवेट कंपनी में जोब करता हूँ", हलके धीरे स्वर में जवाब 
आया।

"अभी, आठ लाख का पैकेज मिलता है। बाजी काफी खुश 
रहता है इस से। अपने कॉलेज में भी टॉप करता 
था। काफी होनहार है हमारा बेटा। खुश रहेगा आपकी 
बेटी को.", माता जी बीच में ठपक पड़ी।

"अच्छा है।", मिश्रा जी सिर्फ ये ही कह सके। फिर ठोड़ा 
रुक कर पिताश्री से उन्होंने पूछा."तो आपकी क्या हमांड 
है?"

"देखिये, हमारा बेटा इंजीनियर है और अच्छी नौकरी 
करता है। ये देख कर ज्यादा कुछ नहीं अद्वैत लाख दे 
दीजियेगा।"

"अद्वैत लाख", मिश्रा जी सोच में पड़ गए। इतना तो 
उनका बजट ही न था।
"हम दस से ज्यादा न कर पाएंगे।", मिश्रा जी ने साफ किया।

"मात्र दस। दस ही कर सकते हैं तो कोई बैंक वाला खोजिए। इंजीनियर क्यों खोज रहे हैं? इंजीनियर का ये ही रेट है।", झुंझला कर पिताश्री ने कहा। उनके मोटे बोल गायब हो चुके थे।

इस कदर हुई बेड़ाज़ौँ ती से बिखर चुके मिश्रा जी ने खुद को समेटते हुए, और अपनी भी अकड़ दिखाते हुए, कहा,"हाँ हाँ, छूट लेंगे। आपसे भी अच्छा।"

यहाँ भी ढील न हो पायी। बात बनने से पहले ही फिर से बिखर चुकी थी। मिश्रा जी भी समझ चुके थे की यहाँ बात नहीं बनने वाली थी और उन्हें यहाँ से भी खाली हाथ ही लौटना था। अबतक वो भी थक चुके थे लेकिन पीछे हटने को तेहर न थे। अब इस बाज़ार में और समय न व्यर्थ करने मन बना कर, अपना सा पुँह बना कर उन्होंने मिश्राइन और मीना को घर चलने को कहा।

'दूल्हा बाज़ार' मिश्रा जी के लिए दूबाते को तिनके का सहारा था लेकिन तिनके में भी घेर थामीना का भी ढूँढ़ चेहरे से साफ झलक रहा था। तब मिश्रा जी ने हुज़र रुपये छूटने का दर्द दबा कर मीना को दिलासा देते हुए कहा,

"झलो चेदा, घर चल कर प्लिपकार्ड पर छूटें। एथ ऑफ़ सीज़न 'सेल' में थोड़ा डिस्कांट भी मिल जायेगा।"
Pinch of Salt
Sriram Akella

No salt. Yet again.
“Did I forget?” she asked as I reached for the table salt.
With salt the curry tasted just fine. If only I could cook for myself.
The rice didn’t cook enough. It has to be crisp to go with brinjal, but I’m not complaining.

Maybe moving here was a mistake, Seshu warned me.
Her chin rested on her chest as she closed her eyes. She looked beautiful. The sunlight from the window caressed half her face, the side with the mole. It was tiny when we married, but it grew with time. Her lips parted as she breathed. Her silver hair danced to the breeze.

How does one swallow gongura chutney without oil? Impossible. How does Seshu do it? “Oil is bad for your heart” he’d say. There was no oil on the table.

I screamed in pain as I tried to rise and woke her.
“Hmm?” she asked and looked at my plate. Nodding to herself she went into the kitchen. Moving is painful for her too. If only I could get it myself. She was back with the oil. She put it on the table and stared at the wall.

The chutney tasted just fine. Venkata Rao always took away leftovers when he visited for lunch. “For my wife and sons,” he’d say with a grin scooping out the last morsel. How long has it been? Twenty years? I’ve lost track.

“How is Venkata Rao these days?” I asked.
“He died in a fire accident.”
“When? And what about his wife and children?”
“He never married,” she said after a pause. There were no drumsticks in the rasam.
“Where are the drumsticks?”
“Ohh. I forgot.”
“You’re disoriented these days.”
It wasn’t like this before. “Leave dad and open a restaurant,” Seshu’d say. As a joke of course. She’d smile and serve him more food. And then he fell in love, with a Bengali girl. All his compliments are now in English. We stayed with them in London for a while but it got cold.

“Why do they not want children?” she asked.

I sighed.

“It’s their choice. You can’t do anything about it.”

“Who’ll look after them?”

“Nobody.”

“Is it so wrong to want to hold my grandchild?”

“No.”

“Then why?”

I tried to pat her on the shoulder but the pain shot up my leg and I gave up. She was silent and stared at the wall. My leg was throbbing. Moving was a mistake. We should’ve stayed in Hyderabad. Seshu warned me. “Don’t. What’s wrong here?” he’d ask. “It gets lonely,” I’d say. “Babu Uncle and Padma Auntie want you to babysit their kid. That’s why they’ve invited you. Do you think Auntie will let Ammuma stay with you? No chance.” What was I even thinking? I was selfish. I did not consider her feelings. How would she feel living next to Padma? I never asked.

“Why does Padma do it?” she asked. “Not take a bath. Hide the vegetables and not cook. Won’t let mother stay with us. She even beats the child. I hear his screams from the kitchen.”

I remained silent. Yet again.

“Have you heard her curse? You wouldn’t believe she was a Brahmin. And her brother. Number one useless person in the world. Studied Law but can’t write a draft, how shameful!”

“Please stop,” I said with a sigh. “Who tells you these?”

“Babu.”

I washed my hands in my plate and waited for her to take it away.

“And the other day she refused to cook maggi for the child. She won’t even serve aavakaaya. ‘I made dosa for you. Either eat or die.’ Her useless dosas. Do you know how much salt she puts in them?”

“Who tells you these?”

“Mother.”

I shook my head and looked at my leg. If only I could go wash my plate.

“Do you hear that scream?” she asked.

Her eyes shot up and her back straightened. The drone of the ceiling fan was all I heard.

“She’s beating him again.”

“Lalli, please stop. You’re hallucinating.”

“How can you not hear those screams? You’re deaf.”

I shrugged.

“I’ll go check,” she said and left.

An overwhelming sadness came over me as I watched her go. She put on her slippers and closed the door with a thud. Her footsteps echoed in the corridor, and faded. Is this salt? It tastes bitter.

Glossary

- **Gongura**: A plant grown for its edible leaves. These leaves are used in making pachadi (chutney) which forms an essential part of Andhra cuisine. It has a distinctive sour taste and is usually spicy.
- **Rasam**: Rasam or chaaru (in Telugu) is a South Indian soup usually eaten with rice.
- **Ammuma**: Maternal grandmother.
- **Aavakaaya**: Indian pickle. “South Indians are known to have a deep attachment to these spicy pickles” - Wikipedia.
But it doesn't mean that if you aren't at the top, you don't have talent.
Our beloved Founder-Director, Prof. C S Seshadri was a man of many parts. A colossus among mathematicians, he was also well versed in classical music, apart from being a voracious reader and scholar in many disciplines including literature, history and philosophy. A recipient of many prestigious awards including the Padmabhushan, Fellow of the Royal society and the SSB prize, Prof Seshadri has been visiting Professor at many celebrated universities including Harvard, Princeton and Paris, Liverpool, Rome, Warwick, UCLA Los Angeles, to name a few. Above all he was a man of gentle words, totally unassuming and always happy to spare a moment for a student. Words cannot express what we at CMI and the world at large have lost with his passing. He is missed dearly, and we shall do our best to honour his memory.

We were a team of three students from the literature club (Paul, Shailender and Ashwin) who went to interview him. He received us warmly and expressed his joy with regard to the activities of the literature club, especially the book discussions. At the end of the interview, he asked us several questions to get our feedback as students on the institute, which are also included here.
Was there any factor in your childhood that played an important role in you cultivating an interest in Mathematics? Could you please talk us through your childhood?

CSS: I think I was in Std.7 when one of my relatives (father’s sister’s husband) who was staying in our ancestral house asked me some basic questions in Mathematics which I could answer fairly well. He had passed Chemistry Hons and was doing research at IISc Bangalore for a year or two in 1930. We talked about Chemistry too but I realised I did not show any particular academic interest in Chemistry whereas I enjoyed discussing intricate problems in Mathematics and could answer many questions he posed in Mathematics. This showed that I had some talent in Mathematics.

I went to Loyola College in Chennai and it was a very good institution for Mathematics. In those days, there was an intermediate level after which there was a three years Hons degree. The college held a tough exam and they had a special paper. I took it and joined the Hons degree. My father and my teachers, particularly S Narayanan, were very encouraging. Fr. Racine, who was educated in Paris and was a student of a great mathematician, Élie Cartan, introduced me to a lot of Mathematics.

Was it not a trend during that time to push smart students into engineering or a more lucrative field?

CSS: The IITs were established only in 1961, and that is almost a decade after I started pursuing Math Hons. There were good engineering colleges and I qualified for admission after taking an engineering college entrance exam, but didn’t take an admission. I was clear I wanted to pursue Mathematics.

Since when were you sure you wanted to become a mathematician?

CSS: Even before the intermediate level, I had made a decision to pursue Mathematics, and it worked that way. With time the will to do work in Mathematics became even stronger. After taking the Hons degree I was at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR). That was in 1953. I joined as a research student and then held positions of Professor and Senior Professor, but I felt I wasn’t cut out for administration.

Slightly shifting gears here, we want to understand what your inspiration was behind starting an institute like CMI.

CSS: The starting of the institute was not a deliberate move. In last few years of my stay at Tata institute, I realised that there were very few institutes devoted purely to research. Even the research institutes in Paris like the Marie Curie Institute were a part of the university. At that time Tata Institute was the best in Mathematics.

From 1982 to 1983, I was in the US. For some personal
reasons I had to come to Madras for sometime. This was the time when Alladi Ramakrishnan had retired from the Institute of Mathematical Sciences (IMSc), Chennai. I joined IMSc as senior professor in which capacity I continued from 1984 to 1989.

SPIC had started a Science Foundation and Dr. S. Parthasarathy (who was heading one of the R&D Divisions) whom I knew because of our common musical interests, offered me to set up a School of Mathematics under invitation from Mr. A.C. Muthiah (then Chairman of SPIC).

The School of Mathematics of the SPIC Science Foundation functioned purely as a research institute. I was Dean of the SPIC School of Mathematics from 1989. We wanted to collect good research problems and some good faculty members and then look for ambitious students.

After nine years, we felt we should combine both research and teaching at the Institute. We then decided to start an undergraduate/postgraduate programmes in Mathematics and Computer Science. So in 1998 we started the CMI.

Fortunately in CMI we get very good undergraduate students. Good students in most parts of India seem to know this place. I believe that an institute gains prestige by the quality of teachers. We had to gradually build up the institute. I had these ideas but I never thought that I would have the capacity to do something like this, it just happened.

You had a long and distinguished career in research. What advice would you like to give to the budding researchers at CMI?

CSS: First of all one must be talented and also have the grit, because it is not like solving a problem or two in an exam. It’s a long term commitment. One cannot expect immediate results. One must have love for the subject and also the capacity, because research in algebraic geometry is different, differential equations is different.

It calls for dedication, really. One should also remember that there are no small or big problems.

Also a lot of strength is required to pursue Mathematics in the sense that even if you do good research there are people better than you, you should not have any complex or feel discouraged when you see the work of someone very brilliant. One must have self confidence, identify what you are good in and pursue it.

Usually one needs to also work hard. Of course this doesn’t mean that one works all the time. One has to look inward and know if he has the necessary talent. If you get good marks here, it can be an indicator of talent, because the exams aren’t routine. But it doesn’t mean that if you aren’t at the top, you don’t have talent.

As a matter of fact Ramanujan failed his exams and C.P Ramanujam, who is one of the finest mathematicians the Tata
Institute has produced, got a second class. Sometimes a person who stands first at the Tata Institute doesn’t distinguish himself in research. That is not to say that people who did well in exams didn’t do well at research, people like Harish-Chandra excelled at exams too.

So, you see in an exam, you test certain capacities which are probably necessary. Necessary, but I won’t say sufficient, certainly not sufficient. In the case of an exam you study, write and go home. But what you do in research is different, there is a whole new horizon. There are many capacities that come into play. You have to understand concepts, do some exercises, work with computation, imagination... all these factors come into play... and then there is the question of luck. In any case luck comes only when one works!

Even in CMI some are doing very well though they have not been at the top. Most importantly you should like the subject. There is no point in pursuing it if you don’t love the subject.

We see there are two types of mathematicians so to speak: the generalists who work in various fields throughout their mathematical careers, like Gauss, Hilbert, or recently someone like Terence Tao. And others who choose to specialize and work in a limited area of mathematics. Do you see any merit in one approach over the other, do you see any relation between these two approaches?

CSS: People don’t deliberately do this. They don’t tell themselves, “I want to do so many things”. This is not like learning something and passing, you have to have ideas. Therefore, those are all just for conversation. Selberg, for instance, is a great mathematician, of course. His mathematics is quite vast, but he has not worked in probability theory or algebraic geometry though he has made good use of it. If you make one very good theorem, it is for the others to say whether you are versatile. We cannot argue if Serre or Selberg or Gauss is the greatest mathematician. What nonsense!

You see, first of all, there are two different periods. And, along with Gauss there were other great mathematicians. Gauss is called the greatest afterwards, but that is for historians and others to say. Why should we bother about that?

Of course institution politics is prevalent. It is possible someone has done an outstanding work, but doesn’t receive an award. George Sudarshan felt that he should have got the Nobel prize.

Sometimes people are forgotten and then after 20 or 30 years their work gets recognized. There was a Chinese mathematician who made a breakthrough in the twin prime conjecture after much effort.

There are people who say “Oh you are not working on an important subject, number theory or algebraic geometry is
the central subject." How can one say that? Mathematics has a certain unity that is surprising, and over time certain areas merge together.

If someone makes a breakthrough in his subject, it isn’t good to say that the mathematics involved is easy! The peer group knows, the peer group has struggled and it doesn’t make sense for someone from outside to make remarks.

In most creative fields one sees people making nasty comments and I feel that overall mathematicians are fairly better. Of course there is a certain inherent competitiveness. You try proving a theorem, but then someone comes along and suddenly proves the result, you feel bad.

If you are familiar with music, you will see that musicians are capable of making biting criticism on each other. In comparison Mathematicians are more gentlemanly I feel. S.R.S. Varadhan got the Abel prize and the general public didn’t really bother about him as opposed to the recognition Amartya Sen received when he won the Nobel Prize. Varadhan did a lot of good work and he was the 3rd or 4th person to win the prize, but the general public didn’t register the win. But that is the way things are!

CSS: Haha, for the simple reason that I am an algebraic geometer!!

Also because the Tata Institute produced some really top-class work in the field of moduli of vector bundles. It was sort of a breakthrough in the subject. There were two or three people working on that. When I came here I started lecturing on that. Also Balaji, who was among the first people here also works on algebraic geometry and slowly we built a team around that.

Algebraic Geometry and Commutative Algebra are very close. There are many links between algebraic geometry and number theory. That is why I wanted to have number theory because there are many exciting things happening there.

You have been at CMI for so long. What makes you happy about what CMI has achieved and what more do you think we can do as an Institution?

CSS: CMI is a very good place, considering the limitations we
started with. Of course the contribution is good and the results are being proved, but I would like the academic contributions of the people to be higher. In my opinion that is THE thing that should happen. I’m not saying we should ignore the other things, we should have an institution, we should have people to teach. See if you go to Harvard, one would want to go to study with Tate or Mumford. Similarly people should come here not only because we have a good undergraduate program but because these people are here, they are teaching here. There are such people but I feel that the proportion should be more. The contributions should be more.

From your question what I understand is what More? I would expect the academic standing should be very high, extremely high. It should be one of the best institutes, It should be like the Tata institute. The Tata institute is still the best place. Earlier we did not have much money. But now we are optimistic about that. There were quite a few who wanted to come here. Manindra Agarwal was here for two or three years.

And then another thing is that a great institute, a great university can’t be for one subject. A great university has multiple streams like Literature, Biology, Mathematics etc and should be throbbing with outstanding talent and that is still to happen. But on the other hand, we have done well. In teaching, it is an outstanding success. It has lent the institution a level of stability. Many people now know this institute. Therefore to answer your question Greater Academic excellence and a diversity of outstanding people!. It’s my dream..

There’s also a sociological reason. For the best students going abroad has become the standard. Nowadays, people are going abroad - I am not blaming them, I would not ask people to sacrifice quality and study in India for patriotic reasons. They should want to come naturally, due to the institute’s merit, otherwise it will not be successful. An institute of mathematics, that is an institute of great learning, with scholars of great merit in many fields, known for its quality of teaching, and academic output at the international stage, that is what is to be achieved. We have made some good beginnings, and hopefully we will see more, the rest is for the long term.

**Someone who is an important figure of Indian mathematical history, at least in recent times, D D Kosambi, you had worked with him? He was certainly a man of many interests, what is your opinion on his work?**

**CSS:** He used to come to TIFR from Pune everyday, by the Deccan Queen, for two or three years. For many of us, Kosambi did not have any influence, he didn’t have good relations with many. There is a tendency to write him off, but let me share briefly what I wrote: The example of Kosambi shows me how limited and narrow institutions can be. Institutions are necessary, but we need a broad base of intellectuals, who may not traditionally fit in but their
scholarship is needed. Kosambi was not the proper person for TIFR, he did research in differential geometry, wrote a letter to Elie Cartan, (something that is rarely mentioned about him) and he was an outstanding man. He knew a lot of mathematics, but still had no influence on the main school of mathematics at TIFR.

In my opinion it is a pity, and shows the nature of Indians, or just institutes, and how narrow their focus can be. I may differ from him very much, but in an academic place one should not need to agree on all political ideas, but it should be a place where ideas can flow freely. After a while I felt very sorry, he was out of the ordinary, and he was an intellectual. A great university in India should have welcomed him.

After retirement your schedule must have changed, what is your routine now?

CSS: Certainly my mathematical activity has reduced. Until about ten years ago I was working together with Balaji. Then I fell sick, I was frequently in the hospital. When I am alright, I plan to devote myself to teaching or something. Currently what I do is I attend all the lectures, and discuss mathematics, but I am currently not seriously trying to solve a problem, instead if I have an idea I usually discuss it with Balaji.

GH Hardy used to say that he wants mathematics to be useless and of no practical purpose. What are your views on pure mathematics in general?

CSS: Who said this?

Hardy.

CSS: (Laughs) See, number theory used to be considered most unpolluted, but these days with technology even number theory is applied. Hardy was a passionate believer in this, but my opinion is that if one does a useless activity no society will give you anything.

I will only slightly change the subject, not digressing, but sociologically if you take the history of support for sciences, say after Renaissance the technology improved, therefore Napoleon’s Ecole Polytechnique was set up, thereafter warfare changed, the quality of life improved. Technology cannot be separated from the development of science. The Laplacian may have been viewed as pure mathematics but technology and the advancement of progress needed the application of science. If a field had been totally useless, I don’t think a society would welcome it.

I find a sort of contradiction, that the very advancement of science, the connections to science, the progress in medicine, happens along with advancements in armaments. You may say “No, no.. let us not do warfare”, but that will not work, those outside your field will apply your work. Of course when the Renaissance came I will not say the passion or support for science was purely utilitarian, but the pursuit of what you call Pure Science totally unrelated to technology would not have
happened in the same way otherwise.

Even in Indian mathematics, the Kerala school etc, their purpose was to observe the correct rituals etc. Of course they also did mathematics, but either way what this leads to is philosophical questions, and Hardy here was not being philosophical.

We know that you are a great lover of music, so what is your opinion of today’s music? How familiar are you with today’s popular music?

CSS: I am a lover of Carnatic music, where I have some competence also. Popular music or today’s Indian film music, which is different from say heavy metal, so would this be a matter of genre?

I also like the great old film songs of Manna Dey, and Kishore Kumar. It was a wonderful period. RD Burman, SD Burman, fantastic. There is something hypnotic about the sound, dhvani in Sanskrit, not sound as in noise. I love the magic of sound itself. I also used to listen to Bach’s cello Suites.

What is your opinion on Western and Carnatic music?

CSS: I have not heard enough to comment, but they’re all brilliant people. Zakir Hussain is brilliant, but a lot of fusion is very uninteresting. The question is to compose something that truly integrates the music, not just about playing in certain ways. There is a mathematician, a Carnatic violinist who is now producing different music, inspired by Grothendieck and so on. India has a great music tradition, apart from polyphonic playing. But say, Jazz is an example, Louis Armstrong, he does not a priori have a pleasant voice, but I like the way he sings.

Generally speaking, I’ve not been able to listen to taped music often. I like to go to concerts and listen, or sing, but of course now things are often available online.

Have you heard T M Krishna? He sings beautifully, but in Carnatic, are you all comfortable with it? When it comes to technique, instrumentalists and vocalists gel quite well, while listeners may have trouble understanding.

Do you think music has played an important part in your life and career, or to widen your horizon?

CSS: It is difficult to answer that, I took to music as I come from a musical, or let us say a music-appreciating family. I only learnt music formally much later, at 25 years or so. For me, it is just one of those things that happened... With music, as well as mathematics, I found it and devoted time to it. Probably, I have wasted some time trying to do both. Trying to pursue two great things, such as mathematics and music, it is very difficult.

What I have found is, with music, you sing for yourself, and in
mathematics you take a problem and think about it yourself, so in that way I believe the process is similar. Whether it affected anything, I do not know. My wife, who is now no more, was a great singer, much more talented than I am, but to have your husband singing and doing mathematics all the time, it might have affected the home life. (Laughs)

Many fear mathematics, or believe they are too old to understand it anymore. Do you believe there is any age at which the layman should give up on trying to learn mathematics?

CSS: I believe there is some truth in the fact that Mathematics is made unnecessarily difficult. Teachers can be very rigid, and many students are very afraid, and unable to make a real effort. Our pedagogical system, not just in India but everywhere, has this issue of creating people who are scared of Mathematics. On the other hand nowadays many children learn much unnecessary Mathematics, and too fast, and it only spoils their understanding. There are big books taught in school, about groups and differential Mathematics, and I am not sure what the objective is.

We do not try to make the effort necessary to make Mathematics understandable. Why do we have people who when encountering a problem, do not know whether to add or multiply? These are taught in elementary school. Children who are taught co prime numbers are very young and these concepts may simply be too much for them. Mathematics should be taught at a level simple enough not to intimidate learners. There is no good answer here.

But theoretically, yes one can learn Mathematics at any age. The layman would not start at thirty to try to do research, but concrete calculation, some level of abstraction, can still probably be developed at later ages. TIFR had an Homi Bhabha Science Education Centre, perhaps this question can be answered better by the cognitive scientists they have there.

Thank you sir for your time. It was our privilege talking to you. That was the last question of our interview.

CSS: I just want to ask you, how do you feel about the institute? Do you find it academically challenging? Critical remarks, positive and negative are allowed.
It is academically challenging, there is a good amount of rigour. One good thing is professors are approachable academically, and supportive, and one can sit in any lectures they want to. There are not too many hierarchies.

**CSS:** You might find abroad, mathematicians don’t wear ties, even if physicist or other academics do. Not to say that means they are always approachable but I believe there is some difference.

I feel professors are also very humble and simple, which is nice.

**CSS:** Any critical remarks?

**CSS:** Sometimes the courses get very skewed during a semester to a bias, say this time they’re all close to combinatorics rather than differential geometry.

**CSS:** I think that is one of those things that happens. May be, combinatorics might be preferred because of the different views computer scientists have of mathematics. But some of the combinatorics can also be very mathematical though. In any given institute, there will be natural emphasis placed sometimes on certain subjects depending on the people.

Do you think any courses are too fast paced or difficult?

No, if anything a lot of courses are being simplified, like say our Algebra I course last semester.

**CSS:** Computer science has also been very useful in recruiting many bright mathematical minds. Quite a number of people are peer pressured into not joining an institute just for pure mathematics. Parents are less likely to ask questions if one can mention computer science during admissions.

Are people discouraged by the high level of mathematics here?

**Some students do face such a problem, not sure how many exactly but a few.**

**CSS:** What about a three year degree versus a four year?

**CSS:** Usually a fourth year is used for a project, so the course is quite complete even without a fourth year, as at graduation we do end up learning the same amount. And if an individual needs longer......

**CSS:** ...We take care of that! We are flexible. In any institute, an artificially high standard is not worth it. Even one or two people are enough. After passing out we want them to have a high level of Mathematics, whether they study computer science or physics, which is quite special of CMI.
But do the majority welcome the high level of mathematics taught here?

**I think many people appreciate the abstraction introduced here, and the rest do wrap their head around it with time.**

**CSS: I ask mainly to see whether even say ten students cannot follow, that would be a problem, it would be a rather huge number. In that case, I would not say it would be the fault of the student, but of what I would call an artificially high standard.**

**I do not think that is the case.**

**CSS: I am very glad, I was concerned that having so many people, a larger number may have trouble, and we might have to simplify courses, dilute the institute. Even if it takes three or four years, I am glad they come out bright and learn quite a lot of mathematics and computer science, and to my surprise, even literature! I am happy to have answered your questions!**
Sundari Seshadri, who was extremely talented but managed to “hide her light under a bushel”

Prof. R Sridharan

Dedicated to the fond memory of Sundari Seshadri, who was extremely talented but managed to “hide her light under a bushel”
“What a lot of books!” she screamed. “And have you really read them all, Monsieur Bonnard?”

“Alas, I have,” I replied, “and that is just the reason that I do not know any thing; for there is not a single one of these books which does not contradict some other book; so that by the time one has read them all, one does not know what to think about anything. That is just my condition, Madame.”

— Anatole France, *The crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*

These self accusatory words of the learned old man created by Anatole France can well apply to me today, since I, like Sylvestre Bonnard and his library, have my own pile of old books with which I share the same relation. The following write up is a consequence of my reading mostly books of generations dead and gone, but for very few exceptions like the one published in 1974 by Robert Pirsig, with the curious title “*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values*”. Indeed this book, which I am going to discuss a bit to begin with, is somewhat of an enigma to me. Curiously enough, it has been a “Best Seller” in the U.S. But then perhaps it is not so curious after all, since strange and unfathomable are the moods of the reading public.

I possess two copies of this book, which I must confess is purely by chance, for neither of them is due to my buying them by intention. Instead the books belonged to two different people but have ended up with me finally. The first copy that I have is thanks to a nephew of mine who lives in the U.S, who had come to visit me a few years ago. He had brought with him this book (obviously for his reading), but when he left, forgot to take it back with him. The second copy which I possess, a more recent edition, is due to the efforts of an ever kind and wonderful friend of mine Shyam, who, when he came to know that the first copy was stuck along with thousands of other old books in a house of mine in Pondicherry, ordered it from the U.S., and sent it to me, since he knew that I wished to re-read parts of the book. This second copy appears to me, more rambling than the earlier version!

I realise that I have been very silent so far about what the present article is going to be about and instead have written about this particular book. I think therefore that it is better to explain at least what this book is supposed to deal with and how it is in some sense relevant to the title of this present article of mine. To do this, I should start by referring to another article in Wikipedia titled “Pirsig’s Metaphysics of Quality”, which claims that the book of Pirsig mentioned above discusses the puzzling word “Quality” from the point of view of Metaphysics. Anyone who genuinely wishes to
have a serious metaphysical interpretation of this word, would in my opinion, never succeed in his quest by reading this book of Pirsig, which drops in many esoteric names like Advaita and Dvaita of India (the author perhaps decided that Vishishtadhvaita could be safely ignored in his impressive list of the things he cares to mention from Hindu philosophy!). Pirsig includes of course Zen’s thoughts and and throws in here and there an impressive list of mathematical concepts beginning with Euclid’s fifth postulate before moving on to non-Euclidean Geometry, Poincare’s study of Fuchsian groups and indeed many more intellectual, impressive, technically dazzling items, but finally leaves the reader (or at least me) bewildered but not any the wiser. Pirsig perhaps decided to prove through this book, to the reading public, or at least convince himself and others who would take the immense effort to be convinced by reading his book, that the notion of “Quality” does not admit a metaphysical definition!

We, the bewildered people of the present, are in an unfortunate situation where we are coerced to believe through a plethora of advertisements that every other perfume or soap to start off a long list, is of the quality of the highest order, and in this sense, my sympathies are entirely with Pirsig (who incidentally died in 1988). I, however, have taken the trouble to talk briefly about his book to begin with, since it grapples with a metaphysically undefinable esoteric concept “Quality”. To be truthful, this word, which the common man of this crass world meets with every day in many advertisements of various products, has really no intrinsic meaning, metaphysical or otherwise.

Having indulged in such a long prelude, I believe it is indeed time now to come to the precise aim of this article. My idea, which is quite modest and from an entirely different point of view, is to discuss the remarkable achievements of two different ‘non-modern’ books which go quite near to defining quality (or perfection) of the highest order through wonderful examples: namely the aims of a couple of shoemakers of the olden times, which incidentally also show how hard (indeed nearly impossible) it is to reach professional excellence. At any rate, these unremembered, yet remarkable workmen struggle to do their best and try to climb to the summit of a very steep, and probably unreachable high mountain peak, namely perfection in their professions. This naturally involves untold misery and sacrifice and yet they accept stoically however, all the associated hardships and heart breaks. Let us for a moment compare this with the typical attitude of our modern world in which, for example, scientists and technocrats are extolled, when they help to produce deadly weapons (using of course the best technology), like nuclear bombs and other destructive devices. They are ever
willing to deliver more and more efficiently destructive weapons and test their efficacy by butchering chunks of lives of humans and others.

The two books that I would like to discuss were both penned by famous and prolific authors who were born in the nineteenth century and who died in the twentieth and talk with the greatest respect and admiration of some shoemakers of the past. They are, in the order in which I read them, 1. “Studies and Essays” by J. Galsworthy, more specifically in the essay titled “Quality” in a book consisting of some of his essays, and 2. “Good Morning, Good People”, the third and the final volume of the autobiography of Ernest Raymond. I hope that the persons who would care to read my article would most probably be familiar with the names of these authors. I do not want to say much about them except that J. Galsworthy (1867-1933) was a very well known British author, famous for instance for his “The Forsyte Saga”, who had great empathy with the working class. He got the Nobel prize in 1932 for Literature. Ernest Raymond (1888-1974) who was British as well, was a very popular, talented and prolific writer and among other things, wrote biographies of well known literary figures, and also many novels; One of his very popular novels titled “We the Accused” was incidentally made into a television movie.

I would first like to take up the essay titled “Quality” by Galsworthy, which turns out to be the first one in a book of some collected essays which I happened to pick up from a road side book seller in Flora Fountain, Bombay, a long number of years ago. It was my favourite way of spending time back then, every holiday evening, to indulge myself in hunting for old books. I would bargain for the price and finally end up buying such very lovely old volumes (I used to love the very smell of them) during my (now no more, alas!) Bombay days. Of course this book is now available on the Internet! Anyway, without wasting much more time, I shall describe to you the gist of the essay which talks about the existence and dissolution of an establishment of two shoemaking brothers in a small by-lane in West End, London. This sincere and honest establishment was owned by two German brothers who were devoted (in the truest sense) to their profession and had the name board carrying simply “Gessler Brothers” and did not for instance advertise how good they were or that they made foot wear for the Royal family or the like; it was simply a very simple non-boasting establishment which made foot wear of the very best quality. The description of the type of perfection they aimed at in their profession, as described by Galsworthy in his article touches the reader’s heart.

The article gives various instances to show the
devotion that the brothers had for their profession. For instance, when a particular pair of shoes made by the older one for the author ends up hurting him and the author reports it to him, the shoe maker is indeed shocked and pained by the lack of perfection in the work which has resulted. He in fact explains to the author that what has gone wrong was with the leather used and is more than ready to make a perfect new pair for no cost! It is very clear, reading the article that the author really was convinced that the two brothers were indeed exceptional in their work, in their devotion to perfection and in their work execution. He has an awe and respect for them and experiences great pleasure whenever he goes to their shop and indeed visits their shop very often to buy shoes. And then, one day he learns painfully about the death of the elder brother, and the author realises that this loss has affected the other, younger brother very much, who looks suddenly older and balder. The surviving brother has had to share a part of his shop with some other cobbler, and the new shop which of course looks modern and fashionable now has a name plate advertising that it has the distinction of supplying boots for the Royal family! The author feels really sad for the old man and to compensate, orders boots on a large scale from him. After this, the next and the last time he goes there is out of anxiety, since he receives all the ordered boots, but along with them a bill for the making them (which had not been their usual practice) rather too soon.

Such a thing had never happened before! He of course immediately first rushes to the establishment for making his payment, but is genuinely anxious to know about the old cobbler’s health; having known the old man, since it was not in keeping with him to send bills along with the shoes! When he goes into the shop, he finds the old man absent and the two establishments merged into a single one. When the author enquires out of anxiety about Mr. Gessler (the old shoemaker), the new man who is in-charge tells him that Mr. Gessler was no more. The new owner is of course very ingratiating and ready to make any kind of boots that the author wishes for. But the author insists on knowing first and foremost how Mr. Gessler died, saying that after all, he has received boots that he had ordered with Mr. Gessler only a week back whereas normally it should have taken a longer time to finish the work. Now to end the narrative, I quote the author himself as I am afraid I cannot do any better!

“Slow starvation, the doctor called it! You see he went to work in such a way! Would keep the shop on; wouldn’t have a soul touch his boots except himself. When he got an order, it took him such a time. People won’t wait. He
lost every customer. And there he'd sit goin' on and on - I will say that for him, not a man in London made a better boot! But look at the competition! He never advertised! Would 'ave the best leather, too, and do it all 'imself. Well, there it is. What could you expect with his ideas?”

“But starvation - !”

“That may be a bit flowery, as the sayin’ is - but I know myself he was sittin’ over his boots day and night, to the very last. You see, I used to watch him. Never gave ‘imself time to eat; never had a penny in the house. All went for rent and leather. How he lived so long I don’t know. He regularlet his fire go out. He was a character. But he made good boots.”

“Yes”, I said, “he made good boots”.

And I turned away and went out quickly, for I did not want the youth to know that I could hardly see.

— J. Galsworthy, Quality

I read this essay once several years ago and I now keep re-reading it quite often. Whenever I see a cobbler in the street busy with some foot wear, I remember this essay and feel really that it is after all worth living in this world, if only to see such simple, and very capable people doing their work with single minded devotion despite perhaps not earning enough to make their living...

Before going to the next item, I must share with you a very beautiful anecdote related to this essay of Galsworthy. When I was working at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, several years ago, I was once at The University of Chandigarh for some mathematical work and happened to meet one of my old colleagues and indeed a dear friend, V.C. Nanda, who was working at the University. Naturally, I visited his house and as was our usual custom, we started talking about our past memories. Suddenly, during our conversation, Nanda asked me whether I had ever read a beautiful essay of Galsworthy which he had read during his school days. You can certainly guess what essay that was he was referring to; it was “Quality”. I was so happy that he has had the pleasure of reading this essay in school, which to me was a pleasant surprise and we discussed how touched we both felt when we read this wonderful article of Galsworthy. I hope Nanda remembers this talk with me!

Now I must discuss how the author Ernest Raymond enters the picture. It happened, that in

1 I was very shocked to hear that he passed away sometime in 2018, when I was contemplating sending him a copy of this manuscript.
one of my usual jaunts at Flora Fountain in Bombay to browse through old books of the pavement book sellers, I picked up a book by him, with a beautiful title “Literature through Life” which seemed to me to offer a very promising reading on English literature. I loved reading it and indeed have re-read it many times (the book now lies hidden from me among my collection of books at Pondicherry and I only hope I will have the opportunity to read it again once more!). This buying led to my ‘discovery’ of Ernest Raymond and indeed I now have several books by him in my collection. Incidentally, one of these books is on a person for whom I have great veneration and admiration - St. Francis of Assisi. It is a beautiful book titled “In the steps of St. Francis”. I came to know a little later that Ernest Raymond had a third volume of his autobiography titled “Good morning, Good People - An Autobiography, Past and Present”, published first in 1970 by Cassel and Company. I, who was still working at that time at the T.I.F.R, requested a good friend and colleague of mine working at the Bombay University to borrow a copy of it for me from its library, if it was available. He was indeed very kind and brought for my reading, a copy of it, borrowing, I think either from the “British Council Library” or from the “Bombay University Library”. I liked this book very much and noted that in this book St. Francis was one of the central figures. Enthusiastic as ever to read anything about the remarkable St. Francis and avaricious as ever about owning old books, when in Chennai, I requested a close and very obliging relative of mine, S. Rajan who had settled a few years ago in the U.S., to buy a copy of this book if possible and send it to me. Very kindly, he did it soon. The book talks about (which I should have mentioned earlier perhaps) three truly great and remarkable religious people, a prominent central figure being of course, St. Francis of Assisi, the remarkable Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a Lutheran Christian), who was arrested and put in the concentration camp by the Nazis and was eventually put to death during the reign of terror unleashed by Hitler, and about the extremely humane and compassionate Simone Weil (younger sister of the André Weil, the great mathematician), who starved herself to death in sympathy with those suffering in France during the German occupation of France by Hitler’s army in the second world war. I would in fact like to quote Ernest Raymond himself on his choice of the title of his book:

I see no way of coupling this book on to its two predecessors like a baggage wagon (with some interesting and valuable stuff in its suitcases, I hope) on to the back of a train-except by rephrasing the last words of the preceding volume. “Good morning, Good people” was a favourite greeting
of Francis to people, whether they were good or bad, and especially perhaps to those who were bad, like the villagers of Poggio Bustone or the thieves in the woods by Borgo Santo Sepolcro. So, accepting the sad truth that we are rather bad just now, the title of the book shall be “Good Morning, Good People”.

— Ernest Raymond, *Good Morning, Good People*

In this book (on p.121 in my edition), Ernest Raymond tries to expound the principle that a true artist values his creation much more than the money and the praise he gets for his work. While praise and pay are good, what is above these is the love that he has for the thing he creates! He illustrates this with a quotation from Rudyard Kipling (which I don’t include here), and four lines from a lovely poem of the cobbler “Chu Chen Chow”, which go as follows:

The better I work, the less I earn,
For the soles won’t crack, nor the uppers turn.
The better my work, the less my pay
But work can only be done one way.

The four lines quoted above also occur towards the end of a lovely piece of an early work by Ernest Raymond, titled “Through Literature To Life”. I was very deeply touched by the sentiments of the verse and wanted to know the origin of this lovely lyric. Though a novice in computer usage, curiously enough I was lucky to find the song of which the four lines quoted above are a part, in a blog post at [http://bytesdaily.blogspot.in/](http://bytesdaily.blogspot.in/), dated 2 June, 2010, titled “The Cobbler’s Songs” (which I shall quote later), preceded by some really charming information, with which I shall begin. Apparently, this person who wrote the blog post had come across a second hand book of poems, in which some one had scribbled a “poem” on the inside cover! (When I first read this, I loved the whole thing which followed, since the blogging person had an experience which I very often have had, whenever I buy a second hand book. This wonderful idea of possessing second hand copies of books is indeed a real blessing!). He then describes how he thought it was a poem but found it to be a song from a musical comedy of 1916, based on the story of “Ali Baba and the forty thieves” which was a very successful show which ran in London for five years, a record which lasted for five years, had successful seasons in America, Australia and had been made into a movie in 1934. (He also mentions Paul Robeson (1898-1976), a fore runner of the civil rights movement, singing a version in a beautiful baritone voice which is still
available on Youtube.) All this was very pleasant and lovely, but more significantly, his words “...although at some stage over the years, the book went astray, the words have come back to me on this occasion in the context of dedication and work ethic” touched me. I now would like to re-quote the lyric of "The Cobbler’s Song", which features as the 62nd poem in the book "The Canadian Soldiers Song Book" 2, the second stanza of which is essentially the one quoted by Ernest Raymond. It is an interesting question, open of course, as to how Ernest Raymond came to know of this song! Now to the song itself:

I sit and cobble at slippers and shoon
From the rise of the sun to the set of the moon.
Cobble and cobble as best I may
Cobble all night and cobble all day
And I sing as I cobble this doleful lay.

The stouter I cobble the less I earn
For the soles ne’er crack nor the uppers turn,
The better my work the less my pay,
But work can only be done one way.

And as I cobble with needle and thread
I judge the world by the way they tread,
Heels worn thick and soles worn thin
Toes turned out and toes turned in
There’s food for thought in a sandal skin.

For prince and commoner, poor and rich
Stand in need of the cobbler’s stitch
Why then worry what lies before,
Hangs this life by a thread no more.

I sit and cobble at slippers and shoon
From the rise of the sun to the set of the moon
Cobble and cobble as best I may
Cobble all night and cobble all day
And I sing as I cobble this doleful lay.

To me, the cobbler in the song cited above and the cobbler of Galsworthy’s essay, are perhaps the very best examples of workers striving for excellence. Though difficult to attain, there must surely indeed be men and women who aim at perfection in whatever they do, irrespective of what they get in return. Indeed, “quality” or “excellence”, however you call it, is perhaps an unreachable ideal which, however, is very much worth striving for. Hopefully it is a noble task to strive for perfection even in this (most unfortunately) imperfect world!
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“When there’s no one left in the living world who remembers you, you disappear from this world. We call it the Final Death.”

Disney brought me face to face with the fear so many of us have - the fear of being forgotten!

I wonder
If my ink bleeds and buries itself in the paper, only to be found by someone desperately in need of hope, comfort and light.

If my sister’s paintbrush dances on the clean canvas to be discovered again by someone who needs colour in their life.

Forgotten

Mugdha Khedkar
If among the seven billion faces on the earth we can find at least a couple who will, a hundred years later forget our art, but remember our heart.

What is life, but a quest to find people who can keep us alive in their stories even when we strive so hard to be remembered.

I light up thinking of a grandmother rocking her grandchild to sleep with a story that ends with “When the whole world was vile, my mother found hope in her smile.”
"I have a madness for languages which I cannot explain."

Interview
Ramaiyengar Sridharan is a faculty at the Chennai Mathematical Institute. He was formerly with the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai. He was born in Cuddalore in 1935. He completed his graduation and post graduation in Mathematics from Vivekananda College, Chennai. He then obtained his Ph.D. from Columbia University under the guidance of Prof. Samuel Eilenberg for his thesis on 'Filtered algebras and representations of Lie algebras' in 1960. Sridharan was awarded the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize for Science and Technology (SSB prize) in Mathematical Science in 1980 and was also conferred the degree of Doctor of Sciences (Honoris Causa) by CMI. He is a Fellow of the Indian Academy of Sciences, the Indian National Science Academy, and the National Academy of Sciences, India. Prof. Sridharan also has a passion for languages, poetry, and fiction.

How long have you been with CMI?

RS: I have been in CMI since 1999 when I retired from TIFR. Seshadri told my student Parimala to ask me to come to CMI. I was reluctant initially, but Seshadri convinced me to work here for 2 years. It’s now 2019. I’ve been here for almost 20 years. I don’t teach a full course anymore, but I still give lectures. I still love discussing mathematics.

We understand you received your Ph.D from Columbia University. Please tell us about your experience at the University

RS: In the summer of the year I joined Columbia University after I had finished all the course work, Eilenburg, my thesis advisor who doesn’t generally suggest any problem for people working, suggested a problem for me to work on. He knew me because he met me at the Tata Institute.

He suggested something I could look at. It was a paper by Riemann. I looked at it and had some comments to make, which he appreciated. But being a student, to me, it looked as though he was not happy - in my own way, I thought I was not up his mark. So I decided to quit mathematics. In fact, I wrote a letter to him during the Christmas vacation, saying that I didn’t want to continue. I expressed my feeling that I may not be able to contribute. Also I had heard Grothendieck lecturing in a weekly colloquium and felt very depressed. I thought I would never be anything like this, so what’s the point in doing mathematics. I didn’t want to do any mathematics at all. So all this worked in my mind. To add to it, I was homesick and was very confused. So I wrote a letter to Eilenburg, saying “I am very grateful to you for calling me. I’m very sorry I’m disappointing you, I would like to go and become a school teacher somewhere in India. I’m sorry to have put you through all this trouble”. I posted the letter.

Oh! He must have been disappointed. How did he react?

RS: It was Christmas holidays, so I used to go to the huge Butler Library everyday. I was sitting there when another Professor, PA Smith came into the library and said to me, “I want to have a word with you, can I?”. Prof. Smith was a topologist famous for his fixed point theorems. There was a
cubicle in the library where we both went in. He said "Sammy tells me that you don't want to continue doing mathematics and you want to go back, but why?" I told him how depressed I felt after attending Grothendieck's lecture in the colloquium and felt I was never going to be anything like this in my life. Being the wonderful person that Prof. Smith was, he said "I want to tell you something. Serge Lang, (who was a faculty at Columbia University at that time) once went to France and met Grothendieck. He also came back and told me that he wanted to give up mathematics. Does talking to Grothendieck always make one depressed? But I must tell you one thing - Mathematics is not someone's unique property. It's very vast. I have taught you and I know you. I am sure you are bound to do some really good things in Mathematics. So I would request you to reconsider your decision. I cannot force you, but on the other hand, you are one of the most wonderful persons I have known." After thinking about it for a while, I met Eilenberg. He had a remarkable way of putting people at ease - he used to wink at people. He asked, "So Sridharan, have you changed your mind now?" I told him about the conversation I had with Smith and continued to stay in Columbia.

Please tell us about your research and your thesis.

RS: Eilenberg told me and K.Varadharajan about a summer school in Chicago on Homological Algebra. We spent our summer there, where I met Prof. Hochschild of Hochschild Cohomology. He knew me because of some of my papers.

When I told him that I was looking for a problem to work on, he directed me to Kaplansky, who had one. I went back to my room and looked at the problem, and I thought I had a solution to the problem. The next day I met him again and told him the same. He told me to write up the solution. The following day, Hochschild told me that a counterexample to the problem has been found. I felt thoroughly depressed.

During my stay at Columbia, I used to love books and read a lot. In one of them - Theory of Groups and Quantum Mechanics by Hermann Weyl, I looked at the Hisenberg relation (I was always interested in the cohomology of algebras). Later, I proved that the first cohomology for this algebra is trivial, that is, every derivation is an inner derivation. I told Hochschild that I had a small result. He pointed me to Irving Segal, a physicist at The University of Chicago. But I never talked to anyone about this, I was nervous.

I came back to Columbia after the summer vacation for the next semester, Eilenberg was happy to see me and asked me about my stay in Chicago. I told him about the "small" result I proved. He looked at what I had written and liked it. He suggested I look at more general objects. I did and proved results about them too. He was very happy with the work. He proposed a problem to generalize the notion of Hisenberg algebra. That was my thesis!

I finished my thesis in one month, but Eilenberg always
insisted that things should be written down and checked. He made me write my thesis 3 times. Finally, I submitted my thesis in one and a half years. After that, I immediately wanted to run away to India. Eilenberg said, “I know you’ve been here for less than 2 years and have never been happy. Why don’t you stay here and do math in a style you like to do, and then go back to India?” I stayed back and started the next semester. But my father fell ill back in India, because of which I had to go back. I told this to Eilenberg, who agreed.

He didn’t make me a post-doctoral fellow. He told me that he’d give the fellowship for the period, and so I went to the finance section. He accompanied me, but they said that the rules didn’t permit them to do that. So anyway, I returned to India. This is the story about Columbia.

You have read a lot of books. Who is your favourite author?

RS: Right from my childhood, I was always interested in reading books - especially second-hand ones. I was in a town named Cuddalore, where I studied until my 4th form. I used to go to a scrap dealer who had old books which people had thrown away. That’s where I started reading. Even before that, my younger sister went to a convent. They had a book called, Job Quality and Other Animals which I loved reading.

My mother was also a voracious reader. She had a wonderful collection of Tamil books, all of which I have read. I was very interested in novels in both Tamil and English.

I have a madness for languages which I cannot explain. There’s no particular author I particularly follow. When I was in the Tata Institute, I used to frequently go to the Fountain Area, where they had second-hand books. I have about 3000 volumes in Pondicherry for which I don’t have place back here. I’m sure they are cursing me for having left them there like orphans.

P.G Wodehouse is one of my favorites. I love Wodehouse. I have read all of his books! I love Pickwick Papers too. English poetry has always appealed to me. I learned English poetry right from the first form, which was taught by some wonderful teachers. There’s practically no English book which I don’t like. I love Wordsworth, Shakespeare.

I also love Sankrit and have read quite a few texts. I love everything classical. Life is so short that there’s not enough time for reading everything. There’s one reason why one should live - so that they can read and enjoy. But modern authors, sorry to say, I’m not a great admirer of their works.

In fact, I have a library collection here, mostly of old books. Apart from reading, I also love the smell of them.

You mentioned that you have read a lot of Sanskrit works. How did you become interested in it?
RS: At TIFR, I had a senior Dr. Balagangadharan, who had great love for Sanskrit. In the first year at the Tata Institute, we learn Algebra, Analysis, and Topology. Dr. Balagangadharan, taught me Analysis, which I love. But what I really liked about him was his love for Sanskrit. In fact, we read Meghaduta, sitting together. I got interested in Sanskrit only because of him. He enthused me into reading Sanskrit. When I went to Zurich, Switzerland (on Chandrashekaran's advice) I went there with a bias that I will really learn Sanskrit.

The grammar in Sanskrit is something I really love. There are wonderful pieces of Sanskrit works which people don't even know! Because of the growing nature of specializations, it is difficult to have universal education.

Which are some of your favourite texts in Sanskrit literature?

RS: I like Kumarasambhava, which we had in intermediate (the first three cantos). Meghaduta is one of my favorites. I always like to quote instances from there. Meghaduta describes how Yaksha, who had been living away from his family, asked a cloud to deliver a message to his wife. I think this is one of the most beautiful poems written. Even now I sometimes read it.

I also like Bhasa's works. Most of his works were forgotten. In fact, Kuppuswamy Sastry from Kerala revived his works, but this led to a controversy on the genuinity. I enjoy the short plays Bhasa wrote. In one of them based on Mahabharatha for instance, when Indra wanted to deprive Karna of his kavacha and Kundala, Karna spontaneously gives them away although he was advised by his friends not to do so. Then Karna says "hutam cha dattam cha thathaiva tishthathi", i.e. "whatever is offered in sacrifice or given in charity will never perish". The beauty lies in not going back on a promise. Such small pieces fascinate me.

I also read Ramayana at home. Sanskrit is a classical language, it is also tough, but I wish I knew better. I do want to teach Sanskrit, Nowadays who cares for Sanskrit?

I love Tamil also, don't make a mistake about that (laughs)! Because of my brother in law, whose grandfather was a great scholar, I got interested in classical Tamil literature. I have read other things in Tamil, like old Ananda Vikatan magazines. But nowadays I feel there is degeneration, but may be I feel so because I've grown old.

If I had another life, I’d love to read more.

Do you feel that the younger generation should learn Sanskrit?

RS: It depends on how things are taught -- things shouldn’t be forced on you. Most times, we feel the teacher is a dictator conducting exams, etc. adding to the stress. I learned Sanskrit
in my college, but I didn’t like it very much then. But later I developed a love for it.

I am trying to learn Latin now. It is quite hard, but I feel very nice learning it.

When I was in the Tata Institute, there was a director who directed Sanskrit plays, but they didn’t have subtitles. Someone approached me with a request to add them, to which I agreed. I spent about 4 - 5 evenings watching the play on the screen and subtitling it into English. The movie was about the life of Shankara. The story revolved around how he came back to do the last rites for his mother.

My wife was very angry with me because I used to go there and spend about 4 hours in a dark room.

Do you feel that mathematics students should develop an interest in Humanities?

RS: I can’t say what they should do, but I hope they do.

What are your views about the way maths should be taught.

RS: Math should be taught in such a manner that it should be lovable. Unfortunately, I see this missing. Math is sometimes forced upon students. If you’re already interested in mathematics, then you don’t need motivation, but you still will want to be patted on your back with appreciation. That’s what happened to me in Math. If not for this, I would have given up mathematics long ago.

Tell us about your teaching experience.

RS: People tell me that I’m a good teacher but I think that’s not the point. Teaching is something I really love. When you share something that you know and you see a smile on the face of student, it makes one happy. According to me, this is what teaching is. It isn’t about making the other person suffer and give a question paper that is unanswerable. My philosophy of teaching is that the other person should become better.

If you learn a piece of poetry and you love and remember your teacher who taught you that, it gives such pleasure in life. I think teaching is a great pleasure.
To be a good teacher, to me, is the ultimate genius. If you’re able to translate what you know, there’s no reason why it shouldn’t satisfy you as a person.

I was the only person in the Tata Institute who used to teach outside. I taught in Christian College and in Bombay University.

As a student/teacher, we should do the best we can and be a human being. Arrogance in both students and administration should come to a halt. Now we do seem to be getting better at that.

In CMI, the first year I taught, there were only 5 or 6 students. Now there are 64! With such a huge batch, I’m not sure how enthusiastic both the students and teachers are. Teaching, according to me, should create a spark.

I love the idea of lecturing. I would like to lecture on other subjects apart from mathematics. Even now I have I can talk on different subjects like weaving, Upanishads, Greek mythology, and so on. But people don’t have time to listen to all this. Students already have a lot to learn.

There has been industrialization of education, where people in India are trying to get into engineering to medicine through coaching centres. What do you think about them?

RS: In Tamil Nadu, one has to pay an unbelievable amount to get into medical college. Is it compatible with education? There’s something fundamentally wrong with our system of education, there’s absolutely no doubt about it.

Talking about institutions in general, I wonder why should all learning be a part of a curriculum? If a student is interested in a topic and I know it, we should discuss it in detail irrespective of whether it’s a part of the curriculum. What one teaches should be something that is inspiring. Anything can be made inspiring provided one sees inspiration in the teacher. Teaching, in some sense, is a sacrifice. It’s something that one gives away but it still remains deep within us.

What do you feel about the general research output in India?

RS: There is a lot of interest in India in science and mathematics. But even then India seems to be lagging in
If you look at America, things there are mostly done by "other people" - Indians mostly! The whole first and second batch of this institute (CMI) went to America. I used to be very angry with the idea. Then Seshadri used to tell me "Let them go, they'll get an idea of what it is". In fact, I ran back from America. This is not because I dislike America, I liked that place - they had a very good system - but on the other hand, I believe you also should do something for your country; something for your own next of kin - someone who wants to learn.

How did China, which I'm told is very good at research, manage it? They didn't allow people to go to other countries.

Is what is happening in a university in Delhi education? It is very depressing to see. If so, how do you expect people to be intellectuals? We've become money-corrupt, that's the whole problem. I think one should live for a much greater worth. If you look at my purse, I don't keep money at all. My wife always asks "why do you do that? What if you're involved in an accident?" I always say "Someone will give me, don't worry". I do buy books, etc. but money per se it doesn't make sense to me.

**You are a polyglot. Which language do you love the most?**

**RS:** If I have 6 children, I can't pick my favorite. English, though not my mother tongue, comes very naturally to me. Tamil is my mother tongue and as I said earlier, I read a lot of Tamil books and of course I can also speak Tamil quite well. I have to be a bit careful with German, which I learned because of a bet I placed with someone. I learned French by reading books and talking to people. I have already spoken about my love for Sanskrit and Latin. Each language serves a different purpose. But languages also divide. Anything which unites also divides.

I would like to learn more languages! I'd be happy if I could learn Chinese.

I'm 84. But still, it is the old urge which still exists and drives me to do more.

**Thank you very much sir. It was a pleasure listening to you.**

**RS:** Thank you.
“Teaching, in some sense, is a sacrifice. It's something that one gives away but it still remains deep within us.”
When I gained consciousness, I was in a drowsy state of mind. I tried hard to open heavy eyes and saw Elina sitting there, with her face hidden between her knees, at the corner of my prison cell.

I tried to sit up straight on the bed, a sharp piercing pain shot through my head, I clutched my head and groaned in pain.

I found a simple soft touch on my hair. I opened my eyes and saw Elina, standing in front of me.

I asked her “How long have I been unconscious?”

She just stared at me with an apathetic gaze.

"Help me?"

She just walked back and sat with her head between her knees at that exact same position.

"Why won’t you help me this time? You have always helped me before, even in the war, you would appear out of nowhere and help me out with my life, then why won’t you help me?"

She just sat there motionless.

I could only sigh.

I looked around for a way to bust out of this cell. I saw fourteen automatic heat and motion sensor enabled machine guns staring at me, oh and ten cameras.

Wow even with my super human capabilities I won’t be able to get out of this deep shit.
Wow even with my super human capabilities I won’t be able to get out of this deep shit.

I looked at a camera and shouted “Do you not know who am i? do you not no i am a war hero. How dare they put me inside a cell. If it wasn’t for me and my team we would have lost a significant part of the Earth to those filthy Zorgonians. And this is how you treat me, i threw in my life for this planet. i am…”

While I was lost in thought, I heard a ghostly voice. “Here we have another war hero in jail, these saviors of humanity sure can’t keep their weapons in their pants they always have to show them off. Well let me ask you, how did a super-soldier end up here?”

I saw an old crooked man standing there with a genuine smile on his face, a smile which sent a shiver down my spine.

“Well Mr.Crooked, it’s good that you know that I am super-soldier, you should also know that I can leave this cell whenever I want so if you let me out I’ll spare people close to you, and if I had to put in the effort to get out of this place, you know what will happen to those people.”

“Oh, really you’re funny to think that you’ll be able to get out this place, I would never let a person out who killed their wife just because she was sleeping with other people, are you really this jealous of a person, you know right jealous is a long-gone concept, I can see your face squirming, you loved her didn’t you.”

“It was Elina who told me to kill her I was only upset that she slept with my enemy.”

“Well, whatever reason the fact is that you killed her and in this era where humans are trying to recover their power of population, you should know how important every human life is. I hope you know that killing a person has a death penalty and who is Elina? Well, whatever you have one more day to live. Goodbye, I hope you sleep well with all the drugs in your body, you’re a super-soldier so we can’t take any ris…”

As I was listening to the devil speak, my vision blurred, I became unstable and I couldn’t stop myself from crashing down on the floor unconscious. In my dream I could see my wife next to me, our bare bodies melting into each other, what a beautiful sight but I could also see Elina’s squirming face, my wife has never acknowledged Elina’s existence, for her Elina was a ghost but I knew she was real because she has been with me at every dark tunnel in my life but it was also her jealousy about my wife which tempted her to tempt me to kill my wife when I was drunk with anger, rage, and sadness.

I woke up again after a while because of a screeching voice asking me to wake up.

“Wake up!!, I hope you have enjoyed your life as a war hero now its time to end it, why don’t we go to the grounds and not spill any blood here in my beautiful house, okay?”

I was still drowsy from the drug so I couldn’t do anything but let the men carry me and bound me to a chair, which is where I suppose my life will end. I saw them put me in front of a vaporizer gun. I knew when my end seems near Elina will always appear out of thin air and help me out of this situation. I looked around for my savior.

Meanwhile, Mr.Crooked asked” Any last wish War Hero”

“I want to see Elina one last time”

“Elina who is she? well, you have to make a call which can be made fast we don’t have time to fetch her for you..”

“No, she was inside my cell!!”

“There was no one inside your cell, you must have been hallucinating because of the drugs”

“No she has been with me for a very long time, and I saw there yesterday but she won’t speaking to me!!”

“Well well | don’t know what nonsense you are sprouting but you’re supposed to die here and now”

“Well, it was she who told me to kill my wife it’s not my fault you have to believe me Mr.Crooked”

“I see...so that’s what has been happening to you... are schizophrenic, now its time for you to rest…”

After that, I just saw a flash of light...
When I tell people that I am a mod of the subreddit r/dankmemes their usual reaction is excitement and deep respect hidden under a persona of uninterestedness, disgust and the occasional "So this is how you're coming out".

However, few people realise the pain and hardship that comes with being a mod. Upon the heartfelt request of my colleagues I decided to show the public how a day in my life usually transpires.

Like many people, I start my day by waking up. Fans and jealous haters of my work think just because I’m a mod and basically have my life figured out must mean that I wake up cheerfully everyday. Yet that is not the case. I wake up dreading the incredible amount of people that will invade my personal space just to have a chance to talk to me. A disadvantage of being famous, that I’ve learned the hard way, is that people don’t really care for your privacy.

Because I wake up a little late, I usually miss my breakfast. Another by-product of waking up late is that I have to leave immediately for class and thus I don’t get a lot of time to freshen up.
This sometimes gives me a bit of an unkempt look because of which some people might say that I am a loser. I would like to dispel that claim by stating that I am, in fact, not a loser.

In class, I study, of course. Though sometimes I might make a few memes, or mod a little. This is one of the reasons being a mod is so hard. You can't even rest while studying. This makes me recall a rather unusual incident.

It happened near the end of the semester. I had finished a problem presented in the class early and decided that I'll use the precious time I had acquired for my mod activities. Just as I was about to start the prof calls my name. I look up.

"Get out."

"Huh?" Did I hear that right? Was she really asking me to go out of the class for performing my duties?

"You were using your phone showing you are distracted. Please go if you cannot pay complete attention."

"I was doing something really important," I explain. Did this prof really not understand how important my work was?

"It doesn't matter. Please get out."

What?!! "I'm sorry. It won't happen again," I try the apology method even though I was clearly right.

"Of course it won't. Now please leave or else I will."

I was running out of ammunition. This prof was too good. I use my last weapon, hoping against hope that it would work.

"Prof, please don't send me, I want to learn."

The whole class is silent. My words move everyone. Then the giggling begins.

"Please leave."

I had lost this round. This opponent was just too good. I take my bag and leave. It was a battle well fought.

After the classes I get lunch in the mess. I think lunch in the mess is the best. I have ordered food from outside restaurants, sometimes spending thousands in KFC in a single day, but nothing beats the mess food. This is absolutely my honest opinion and I'm absolutely not being forced by anyone at all to say this.

I also make some time in my busy schedule to watch some anime. I feel a mod has to be as obnoxious as possible. Watching anime is one of the best ways to do it. If you read manga you can increase that obnoxiousness 10 times. So of course I also read manga.

After dinner, I go to bed and pull an all-nighter, obviously. My objective, ever since I elevated from a normal redditor to mod, has been to get as little sleep as possible. That has been a bit hard to achieve as I usually just sleep in to make up for the all-nighter.

Overall, as you might have realized already, being a mod is no easy feat, and I feel I should get much more fame for my work.
Alongside several online seminars on mathematics, physics and computer science, during the pandemic CMI stayed quite active in the field of humanities! We held numerous online events, from book discussions to debates to Poetry readings and more. Here are some of the highlights of this year’s humanities events at CMI.
Debates

The first year batch participated in a series of debates this year, treating us to the best of their rhetoric, and many enthusiastic rounds of discussion and discourse. We also had the honour of having five judges preside over these debates, each of whom were kind enough to give their time, guidance and feedback to the students. The following were the five topics for debate:

1. ‘Boarding schools are harmful to students’, presided over by Prof. Jayashree Ramadas.

2. ‘Gene editing should not be used on human beings’, presided over by Prof. Prajakta Nimbhokar and Prof. Jayashree Ramadas.

3. ‘Social media brings more harm than good’, presided over by Prof. Krishna Hanumanthu.

4. ‘Technology destroys young minds’, presided over by Prof. V. Ramamoorthy.

5. ‘There should be no government censorship over the entertainment industry’, presided over by Prof. Pramathanath Sastry.

Music Fest

After the hectic activity of the first full online semester, we came together for an evening to relax, and enjoy some music and poetry. Professors, students, alumni and staff let loose their creativity, giving us a night filled with melodious singing, skilful instrument playing and moving poetry readings, and even a few impromptu performances! Reflecting the diverse makeup of our community here at CMI, the music ranged from hard rock to traditional Carnatic, Bollywood to Alternative Pop, and from the poetry of Gulzar to the compositions of Ilaiyaraaja. Despite having to cancel Tessellate this year, we definitely captured the spirit of our yearly concert nights and Soundscape.
Short Story Discussions

We held a number of short story discussions as a part of the Art Of Short Fiction course. Each student chose an author, and discussed three short stories indicative of their body of short fiction, both summarising the works and analysing them.

1. Anant Mudgal discussed Anton Chekhov’s distinctive style of short fiction, his humour and sensitivity, by examining works such as ‘The Orator’, ‘Misery’, and ‘The Steppe’.

2. Neha Rino discussed Neil Gaiman’s use of artifice fiction and allusions in his short stories, through the examples of stories such as ‘A Study In Emerald’, ‘Murder Mysteries’, and ‘How to Talk to Girls at Parties’.


5. Shankar Ram discussed Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s contribution to short fiction, and to the genre of magical realism in particular, by looking at ‘Eyes of a Blue Dog’, ‘A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings’, and ‘Death Constant Beyond Love’.
Award winning author DW Gibson has spent more than a decade conducting interviews regarding democracy, capitalism and globalisation. We had the honour of hearing him discuss what he has learned about the tensions between globalization and borders, and between capitalism and the workers who keep it churning.

2. Summing Up, by Anne Tanam and Fiona Bolger
Anne Tanam and Fiona Bolger are both poets based in Ireland but with connections to India and Chennai. In this poetry reading, they explored the themes of loss and gain, numbers and accounting, stasis and movement, through their words.

3. Beethoven: How to Think About the Making of an Artist, by Ruth Padel
Ruth Padel is an award-winning British poet with close ties to Greece and wildlife conservation, who grew up playing classical music on viola and piano. In this poetry reading, she read from her new collection "Beethoven Variations - Poems on a Life". The poems describe Beethoven’s early psychological and emotional shaping, the onset and effects of deafness, his ambivalent relations with his patrons, his failures in love, both with women as well as with Karl, the nephew he adopted as his son.
It was a long day. Prakash had just finished his twelve hour long shift at the sheet metal factory. Three years it had been since he had a shift so long. After all, a nine to six job is one of the perks of being promoted to the floor manager position. Clank, Clank, Clank... That was the only thing that Prakash could hear; apart from the conductor’s occasional chit chat about the upcoming elections and how no passenger has ever, in the history of his employment, brought the right amount of change for their ticket. "Always sir, for a ten rupee ticket they give me a hundred rupees. Am I running a bank? On top of this I have to make sure it isn’t a counterfeit, or else i’ll be the one in trouble”.

After an hour of this indescribable monotony, Prakash’s stop finally arrived. "Two more kilometers and I can finally have aval payasam. I prefer vermicelli, but Ammu hates it.”, he thought as he deboarded the bus, only to be greeted by a foul stench which made him instinctively raise his kerchief over his nose, which was already covered by a mask. He took the same left, which he had taken for almost a decade now, which led to a narrow, dimly lit street. The moon was too shy to grace him with her presence that night. As he was desperately rifling his brain for any traces of the delicious payasam, desperate for the stench had done a thorough job erasing it, he noticed the silhouette of a young woman in front of him.

"It’s pretty late now, isn’t it? What is she doing here all by herself?” he wondered, as he looked around to check if she had company. "This place isn’t even safe for a man at this time! Why not call an auto or a cab?” he propounded. as his own thoughts expostulated ”No, even that is not safe.” Taking a break from his deep thoughts, he looked up, and there she was.
Still going the same way as him. "Am I lost? No one takes this route this late in the night!" he pondered. He wasn’t lost. He was almost at the biriyani shop; he could tell from the aroma of the spices dancing their way to his senses, and the crowd of course, but the aroma always hit him first.

"Why is she still going the same way? There have been four turns till now. Surely she must be going the wrong way" he conjectured. It wasn’t long before inane thoughts crept into his head. "What if she thinks I’m stalking her? A masked man follows you for this long, at this hour, you don’t chalk it up to coincidence. She must think I’m going to assault her! Oh god, she is walking faster”. It was all in his head. Just two weeks back he had seen on TV that a young woman had been assaulted by a man not much older than himself. "So many people saw me following her. Oh god, what if something happens to her tonight and the police think I’m the culprit? Why is this happening to me? Why did she have to walk in a lonely street wearing jeans and a t-shirt at this time?"

No longer worrying about anything other than his own fate, he decided to be the harshest critic of this young woman’s lifestyle. "Even if I don’t do anything, I might become a culprit. Of course, the society doesn’t care if I did anything wrong. The man is always blamed by the news, and people always believe the news. If a young woman walks so brazenly in a dark street, wearing such provocative clothing, she is bound to be catcalled at least. If not today, then some other day, but it is the indubitable truth”, he asservated.

"The man is also partly at fault, but how can she be blameless if something were to happen? These people have lost their ways. Cultureless millenials. Their parents are to be blamed for this. Letting girls go out to parties and pubs. And the drinking! I can smell the alcohol from here. This is why the crime rate is going up. More assaults everywhere. The nosy neighbors keep asking why I don’t let Ammu go out to parties with their daughter. This is exactly why! I will never let her roam around after dark. Too many perverted people on the streets who don’t know how to behave” he complained, not recognizing the palpable irony.

As he subconsciously stopped in front of his house, he looked up to witness nothing but a few stray dogs fighting over a piece of bread. No sign of the woman. The twenty minute walk felt like a two hour marathon, and all that was left was the fainting semblance of the silhouette that caused him so much trouble. "Well, I better check the news tomorrow morning” he mumbled. He removed his shoes outside the vasakkal of the house. "Madhu, I’m home. Bring me some water”. His voice echoed through the house, but he received no response. "Madhu!” he shouted once more, as he walked inside. His wife always responded to his first call. This was unusual. He could hear a faint voice, which he followed to his daughter’s bedroom. He found his wife comforting his sobbing daughter.

"What happened here?” he yelled, as his wife calmed him and began to speak. "Ammu was on the bus today when two boys...”. A chill went down Prakash’s spine. His shoulders drooped a little, and he bowed his head down, as tears, weighed down by his vile and delusional thoughts fell to the ground with a thud only he could hear.
Talking to the One Who Listens
Ms. Anupama Anand has been the counselor for CMI since August, 2019. She has been consulting counselor for several educational institutions and believes in empowering people to find their own unique and effective solutions to resolve their concerns. She visits the campus regularly and meets the students. When the campus shifted to the ‘online’ mode she did too.

She was kind enough to sit with our team of interviewers to discuss the importance of counselling for parents as well as children, demystify different forms of therapy, destigmatize mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder; and empower us to best help our loved ones in need.

This interview was conducted by Ashwani Anand, Shailender Joseph and Himanshu Patil on 20 November 2019.

Content warning: Mentions of suicide, self harm and addiction.
What does a counselor do?

AA: A counselor is basically a person who will listen to you and who can do a little bit of therapy. If they have a doubt about the person’s mental health they will either refer to a psychologist or a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist is primarily a doctor who can administer medication to you so when you are definitely diagnosed with depression or anxiety or any one of those disorders then you would be recommended to a psychiatrist. A psychologist does a number of tests, it could be a variety of tests that are done on you. She also would probably do more therapy and is more involved in the subject. Normally a psychologist also goes into research. Most people who are counselors, you don’t hear them do research. So, these are the three and they all work in tandem, it is not that one steps on the feet of another person.

What is the difference between CMI students and your other clients?

AA: Most of my clients are either parents or students from schools. College students are far and few. Here you volunteer to come but in most colleges that doesn’t happen. We assume that you are mature adults who want to come to the counselor but in Chennai, by and large, I have not seen that happen. Most college counselors, at least people who I know working in the field in the colleges and even in schools, (I was working in schools) are very unhappy because of the social stigma that is associated. They all believe that at that age you have to struggle so therefore a counselor is a waste of time.

Okay. So here you mean that students come more frequently?

AA: I think somewhere along the line either you are curious to know how you can benefit by talking to a counselor. So you come to checkout or you come because by word of mouth you heard from somebody else who met me. Sometimes you want a neutral person to listen to you. All of you have friends you talk of issues but there could be some things that you may not want to share, the person may not maintain your confidentiality in which case they definitely come to a third person who is a counselor. Most students I see here work very well with reasoning as they are all in the field of math so working with you all is relatively easier. Otherwise bringing the rationality, even with adults, even with parents, is sometimes very difficult. They won’t look at things objectively, they get very emotional and very subjective and then, you know, trying to work through it can be very tough.

Whom do you find difficult clients, parents or children?

AA: It’s very difficult to handle parents. Children are far far easier, very simple to handle. When parents come to me, the primary client is always the child. The parents come to me because I am working with the child. I like to know what the parental background is, what the parental set up is at home. They come with the notion that I am going to set right the
child, I have some magic wand here. So they come with this whole list of things the child does or does not do, what they want, their expectations etc. They never look at themselves. It’s always somebody else that they are focusing on so they are not able to understand that they need to start with themselves. This is very difficult.

They fail to acknowledge their responsibility.

AA: Their responsibility, their hand in upbringing, everything is there. There is a template in every house so depending on that you see how the child has been brought up.

What are the views and sensibility towards depression in India?

AA: See, in India I think the biggest breakthrough in depression happened thanks to Deepika Padukone. When she came out and said that I went through depression and she started her own ‘Live Love Laugh Foundation’ I think that sort of broke the ice especially in that fraternity, in the movie world. People do go through depression, people don’t mind saying “I have diabetes, I have BP”, all these things but the minute it comes to mental disorders you shy up. If somebody tells you that so and so is suffering from depression, you sort of classify that person as ‘yeh to gaya’, you can’t really do much for this person, that’s really not the truth.

If a person is depressed does it mean that he will always be depressed, can he not come out?

AA: Not at all! I think somewhere down the line you have asked about medication and side effects and all. See when a person is diagnosed with depression, again, it’s the psychiatrist who decides everything. If we take any disorder we look at it as a spectrum of how severe it is, right? So depending on that, medicines are given. Why is it that we have mental disorders? It’s because of the chemical imbalance in your brain which needs to be sorted out. That will happen primarily with medication along with a lot of other changes in your lifestyle. So a lot of therapy is done for these people either in the form of psychotherapy or psycho trauma. We have seen with whatever cases we have gone through that with the people who have depression you sort of work with the schedule. They are fantastic with a scheduled routine, tell them a routine and if the caregiver, the person who is along with them, also understands how it works, people come out of it. It’s not a lifelong affliction, you have to take medication.

Can you give any examples?
AA: I have given you a popular example of Deepika Padukone, she was working at that point of time. She had clinical depression as I had mentioned, she took medication, she had her hit movies, she did everything and then she came out of it because she had her family support. There are cases where we have seen people come out of it. It is not a permanent state that you have to continue the pills but then like anything whenever you take a pill definitely there will be a side effect. It is close to impossible, say, even if you have diabetes or anything else they say that if you take the pills for a longer period of time it does impact your other organs. The same works here. It’s not that you will be able to come out without any issue.

What do you think about the current state of mental health awareness in India?

AA: Mental health awareness in India is currently much more. We celebrate Mental Health Day, there is a lot of awareness. But again, like how we see about education or how we see about how women are to be treated or anything, it’s all at the superficial level more in the metro and in the urban area. If you actually percolate to the rural areas where awareness is not very high they still are not aware what needs to be done. Many of them at least take them to a doctor. It is fine, but otherwise they start believing that they have been possessed, you know how it works in rural areas. It has not percolated so far really over there.

The person suffering is left as a lost cause.

AA: Yes, they are invariably treated as a nut case or they say paagal or whatever words you want to associate with them. It has never been diagnosed, they have never been taken to a doctor to see what is it that is impacting these people.

If someone we know is going through mental health issues, what can we do?

AA: When you say you know somebody either at a friend level or at a personal level with a mental disorder, you see the first thing that would have happened to this person is a change in their behaviour. Any form of behaviour, if you look at depression or at anxiety or anything the first things that get impacted would be their sleep patterns, their eating patterns. They would either start eating excessively or they would start sleeping excessively or the reverse. So those are the first two that start getting impacted. Gradually because of this their focus will get impacted, the thinking patterns will start getting impacted. You will see that they are not able to focus they are not able to do anything, they start thinking very negatively, even things that they enjoyed doing, say, for...
example the person used to enjoy playing TT, suddenly they will start saying "No no I don't think I can do this, I don't want to play". They start looking at everything with a very very negative point of view. So when this kind of a thing happens it is basically some kind of a stress which has started it off which gets escalated and after a period of time they don't know to get out they get so wrapped up in it they can't see hope anywhere everything seems "I can't do it, I don't think I am capable of doing it". That hope, that confidence, everything is shattered. So when you see somebody like that, the simplest thing you can do is to talk to them because they themselves don't know what is happening. Listen to what they have to say, ask them if everything is okay and say "you don't seem to be okay I am there for you".

Do remember that when you go and speak with anybody with a mental state which is not stable you will get affected yourself. So you need to take care of yourself as well. So your lifestyle, whatever pattern it is, you need to take care of it because they are not going to be a happy person to go and spend time with. They will bring your emotional state down and you really can't change them unless they are ready to talk to you and if they start talking to you, you can ask them gradually "Do you think, you know, going and talking to some professional will help you out, why don't we try it out?". You need to gradually put it into them that what they are doing right now is not really beneficial for them. Possibly in their mind they have hit the rock bottom. That's why sometimes suicide can be traced back to depression. They feel alone. They feel there is no way they can cohabit in life, they don't see anything which they want to do or like to do.

...there is no purpose of...

AA: ...there is no purpose in life, there doesn't seem to be a way out so what is the purpose in me living? Ultimately it boils down to just that and you will find that there is always a thread of depression there with the person who dies by suicide.

So prior to this, you say there will be a pattern.

AA: There will always be a pattern. You will find all these changes in the person where the person feels a sense of very high degree of both helplessness and hopelessness, they will feel very lost and that's where you can probably step in.

How do you manage your mental health since you have to handle it on a daily basis?

AA: It is quite demanding, that is why I said that your lifestyle has to be maintained. It is good if you can do any form of exercise it could be walking, running, sports, yoga. So, yes, all mental health professionals definitely have to take time off for each other and we do talk. Here we primarily listen so we end up listening to a lot, therefore, there always will be something that stays back in our mind. It's not that we come out saying "yeah over, shut the door we can walk off." It doesn't really work that way there could be something which
really hits you, it hits home, it could be something that pulls you down so it’s very important that we also talk it out or write it down or get it out of our system otherwise it is going to impact my everyday life. Getting sucked into it is very easy, we can get sucked into it.

So does writing help?

AA: It helps a lot. See, we have basically two modes of expression: one is talking it out and one is writing. Everyone need not have the time to listen to you even if you have three, four or five best friends. They need not have the time to listen to what you have to say but these thoughts keep swirling in your head and you need to take it out. That is why it is very handy to write it down in a journal. Even if you write one sentence it is enough. It is either something that is worrying you or if you make a habit to write about something good that happened to you every day then it stays in your mind so you go to sleep in a very happy state. So the chances of you waking up positive are much higher. Writing a record is very very important for the present generation because you keep using your gadgets, many of you forget how to write.

Apart from writing, talking and exercise is there anything else that you would suggest?

AA: Anything that you can do, if you like gardening, please go ahead and do that.

any kind of hobby....

AA: Any hobby, any activity. Basically you need to have that amount of time where you spend where you are not taking in stress of the world around you. We already have enough stress with your everyday life plus intrusion of technology. When you ask me about depression, in fact, the current depression which is taking the world by storm is called ‘Facebook depression’.
When we are not getting enough 'likes'.....

AA: When we have taken up so much by social media and what everyone thinks about us it’s important that we think about ourselves first. It’s important to take care of your physical health as well as your mental health.

If you are comfortable, can you share with us your most challenging case?

AA: I have worked a lot with children and my youngest case was a five year old boy. He was in I standard and five and a half. He came to me primarily because he refused to cooperate in the class, his teacher could not handle him so he was recommended to me saying that he doesn’t sit, he doesn’t do anything in the class, he doesn’t write down notes so his notebooks will be practically blank. Some words would be written here and there. But he was a very bright kid. So he came to me, he would not talk, he would just come and sit. To talk to a five and a half year old and ask him what’s wrong with you or what’s your problem is damn difficult so I just gave him a sheet of paper and asked him to draw something. He said ‘what do I draw?’ I said “draw something, your house or house picture, your home, your family, whatever comes into your mind. He said ‘I will draw my house picture’. He drew some picture, some staircase, kitchen, some set up in his mind it looked like his house. So I asked him to explain, because that’s the simplest thing you can do to a small kid and in the entire scenario there is a father, there is a mother, the mother is having a stick, this kid is under the staircase and the father is standing somewhere. As I worked through the child I realised the issue is not with the child at all, it is with the parents. It was a huge problem for the mother because she had quit her job because of the child. She felt that she was compromising. All this was coming out on to the kid who was misbehaving in the school and this little fellow had no clue that he was demanding attention. So anytime he felt free to talk to me or anytime he would see me he would simply slip in and come and sit. So there was a time when the entire school was searching for him and the child was sitting here talking to me because he had not asked for permission. He just decided that okay I can come and talk to that aunty whenever she is free. I had no clue that he had not told his teacher, I assumed that he had informed and come.

The most difficult thing was that he was so little. Since it’s a dysfunctional family you really can’t do much. What can I do? I cannot go and change the situation around him, I can’t do much. In his case the primary caregivers who are his parents themselves were not in tandem with each other. After a year his father passed away so that led to further issues and finally, you know, how schools are, they asked the child to leave.

Anything that you can do, if you like gardening, please go ahead and do that. Any hobby, any activity. Basically you need to have that amount of time where you spend where you are not taking in stress of the world around you.
It really took a toll on me. This kid was such a sweet child and very smart, he saw that he had to attend school and do well in his tests. But all his childhood was getting spoiled because the upbringing was not a very happy upbringing. Even now when I think of the little fellow it's very difficult for me to sort of just move ahead.

That's a problem, instead of fixing or admitting that there is some mental issue and solving the issue they just decided that this guy cannot do anything, just throw him out.

AA: The mother had a problem with this school. And what she started doing was she started reading up a lot of stuff. She said so what if I am a counselor and she started arguing with me and I sort of backed off and said I am not here to tell you what to do, what's right, what's not right I am only telling you that the impact of what is happening at home is coming out in the school. She was a powerful lady in the corporate field and taking care of the child was not something that she had bargained for in life. So it really took a toll on her so she started getting angry with me, she would get angry with the principal. She would come there and it would be like a Tornado and would really blow up. What happened is that ultimately nobody wanted the child, none of the teachers wanted him and the school didn't want him because he was developing into quite a naughty little fellow. He did lots, he did lots in that school and I think if I go back today and I ask them 'do you remember this kid?' there would not be even an ayah who does not remember that little fellow. That kid was very different.

What do you think are the major causes behind the depression of young adults today, since they seem to be suffering from this the most?

AA: You tell me, you all are young adults you must be reading a lot, what do you think would be some of the reasons? All these questions I have answered are coming to young adults you can answer. I am sure you would have done a little bit of research here and there. What do you think would be the reasons?

I would think the competition...

AA: Performance? Performance is definitely one of them so therefore they feel inadequate, worthless, yes.

The family pressure that you have to do well at any cost....

AA: Yeah, that's all based on performance therefore you don't feel good enough you feel worthless you feel inadequate so all these things together come under one bracket. What else?

Social media.

AA: Social media, sexual orientation, social status so all these things do add on if you look it could also be genetic. There are
strains and if it is there in the family it can pass on. Looking at genetics is also a very important thing, the family history. Even if you go to a psychiatrist and say that somebody has a mental issue they will ask you ‘is it there in the family?’. Like we ask for diabetes for anything, it’s the same thing. Anything with respect to your human genetic makeover can have a family background to it.

What is the difference between anxiety, depression, bipolar personality disorder and other relevant terms? Can you please explain them briefly for us?

AA: Depression is so easily bandied about that nobody even gives it further thoughts. Like I told you, some of the symptoms for depression would be eating, sleeping excessively, and hopelessness. All these are the beginning of any kind of mental illnesses which you see especially when we say the word depression. It has to be at least for a period of two weeks. It’s not that today I am not in a mood so I am depressed. It doesn’t work that way. It’s not temporary, just get out of it so after sometime you find something interesting enough and you move on but when it stays with you for a period of two weeks and you sort of really feel that things are spiraling out of control that is when you can actually classify as somebody having depression. That is when you start noticing the behavioral changes. One day a person is lying down looking at the ceiling, you are not worried, two days you will think he will come out of it but when it goes on and on the person shows no sign of coming out. Such people will not want to get up in the morning, they don’t want to do anything, they will have a disheveled look, they don’t take care of themselves. You can imagine how they will look! That’s how a person with depression is noticed.

Bipolar was also classified as depression before it was referred to as manic depression. You must be knowing Physics so bi-poles which basically means two extremes. A person can go through depression at one end and when you mean manic it means you go to the other extreme, so you will be very positive, full of energy, running around you won’t sleep. In fact, with teens many people think it could be ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and that’s the reason why you are doing all this. You will keep on talking, you will be very very excited, very impulsive, you will make quick quick decisions like this [snapping fingers]. That’s the other end and between these two phases there will be a normal phase also. All of you read books, you are from the Literary Club, you would have read about Sidney Sheldon, he was bipolar. One of his books, The Other Side of Me, he talks about his bipolar disorder, it’s not that he could not function normally. They go from one extreme to the other and one end they would be depressive the other end they would be over hyper. This is how a bipolar person behaves but again this lasts for more than two weeks. At least for the period of two weeks you suddenly find them walking, they will be talking as they walk, they put in a urgency in what they do, you can actually identify that they would have the symptom of Bipolar. Everything has to happen quickly, quickly, quickly.
They will be very goal oriented. They can actually do a fantastic amount of work in those two weeks and then they hit exhaustion. You know it’s like the waxing and waning of the moon to go from one end to the other.

With depression and Bipolar, by and large, with medication it is seen that people can do some work if we can put them on a schedule. Anxiety is a totally different thing altogether. Anxiety is because you are worried about something, like, if I am continuously worried can I focus on any amount of work? It is next to impossible for me to focus on work. All kinds of phobias come under anxiety, continuously worried about people talking about me or going out into public or not doing something properly. In fact, if I am always into the mode of being worried then I really can’t function normally. It’s actually more than that. Not only the patient but the family also gets hit very badly. So giving care to such kind of people is very difficult because they really could be disturbing for everyone around, they will not cooperate very easily, they will not do their work very easily, they will be perennially worried about something and most people don’t understand this. They will think that this man is doing some drama or he is just out to trouble me, they don’t accept a person with anxiety very easily.

...they will be able to figure it out by talking to them and through medication. So when you go to a psychiatrist he’s just going to give medication, the psychologist will probably start working on various other kinds of tests. The counselor will start talking. When you have the medication it is easier to talk to the person.

...we do all this the trigger is not removed.

AA: Ya, which is why we need to go in for professional help because they will be able to figure it out by talking to them and through medication. So when you go to a psychiatrist he’s just going to give medication, the psychologist will probably start working on various other kinds of tests. The counselor will start talking. When you have the medication it is easier to talk to the person. If someone is going to be sitting with full depression and say ‘nothing’s going to work for me’ I can’t get through to that person as me to focus on work. All kinds of phobias come under anxiety, continuously worried about people talking about me or going out into public or not doing something properly. In fact, if I am always into the mode of being worried then I really can’t function normally. It’s actually more than that. Not only the patient but the family also gets hit very badly. So giving care to such kind of people is very difficult because they really could be disturbing for everyone around, they will not cooperate very easily, they will not do their work very easily, they will be perennially worried about something and most people don’t understand this. They will think that this man is doing some drama or he is just out to trouble me, they don’t accept a person with anxiety very easily.

One more thing I wanted to ask about that child you spoke about earlier. If you had used a different form of communication and maybe with other patients also, by just talking you may not be able to get what’s exactly going on so do you use any other forms of communication?

AA: If you notice today the awareness about mental health is not so much so as the various forms of expression. Like as I
said when we say we talk or we write, these are only two mediums whereas today depending on the kind of person that you are, you have various forms of movement therapy, you have art therapy which is again you with respect to drawing, colours, etc and you use different formats of things and then you start talking about it. A very good friend of mine is an art therapist. If you go to her studio where her clinic is, she has everything from straw to crayons, fiber pens, you name it, and she lets you in there and she says ‘do what you want’. It’s up to you to choose what you want to make, how you want to make it and how long you want to take to make it. And once you are ready she calls you in and asks ‘okay tell me what you have done?’ It’s a form by which you start talking. So we don’t know which button needs to be tapped for a person to start opening out. Again, today you see a lot of people doing what is called storytelling. Psycho trauma is utilised when you tell the person to enact, be various people in the family and you try to enact it. When you enact something or some thought that could be troubling you comes out. Or stories, stories are used even in corporations to get people to come out with their stresses. So various formats are used today, it’s not just art therapy.

I think you have answered the question but just for clarity we are asking. If one is feeling lonely does it mean that the person is undergoing some kind of depression or it depends on the duration, how long the person has been feeling this way?

AA: Okay, you understand the difference between being alone and lonely? You tell me there are times of the day when you just don’t want to talk with anybody, you want to be alone, that’s out of your choice where you decide you want time for yourself and I don’t want to interact with anybody. You want to be alone. If everybody leaves you and goes away how do you feel? Do you feel alone? No, you feel lonely because you have been sort of discarded by everybody and you have no one to go to and no one to talk to and after a point of time even if people are there they come and tell you ‘we are concerned’ you don’t really trust them all that much because you have already started having self doubt within so that’s the state of loneliness.

That is different from depression or that leads to depression?

AA: Very very gradually, when a person is lonely and if they don’t have something to focus on. Some people may not want to have a social life. There are people who are very happy with themselves. As long as they are able to do everyday activities they are fine. You don’t need to have friends, you don’t need to be available on Twitter or other social media. Your daily life should be normal, whatever, we can find as normal. Basically they should be able to function as we expect most people to. When you see a break in that, that’s when it is a cause of concern.
Do you think that this pattern is noticed in suicidal people also?

AA: Which is why I think Deepika started off the Live Love Laugh Foundation. There are thirteen reasons why. Those webisodes deal with suicide or whatever. They give you helplines which you may call in case you feel that you need to get some kind of emotional support.

You feel that you want to talk to somebody. All over India there is a group of ‘Befrienders’ where you can call them up and speak to them. In Chennai there is a place called ‘Sneha’ which is part of ‘Befrienders India’ where you can call up and speak. You find somebody who is not willing to open up to you but you feel that they may be okay to talk with somebody on the phone then you can give them the number. You can tell them that they can just call up and talk because the confidentiality is maintained, you are literally unknown so at least call up and speak to somebody. There is a recent thing called ‘Mood Cafe’, it’s an app which has been started by an IIT guy in Bombay. Here again you can call up and talk. So these facilities are available today in India which were not there before because now the general public is aware that they need people to talk to. Again, why has it come about? We can always trace it back to the breakdown of the family system. From joint families we all have become nuclear, we all have jet set life, so busy in our day today life we may not have people to talk to which is why it is important that you have these kinds of helpline or an app or whatever to help you out.

If you find someone has suicidal tendencies and you have tried everything like talking to them and they are not talking to you, you have suggested these helplines but they don’t want to open up. They are on their own so what do you do then because if they are having suicidal tendencies something can go wrong at any moment, like, something can trigger them and they can do something to themselves. Then what do you do?

AA: See the simplest thing you can tell them is that you are there for them. You need to tell them that you are concerned about them because there is change in their behaviour and the way they are managing their life. If the person is okay to talk to you then tell them that you are willing to talk to them at any point of time and I am genuinely concerned about you and don’t think you are alone. I am there with you so any time you want to knock on my door, come and speak to me. You have to give the assurance to that person that he or she is not alone. Whatever you say or don’t say whenever they feel the total hopelessness it may trigger off.

That’s where you can give them these helplines also, tell them that if you don’t want to speak to me why don’t you speak to
another person. There is Sneha in Chennai, or Mood Cafe, there are so many options available to you. Why don’t you think of talking to somebody? See there is only so much you can do, we can’t change people but at least that much you should try.

In legal terms at what point you can breach the patient’s confidentiality. Are there any situations where you have to breach?

AA: You may breach only if you think it is for the betterment of the patient. Again, if it turns out to be a legal case or a police case only then, otherwise normally we don’t. It is part of the ethics that you retain the confidentiality otherwise there is no credibility that I am left with, if I start telling everybody anything that happens here then nobody is going to trust that I might keep things to myself. Then nobody would come, my profession would be at an end.

If you feel that a person has a very high potential to harm someone, at that time can you breach or you cannot breach?

AA: So you can get assurances from these people. That’s why I said, let’s take for example that you come and tell me that you know you are having this kind of tendencies. As I talk to you I will probably give you my number, I will tell you that I am just a phone call away. More importantly I will tell you that I am there for you and I am concerned about you and you are free to call me anytime that this is happening. I will talk to you about what are the things that you can do to cope. We all have our coping mechanism in place. Simplest coping mechanism you all have is distraction. So when these things come you can distract yourself either with music or a walk or something. So what are the coping mechanisms that would interest you which can take your mind out of it and definitely get an assurance from you that at least till tomorrow you won’t do something to yourself. Call me up tomorrow just tell me you are okay or can I call you up and you tell me you are okay. So you continue this thing till that person sort of gets out of that mode.

What has been your career like? How did you come to choose this profession?

AA: I never started out as a counselor. I think when we are growing up our parentstalk to us what we are good at so I went on with what my parents told me. At that time it was the millennial move, you know, the computer move, the IT move. So I got into the move and I got out of the move very fast.

What made you come out of the move?

AA: I really didn’t like machines (interviewers laugh). You guys must have been very small when this happened in IT. All these things were really flying high and everybody was into Y2K, it was a big big thing then and computers were just not even entering homes. I never had a computer while growing up. It was the latest fad then, like, today everyone is into AI or
whatever it is. It was the latest thing and if you have a degree and an iota of intelligence you have to be there! So everyone went into MCA. I went to the same trodden path because everyone felt that that’s the growing field and you should be there. I worked for two years and I gave up. The amount of stress that you go through in that field is not a joke, it’s crazy. After a point even to go for a tea break you are sitting and sending messages to people as to who is coming and who is not coming and this was the limit. I decided I am not sitting with machines beyond a stage and this stress was really getting to me so I actually stepped back and said ‘okay if I don’t like this I need to do something I can’t sit at home’. So then you start working on what you actually like to do. I suppose today a lot of people do take sabbaticals, your generation of people do take the time off to figure out what they like, this was not the case 20-30 years back. Most people especially guys, if they join a job that’s for life. But today thankfully, people are more open to taking a break thinking about what really really interests them, what they would like to do, what they would like to wake up to do, what is their passion and everyday wake up and should want to go and work. If I find it boring and mundane then that’s not work that’s a burden.

Not knowing something which you are passionate about and doing something which you don’t like also has a very high contributing factor for depression or anxiety.

**AA:** You will not be successful. If I am going to do a routine job and my mind is not into it I am just doing it 9 to 5 okay, I am not going to be happy. If I am not happy people around me will not want to associate with me therefore my social life in the office is going to be very poor and my own happiness is going to be poor. I am going to be dragging my feet and going to the office everyday therefore what am I doing? I am just doing it to get a salary at the end of the day. Sometimes it could be a compulsion I may not have a way out. Many children today after their college take time out, they would have done graduation but you still you know you will say I’ll go trekking I will figure out what I want to do, not everyone’s got that privilege so you end up just going through the monotony of life, end up becoming a very unhappy person that’s it. If you are able to find happiness in something then please pursue it. That’s what is important to have a hobby, it’s important to do something even if you go into the depths of your field. Tomorrow you may go into research, you may go into working in a corporation, don’t think you have time. You know you probably have to be there by 8 o’clock and you come back home at night, tired. Please make time for some physical activity because in the coming future you guys are going to be sitting in front of laptops, iPads or whatever, basically, it’s more of a strain on your eyes. It’s very important that all these gadgets are kept aside for at least an hour a day and do some physical activity. I hope that’s a take away for you that you never give up physical activity for yourself.
Can you give us some advice about how to tackle different kinds of addiction?

AA: For addiction you have to take the person to the doctor. There is no way you can tackle it. You are not equipped, I am not equipped, even if you come to me also I will definitely put you onto a person who can help you.

So doctor, as in?

AA: It would have to be a psychiatrist.

So for an addict we need a very high level of expertise?

AA: Exactly. The kind of intervention that they do is not just talking to you or finding out or whatever because when you say addiction it has gone beyond the normal habit, it’s gone beyond the person’s control, therefore, to bring anything back to normalcy you may need medical intervention. Today we have from porn addiction to mobile addiction to all your gaming addictions, before it used to be only smoking or drinking or sexual fantasies. Now we have blown it in all directions, anything and everything.

...you are including gaming addiction also?

AA: In fact there is a center which has opened in Delhi I think, for phone addiction. It has not come to the south, NIMHANS may have one soon. Delhi was the first one to have a mobile addiction center, that is a mobile de-addiction center,

[laughs]

AA: It is picking up in India.

So did you have any cases of mobile addiction?

AA: No. Definitely not in CMI, I find most of you are quite happy to play and work on your comp or whatever that’s required. Many of you are not into this PubG or Clash of Clans, or whatever the latest craze is, I generally don’t know. That’s one way I think your hostel helps. You say ‘you are going to play’ you also sort of pulled out that helps.

Do you see any change in society, the way people are accepting different sexual orientations?

AA: All these things have to go till the grassroots level. It is going to take a lot of time. In India, to some extent we have started accepting it, again, when we say acceptance everybody is okay on paper but when it hits home are they ready? I don’t know. I may say all these nice things to you, tomorrow my son comes back and says ‘you know what, I like another guy’ I will probably take a step back and say ‘okay what’s happening?’ It’s always when it’s on your doorstep it’s not easy to accept.

Thank you for giving us your time!
लॉकडाउं न कवि
- राजेश्वरी नामर

लॉकडाउं एक, अनलॉक एक
लॉकडाउं दो, अनलॉक दो
लॉकडाउं, अनलॉक पांच
तक पहुंचते पहुंचते
हर एक व्यक्ति कवि बन बैठा
रह चलते हर जीव-जन्तु को रोक
अपनी कविताएं परोस दी
परेशान कर डाला पड़ासियों को
अरे में अपनी नहीं, बल्कि
उनकी
उनकी
और वो उनकी
कविताओं का जिक्र कर रही हूँ।
अफ़सोस
- राजेश्वरी जामर

अफ़सोस हम हिन्दी लिखना भूल गये
हलन्त या चन्द्रकला?
मात्रा, बड़ी या छोटी?
टाइप करते करते ...
भाषा से नाता ढूंग गया।
Hi folks! The Travel club of CMI is back with another story about their adventures. This time we organised a trek to Roopkund. It is a high altitude glacial lake in the Uttarakhand state of India. It lies in the lap of Trishul massif. Located in the Himalayas, the area around the lake is uninhabited, and is roughly at an altitude of 16,470 feet (5,020 m), surrounded by rock-strewn glaciers and snow-clad mountains.
We started from Delhi and took a train to Kathgodam. Our stay that night was at Wan village which is a tiring 200 kms from Kathgodam. We started early the next day and covered 14 kms to reach our camp site. Some of the first time trekkers were already disheartened after 1km but still reached the campsite after some motivation from veteran trekkers. The next day we trekked through beautiful rhododendron forests and reached the scenic alpine meadows of Ali bughyal. After enjoying the the view and taking plenty of photos we came back to our camp site. We even tried freshly prepared rhododendron juice. Our next destination was the famous Bedni bughyal. From Bedni Bughyal one can easily see prominent peaks like Trisul and Nanda Ghunti. We made our way to Patar Nachauni by covering some challenging terrain. Walking on icy slopes while wearing cramp-ons on our shoes was a new experience for all of us. Unfortunately we had to turn back from Patar Nachauni because of unfavourable conditions caused by excessive snowfall near the Roopkund Lake. Even though we could not complete the trek, it was a memorable experience for everyone. CMI travel club will return in the next edition of Para with another tale so watch out!
The swing

The labourers go on and on
Occasionally looking up
At the adjacent palatial house
The lovely swing in the balcony
Says, ’come, come’ as it moves
Ever so gently, ever so softly,
Answering the call of the breeze.

Here at the construction site
Bricks and cement and stone
Go on and on in an endless relay
Keeping pace with
The indefatigable concrete mixer.
Prof. Usha
Mahadevan

There the meticulous servant
Approaches the swing at ten everyday
Carrying a blank face and a clean cloth.
The swing resumes its leisure
After the good mechanical dusting.

The supervisor howls
And the labourers go on and on
Unmindful of their little ones playing around
In one part of the scaffolding is tied a rag
Well above the ground it swings
Dirty, hungry, half-naked
The children swing and laugh in utter glee.
Leonardo da Vinci
A home away from home...
About the cover

Last few months have been very difficult for all of us. We have lost many lives and suffered physically, mentally and economically. The cover of this magazine is dedicated to those who lost the battle against CoVID and to those essential services workers who risked themselves to save us.

The heartbeat on the cover is actually the graph of daily worldwide deaths due to Coronavirus, plotted according to the data from Worldometers. The left-most minimal point is the zero and the bar is at 7500 deaths mark.

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How was the magazine?

It takes a lot of planning, time and efforts to create a magazine. Your feedback helps us improve. Scan the QR code and share your experience.