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It doesn't matter who said it. The book in which I first read it ascribed it to Panini, the great Sanskrit grammarian. It goes like this in translation: *A word has a threefold dwelling—the throat, the head, and the heart.* It could go like this also: *A word has three dwellings...* Or like this: *A word has a triple dwelling...*

The first reading suggests that a word unravels itself, fold by fold, on three planes: the physical, the intellectual and the emotional. It is a sound, a concept, and a feeling. The order of occurrence is not fixed. You can hear a sound, which generates a certain feeling, and you give it the shape of a concept. Or you have a feeling, give it a conceptual form, and the sound follows. Or you have an idea, which evokes a feeling, and you give it a sound. Or you have an idea, for which you find a sound, and a feeling arises.

The order depends also on whether the word is spoken or heard. When it is heard, the first to occur is the sound. When it is spoken, the first to occur is an idea or a feeling. The listener, or reader, begins with the sound; the speaker, or writer, ends with it.

But that is not all. *A word has three dwellings.* So, a word may have any one of these dwellings. It may be a physical occurrence, a mental or intellectual happening, or an affective

ON WORDS AND DWELLING

"A dwelling is not just a place or a home. It is also a space, in which a word opens, resonates and moves. Considering there are three spaces in which this happens, a word is alive in so many ways. This gives it those infinite riches of ambiguity from which miracles fly off when the poetic mind is fire itself."

— Rajesh Sharma



they make music? Do they have rich, dense substance so kneaded into them that they sing? And are they radiant and do they feel weightless? In the words of the ageless old masters of Sanskrit poetics, we know the words in a poetic space to be right when they have *madhurya*, *ojas* and *prasada*. Sweetness, intensity+density, and light.

To dwell is to abide deeply, inwardly in.

But it is also to linger, to hinder, to delay, to lead astray—if we heed the symphony of the word's etymological acquisitions. Aren't they also ways of getting deeply, inwardly in? To abide, you wander inwardly, hold on and delay, long to go astray that you may go farther, arrive somewhere deeper. You want something to hinder your urge to escape the bright uncertain promises of dwelling. You crave something to overcome the lure to evade the call to abide and wait.

I have to wait in order to become what I must be. I must abide in my innermost necessity. To abide there I must abide, for now, in words.

To abide in words is to abide in them in the space of the heart. Words arising and received in the body and the intellect do not necessarily visit, much less abide in the heart—the quiet inner space where I go to find myself whenever I am lost. This is the space where words discover their integrity and meaning.

What if I should discover in my depths a longing to go across the void? Can a word be my ferryman?

There is a word in every word, a word in which every word is. A word that sounds no more than a sound but is not mere sound. The three dimensions fold back into it, though it is not itself a dimension.

You will hear it if you listen, death told the boy whose father had given him to death.

Given to death, Nachiketa was delivered to immortality through a word.



PANDORA

By Odilon Redon, Credits: National Gallery of Art

The Sādhana of the Scribe

Writing as Mindful Practice

In my sixteen years of teaching experience, I have recognized the common belief among students. Every novice writer wishes to attest to an epiphany, always supposing that something will descend from the heavens and only then he/she will be able to create a masterpiece. But I would like to highlight that with academic maturity, one naturally realizes that writing is not a magical thing; it also involves craft. And one who understands this has shed off the illusion: writing is not a vision or a discovery; it is practice and mindfulness.

Every blank page begins with emptiness, daring and caring to map a city you have never walked before. Similar to our classical traditions, writing is nothing less than *sādhana* (practice). It is the practice, just the way a singer practices every day and tunes the same *Sa* over and over again trusting in discipline, one's own hard work, and sustained belief.

The monkey-mind always hijacks the page when we wait for inspiration or the divine oracle. My first suggestion is to start from imperfection. For writing an essay, you might have little knowledge of the subject or might not have exact words to put your thoughts out. But that doesn't stop you. Your task is to write whatever little you know. Once you have accumulated all you know, then you will get your first draft ready for review, and here your journey of writing starts. Now I suggest you revisit your write-up

again and again. You will see the lacunas in your writing, and mostly at the end of the final draft, there may be no real identification remaining between what you had written the first time and what is now ready for publication.

By the end of the first draft you will observe how your hand moves across the page like a stream of water, without the pause of punctuation or a greater thought over the right word. Taking the poetic license on the flight of your imagination you just pour out, the rawness becomes the magical ingredient of your organic compost made out of an ordinary day before the language ripens on the page and in your mind.



When all five koshas are healthy and balanced, we feel physically fit, mentally calm, emotionally strong, and spiritually peaceful.

To train the eye or the mind to stay is to nurture concentration within oneself—the unruffled hushed quiet, almost watching like a hawk. Look at the vegetable vendor balancing a tower of tomatoes; check out the shrinking potato peels, notice the cooing of the birds. Literature is not found in colossal, majestic estates and acknowledgements. It urges and nudges your appeal of the humdrum, the uninteresting until its unspoken weight can be felt and

captured.

Good writing often fails before it starts because writers try to generate ideas, structure sentences, and correct grammar all at the same time. The brain cannot efficiently critique and create in the same breath. Hence, the craft begins with capturing thought without judgment. Listing or brain-dumping silences the internal editor, allowing hidden connections and authentic insights to surface. A core discipline of writing is subtraction. You do not write about everything you know; you select only the sharpest angle that serves the central theme. And I believe that breadth dilutes impact and depth creates resonance.

Once ideas exist, the writer transitions from creator to architect. Raw inspiration needs a container, or it will wander. Formulating a topic sentence or thesis statement defines the core promise made to the reader. Every subsequent sentence must either support, challenge, or expand that promise. An outline ensures thoughts unfold smoothly. It establishes cause and effect, transitions, and hierarchy—ensuring points do not trip over each other when drafted.

The primary goal of a rough draft is existence, not perfection. Drafting is the act of turning an outline into a living voice. Stopping to fix spelling, punctuation, or word choice during a draft breaks narrative momentum. The discipline here is endurance: keeping your hands moving and letting thoughts pour into sentences without flinching at rough phrasing. Skilled writers understand that the first draft is simply laying the clay on the wheel; shaping it comes next.

The Idea of Art

The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim. The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things.

The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography. Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.

Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope. They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only beauty.

There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.

The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.

The nineteenth century dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass. The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium. No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved. No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style. No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything. Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art. Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art. From the point of view of form, the type of all the arts is the art of the musician. From the point of view of feeling, the actor's craft is the type. All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors. Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital. When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with himself. We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely. All art is quite useless.

OSCAR WILDE

Excerpt from:
The Picture of Dorian Gray



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The real artistry happens after the draft is complete. The experts separate this final stage into two distinct passes:

Revising (Macro-level)

Looking at substance, tone, and logic. Does the paragraph deliver on its opening promise? Are there gaps in explanation, or fluff that can be cut? This is where peer feedback or fresh eyes prove vital, revealing blind spots the writer has grown used to.

Editing (Micro-level)

Polishing mechanics—syntax, rhythm, grammar, and word choice. This pass strips out passive phrasing and sharpens cadence, ensuring nothing distracts the reader from the core message.

And after many years of practice and attention you then heed to your subject, your writing gives way to *divani*—the deep, unsaid resonance of suggestion. Writing is fundamentally a recursive habit: write, assess, reshape, repeat. Approaching writing as an assembly of distinct stages removes the paralysis of the blank page, replacing anxiety with a predictable, repeatable system. Grab whatever you have to scribble your thoughts on as and when you immerse in your subjects willfully or intuitively. Do not wait for a muse to arrive. Sit down, pull up a chair, and let the practice become your awakening.

YOUNG SCRIBE

Artwork by: Mir Sayyid Ali , Page from an Album 1555-1556, Credits: LACMA



Editorial

Cultivating our intellectual capacity to discern desires, drives, emotions, and all that constitutes our humanity, the domain of aesthetics has consistently rendered flight to our imagination, disclosing a shared world of experience within which meaning can emerge. Not only has this capacity allowed us to engage critically with the world that we inhabit, but to develop an intellectual intuitiveness to be spontaneous in one's becoming. It allows Nature and Self to communicate with each other through symbols and words that enrich human life with an innate illuminative discursivity. The potency of the intellectual fervor that remains luminous in the works of arts continues to revive life from its materialist stagnation. The expression of the idea through which this self is revealed in its inspirational authenticity is indeed the very essence of an artistic vision.

With such underlying motivation that has always helped us to revive this innate inspirational journey, we continue to traverse forward with this latest publication of Makrand. With this new edition, the domain of aesthetics once again gets embodied in its creative meaning that we explore further in many articles and art works. Transcending the one-dimensionality of a cause-and-effect world, the intuitive and creative spontaneity in these articles continually expand the scope of our literary canvas. The philosophical reflexivity in these articles radiates illuminations of art catering to the elevated needs of human imagination. We look forward with hope and anticipation to unchain the expressive ingenuity that remains latent within untouched recursions.

Amandeep Singh

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We celebrate arrivals, but rarely acknowledge the journeys that lead us there.

There's a particular kind of silence that belongs only to waiting. It settles over us after we hit "Submit" on a job application. It follows us as we wait for exam results, hope for news that our loved ones are well, or check our phones for a message from someone special. In these moments, nothing remarkable seems to happen. The world carries on around us. People laugh, buses arrive, tea grows cold. And still, inside us, something feels different.

Maybe that's because we spend so much more of our lives waiting than we give it credit for. We wait for results, replies, recoveries, opportunities, and second chances. We wait to become successful, independent, and to know with certainty that everything is going to be okay. And somewhere along the way, we come to believe that waiting is just a phase we need to get through before life can actually begin. It's a peculiar illusion: the belief that life begins only when the waiting ends.

We celebrate arrivals, but rarely acknowledge the journeys that lead us there. We frame our graduation photos and remember the day we finally received our degrees, but rarely the sleepless nights spent wondering whether we had studied enough. We celebrate the first day at work, yet tend to forget the weeks of uncertainty that came before the appointment letter. Even self-confidence is admired more readily than the years it may take to overcome self-doubt. We notice the moment someone arrives, but often overlook everything it took to get there.

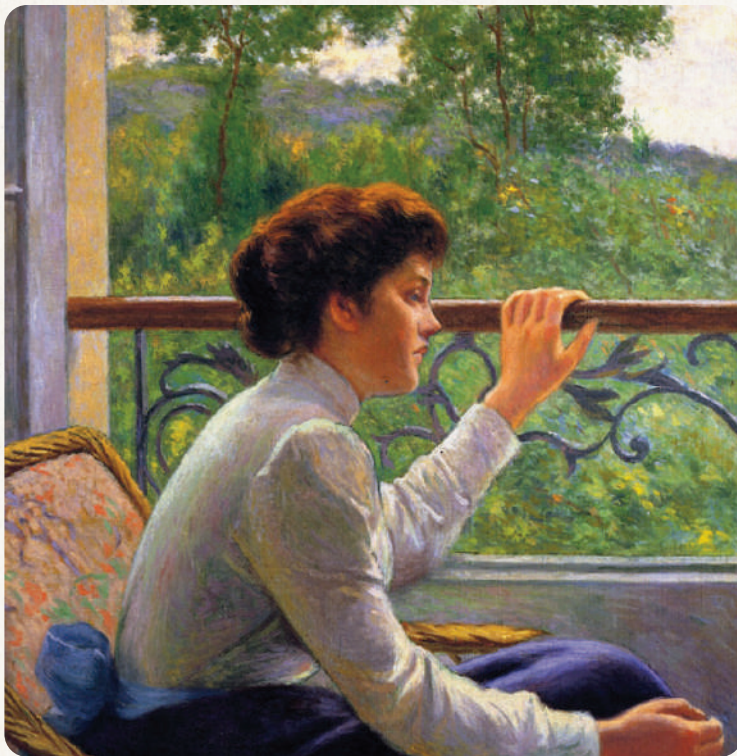
There are times when it feels as though we are standing still while everyone else is moving ahead. Friends get jobs. Someone gets married. Someone moves to another country. Someone seems to know exactly what they are doing with their life. We start to question whether we are falling behind. But life is not a race where everyone starts at the same point or follows the same timeline. Sometimes we are simply in a chapter that does not look very important while we are living it. We only understand its importance later.

Perhaps the moments we mistake for delays, or even impediments, are actually doing some of the most important work in our lives. Great literature has a remarkable ability to notice ordinary experiences before the rest of us realize they are worth noticing. Waiting is one such experience, and Samuel Beckett explored it in a play that dared to ask a simple question: What happens while we wait?

At first glance, *Waiting for Godot* might seem uneventful. Two men wait under a tree for someone named Godot. They have no idea when he'll show up or even if he exists at all. And even if he does arrive, they do not know what his arrival would actually change. Still,

What are we waiting for? *and what happens while we wait?*

We celebrate arrivals, but rarely acknowledge the journeys that lead us there. We frame our graduation photos and remember the day we finally received our degrees, but rarely the sleepless nights spent wondering whether we had studied enough.



WAITING

Art by Federico Zandomeneghi

they wait. They pass the time by talking, arguing, remembering, forgetting, joking and occasionally thinking about leaving, but never truly do.

Maybe that is why the play still feels familiar. We have all waited for our own version of Godot. A result. A letter. A person. An opportunity. We tell ourselves that once it arrives, everything will fall into place. But if someone were to stop us and ask, "Then what?", many of us might find ourselves at a loss for words.

Maybe that is Beckett's quiet observation. We spend so much time looking ahead that we often overlook what waiting is doing to us. While we are busy wishing for tomorrow, today quietly passes by. But waiting starts to make a bit more sense if we shift our perspective and ask a slightly different question: what motivates us to keep moving forward when the future is

uncertain?

That question brings us to Viktor Frankl, who explored questions of meaning and human purpose throughout his work. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he writes about his experiences in Nazi concentration camps and the importance of finding meaning even in the midst of suffering. Frankl's experiences were far removed from the everyday uncertainties we face while waiting for a reply or an important decision. His situation was unimaginably more severe. Still, his ideas give us something to think about when we face our own smaller periods of uncertainty. Maybe we don't always need to know when the waiting will end. Sometimes we just need something meaningful enough to keep us going through it.



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Someone might be reading in it. Someone might be worrying. Someone might be meeting a stranger who makes them laugh. Someone might receive difficult news and realise that they are stronger than they thought. Nothing about the waiting makes those moments less real. The same is true outside the literal waiting room.

But here's the thing: most of us have more options than Beckett's characters seem to have. We can walk away from the tree. We can start something else. We can decide that the thing we were waiting for is no longer what we want.

Maybe the hardest kind of waiting is not simply waiting for something to arrive, but recognizing when it is time to stop waiting for it. Sometimes, that means accepting that we cannot control what happens next. At other times, it means taking a step in a different direction instead of putting our lives on hold.

Sometimes waiting teaches us patience. Sometimes it teaches us what we actually want. Sometimes it makes us realize that the person, job, place, or future we imagined was not the answer we thought it would be. And sometimes, after waiting for a very long time, we find that we have changed along the way.

The person who finally arrives at the destination is not always the same person who started the journey.

Waiting is not simply the empty space between where we are and where we want to be. Something is happening during that time. We are living, choosing, changing, and sometimes discovering what actually matters to us. That might be the quiet work of waiting. It changes us without asking for our attention.

Rudraksha The Beads of Belief

What if I say that God can be remembered by a seed? Seeds made of tears that bloomed only after falling from the eyes of a god, the tears of utter grief and separation.

They say that it is easy to love someone, but it is hard to keep that love forever. We have been listening to the story of Sati since childhood but have never felt the intensity of her love. It is believed that when Sati's father, King Daksha, performed a fire ceremony to honour the divine, he invited all gods except Shiva. He deliberately excluded Shiva from the ceremony. When Sati heard this, she went into the fire and sacrificed herself. When Shiva heard this, tears ran from his eyes and fell upon Earth. Wherever they fell, Rudraksha trees grew. The name defines its meaning itself, as *rudra* means Shiva and *aksha* means eye, encompassing the eyes or tears of Rudra.

When tears bloom into a new beginning, it grows with the vastness of shade beneath which a believer can



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meditate. The tiny pearls of Rudraksha touch the peel of the body, carrying an everlasting tale that extends beyond the afterlife. Rudraksha alone is an emblem of Sati's suffering, Parvati's patience, and Shiva's sorrow, which transforms into a beginning and optimism. If the tiny sphere of a tear can become a sacred story, then what will our own tears become if we learn to change our regrets into compassion?

Kitchen: Archive of the Feminine

Memories live through smells, ingredients, and recipes handed down over the years. Before families kept photo albums, women shared stories of their recipes by making food with their own hands.

I believe that all memories are not found in photographs; some might live in the smell of cumin frying in hot oil, the taste of a sweet made by grandmother, or the sight of familiar hands rolling out dough on the kitchen counter.

I remember watching my mother in the kitchen as she made a recipe she knew by heart. She never used a recipe book, measuring cups, or weighing ingredients. She would add a pinch of this, a handful of that, and a bit more spice. It seemed like the ingredients came straight from her hands, as her hands were her measuring cups and not from any written instructions. When I asked how she knew the right amount, she simply said, "You just know."

Later, when I myself started cooking I realized that what she was doing was more than just cooking. She was carrying an archive. A kitchen is not a place for cooking the daily needs for a family but its something more. If I put it into another words or to say metaphorically, it acts as an archive, even without catalogues, labels, or shelves. Memories live through smells, ingredients, and recipes handed down over the years. Before families kept photo albums, women shared stories of their recipes by making food with their own hands. A recipe written on paper may tell us what to cook, but one remembered by heart puts taste in it.

I believe that for generations, our mothers have preserved their family heritage through food. Grandmothers used spices without measuring spoons; mothers learned to judge dough by touch, and daughters learned by watching. Much of this knowledge was never written down. It lived in gestures, like knowing how much salt to add or how a dish should taste when



PEELING APPLES
IN THE KITCHEN
Artwork by Elisabeth
Alida Haanen,
Credits: Artvee



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is becoming public. This raises an interesting question: what happens when the feminine culinary archive moves from the kitchen to the digital world? I think perhaps it will not disappear. It will even grow more.

A food archive is special because it always changes. When recipes are passed down, they often undergo changes. For example, a grandmother's recipe might get a new ingredient from her daughter and change it again in her granddaughter's kitchen. This does not mean tradition is lost. Sometimes, tradition survives because it is allowed to change. Today, a woman can inherit a recipe without feeling she must follow it exactly. She can keep it, give it a new twist, simplify it, reinvent it, cook for others, cook for herself, or even choose not to cook at all. Instead of seeing the archive as something she must live up to, she can now make it her own.

This may be what food and feminine memory really mean. It is not just about remembering the dishes women cooked, but also those they created, endured, celebrated, and shared. Whenever an old recipe is prepared, passed on, or remembered, the archive increases. Between the scent of spices and the familiar taste of a dish made 'just as she used to make it,' the past joins us at the table once more.

Photo credits: Pinterest





The Tree of Life Across World Art Traditions

Navjot Kaur

In almost all major traditions of the world, the creative and spiritual journey of a seeker is depicted as a Tree of Life. The tree is a link between the temporal and the cosmological, the immanent and the transcendental and the uncertain and the certain. Artistic details vary amongst traditions but one can decipher a general pattern. The roots spread into the soil depict one's given-ness, the foundation from which one seeks to grow. The trunk of the tree represents the firm resolve that the seeker undertakes to take care of himself. Having nourished itself by its given-ness, it now seeks to unravel its own mysteries. The branches, spread out as they are, often profusely, represent the relentless effort of the seeker to make most of what is given to him/ her in life, absorbs the many-ness and creates fruits of its labour that would serve each and all. The branches seek the sky, signifying the innate spiritual potential of the seeker and the presence of a higher divine order that awaits one's presence.

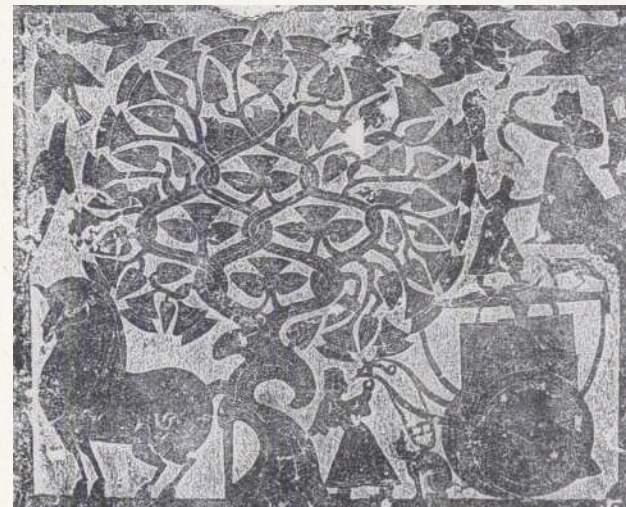
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Shajarat al- Kholoud

The Tree of Immortality (*Shajarat al- Kholoud*) is most widely considered the tree of life as indicated in the Quran. Sufi mysticism, however, also attaches importance to the Tree of Bliss (*Shajarat al-Tuba*), found in paradise which symbolises the ultimate spiritual state of the merging of the human soul with the divine.

The Tree of Immortality, Shaki khan palace interior, Azerbaijan
Art Source: Wikimedia Commons



Fusang Tree

The Fusang tree is considered as linking the earth with the heaven and sunrise. It is located in the mythical Tang Valley in the east, marking the point of sunrise each day, and hence symbolic of new beginnings. It also represents duality interwoven into one- ness.

Wu liang shrine relief depicting xihe, yi, and fusang tree
Wikimedia Commons



Tree Goddess

The Tree of Life is a personification of Nht(tree Goddess). It represents the mother who creates and nourishes. Her bestowal is an ever- ceasing one often depicted by the non- delimitation of the extended foliage.

Senndejem and his wife are receiving from Nut the water and food of immortality
Art Source: Arsgavis



Bodhi Tree

The Bodhi tree is a sacred fig with an expanded canopy symbolising the ever- expanding heart of the seeker for love and compassion along with firm strength, reiterating mindfulness and unshakable resolve for wisdom.

Pipal tree temple of Bodh Gaya depicted in Sanchi Stupa
Art Source: Biswarup Ganguly



Cross Tree

Christianity's Tree of Life (often depicted by the wooden cross on which Christ sacrificed) depicts the absolute necessity of divinity and the dependence on it of all genuine experiencing and thus living. Christ through his sacrifice re-opened the access to it which was denied to man due to his fall.

The Tree of Life (Scenes from the Life of Christ)
Artist: Pacino di Bonaguada



Kalamkari

In Kalamkari, the Tree of Life is rendered with intricate lines and flowing forms. The detailed branches, birds and animals reflect a dynamic and interconnected universe, expressed through the narrative style of this tradition.

Tree Of Life (Kalamkari), 20th Century, Jonnalagadda Niranjan, Natural dye on cloth
Art Source: Sarmava Arts Foundation



Tree of Life

Gustav Klimt's 'The Tree of Life' is a rich piece of art, symbolising the inter- connectedness of all that is, the bridging together of the worlds and the heavens, emphasising the cyclical nature of things (branches coiling back on themselves) and the balancing of the masculine and feminine energies. The single black bird (crow, raven) is a symbolic reminder of the inevitability of end. The embrace weaves within its meaning- fulfilment as well as the pious nature of new creation.

Central component of "Tree of Life" from the Stoclet Frieze
Art Source: Museum of Applied Arts



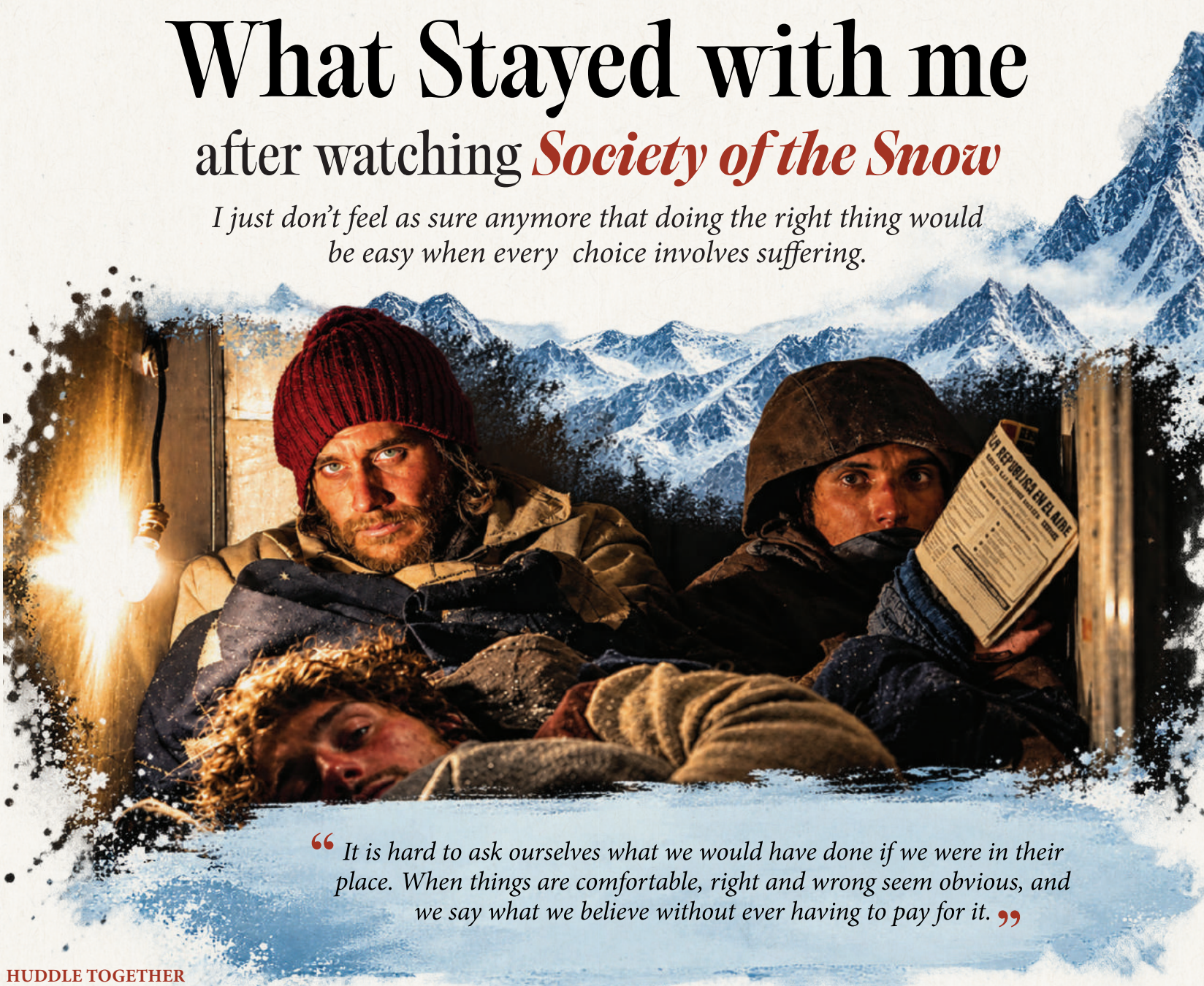
I didn't expect that a Spanish movie, *Society of the Snow* would stay with me the way it has. Some films fade by the time you finish watching but this one just kept lingering in my thoughts and made it almost unsettling. The film opens with a scene, young men travelling together on a plane to play rugby, enjoying themselves and not thinking much about what might come after. And suddenly their plane (Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571) crashes in the Andes and their lives enter the unexpected trial between life and death. The crash portrays the actual event which took place on 13 October 1972. In this crash, 29 out of the 45 people who were boarded died, including members of the Old Christian Club team and their loved ones. Only Sixteen made it through 72 days in the mountains, which is hard to picture even now.

If you know *Alive*, the 1993 film, you know the outline of this story already. But Bayona's adaptation of Pablo Vierci's book feels different. It is less about the fact of the survivors from the crash and more about portraying how their lives take on a different meaning when we try to understand the life of people behind the story, how they get along, how scared they were, the choices they had to make which weren't easy ones. Surviving is one piece of it. What came after was more than the survival itself.

Before the situation changed, they were just a bunch of rugby players and their kin talking, laughing and enjoying the trip. Then there was a sudden crash and they were left with the mountains as their only refuge. They were trapped in a place they couldn't even escape. At first, they waited for rescue until the search was called off. The scene takes a different turn when waiting only adds to their suffering and they realize that they'll have to find a way themselves.

As their food runs out, the survivors faced a choice none of them could have imagined making. Some of the people who died in the crash were lying out in the snow, and the survivors had to weigh eating their remains against dying of hunger, a choice which is almost impossible to imagine.

We cannot even explain how heavy this part would have felt by the survivors. The dead weren't strangers lying in the snow. They were their friends and teammates; survivors now dead had laughed with them earlier and they could still hear their voices. And eating their remains meant violating the boundaries many of us hold sacred. I think the film also intentionally shows how the survivors look like when they had stopped valuing the lives they'd lost. Watching them struggle with the decision I found it hard to say where the line between the living and the dead actually sat.



"It is hard to ask ourselves what we would have done if we were in their place. When things are comfortable, right and wrong seem obvious, and we say what we believe without ever having to pay for it."

HUDDLE TOGETHER INSIDE THE WRECKAGE

(Above) Survivors Fernando "Nando" Parrado (wearing the beanie), Roberto Canessa (holding the paper), and Anotnio "TinTin" Vizintin (with curly hair).

One way to look at what they did is through Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism, where what counts is the outcome. If eating the bodies gives some of them a shot at living, while refusing means more may die, then the choice kind of works itself out. But I kept wondering about that. It might

explain the choice and still miss what it means to be the one who makes the choice. Because these men were hungry, grieving and frightened, all at the same time, while still keeping the memory of the dead companions.

Another scene that stood out to me was the note that was found after Numa Turcatti died. In it he had written John 15:13 "There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's friends." This is exemplified from the scenes in which the survivors expressed their care for each other like sharing food with someone

weaker, tending to the injured, staying beside someone who's dying, etc. Numa didn't choose to die for anyone, his body simply couldn't endure the harsh conditions. But the words he left behind gave the survivors something to hold on to.

The film also leaves space for the question of faith. These men were Catholic, and being Catholic didn't keep them from being afraid or from doubting. They prayed too but nothing answered, at least not right away. This brought to mind that the film doesn't turn their suffering into an

argument about religion. The belief stays, the doubt stays, the fear stays all in the same place which only suggests that faith might sometimes mean continuing without knowing why.

It is hard to ask ourselves what we would have done if we were in their place. When things are comfortable, right and wrong seem obvious, and we say what we believe without ever having to pay for it. We state our values confidently and we're seldom asked to act on them when the choices could cost us something. But I don't think morality stops mattering in extreme

circumstances. I just don't feel as sure anymore that doing the right thing would be easy when every choice involves suffering.

Then there's Nando Parrado and Roberto Canessa, setting off across the mountains. It felt to me like one more piece of the same struggle, only stretched out further. They didn't know if they would find anyone to seek help or they would live long enough to find out. Perhaps only because back at the crash site others were counting on them and that's what kept them going.

When rescue finally came, their old lives had completely changed. Sixteen of them made it home, while their friends remained in the mountains, and the memories of what happened and of those they lost came home with them.

When the film ended, I walked away thinking about the price of survival more than life itself. What is it like to keep living after making decisions you never thought you could make? That one stayed with me, and the other unresolved question is what happens to the way you remember the people who died when your own life was saved partly by what they left behind? I don't have an answer, I'm not sure if there is one either.

I used Bentham to think through what the survivors went through, and it worked up to some point, but after sitting with the film for a while I am still unsure whether a theory could have a room for grief, faith, friendship, and hope as well as the burden that the survivors owe each other something. Maybe that's why their story remains unnerving for me. The film never seems to be asking me to praise them from a distance or condemn them for what they did. However, what I kept thinking about is how little we can know about what somebody else had to bear. By the time the film ended it left me with a bit more humility and about how sure I can really be that I'd do the right thing if my own life would have been at stake?

Om Dar-B-Dar Redefining 'Surrealism'

I believe that life, in its complete sense is difficult to comprehend, because it declines to follow a sequence or a linear flow. It can only be grasped or understood in fragments, in brackets, in the momentary experience of events.



SCREAMING "OUT OF COURSE"

(Above) Om navigates the film's unpredictable universe through his unconventional behavior.

There is something extremely uncomfortable about a thing that does not make sense to us. The more we urge for explanation the more we get confused. But we as enquirer do not stop there. We start a journey towards knowing the beginning, ending, and 'whys' of things. For me the film *Om-Dar-B-Dar* (1988) seems to be the biggest example for this longing to know. At first glance the film is bizarre, absurd, hilarious, and, at times, almost impossible to follow. Its images appear to have arrived from abstract and un-understandable dreams. It refuses to add unwanted 'surplus' to reality and tries to challenge and redefine 'surrealism' as a genre in itself. One finds it extremely difficult to connect dots and locate the film's narrative. Its unsettling, unfamiliar imagery makes it difficult to find our footing. And yet, if we look closely enough, certain threads begin to surface which I intend to unravel for you.

Anchored in Pushkar (believed to be the land of Brahma), *Om-Dar-B-Dar* constructs an absurd bridge between Hindu mythology and the language of India's freedom movement. The moment when Brahma's promise to turn Pushkar into heaven collapses, its residents launch a non-cooperation movement against their own creator. But how does one protest against life itself? By revolting against the breath. Everyone fusses with life by refusing to breathe whereas Om, one of the central characters, who sustains his life by holding his breath underwater to fish coins out from a sacred pond, rebels by attempting to breathe inside water and dies. Even the peculiar logic behind the very name of the character is insane, astrology predicts his death at seventeen, so his father names him Om, hoping Yama won't dare put God's own syllable on his death list. From Brahma-the creator, the film moves to Atlas, the Greek Titan which is punished to carry the heavens. The connection is more than mythological

name-dropping: while Atlas bears the weight of the universe, the character in the film endlessly cycles through planetary motion on a bicycle. This bicycle highlights itself throughout the film and becomes the image that binds together its characters, as life catches them in cycles they cannot escape. Brahma is the creator, Atlas is a bearer, and Om attempts to defy the laws of the world. The film allows mythology to collide with the non-linear complex of contemporary life, with its formulation, ambitions, institutions, and weird little arrangements of power. It refuses to keep the narrative in already made, assigned categories.

The film makes no attempt to crown a protagonist. It abruptly wanders from one life to another, letting their lives speak

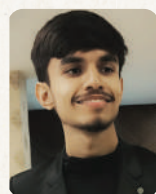
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The claim that the film redefines surrealism as a genre unravels itself by shifting the question towards whether each moment in the narrative should make sense on its own terms or its sequences should approach a climax which gives it meaning.

without one drowning out the other. Jagdish, who is in love with Om's sister Gayatri, asks her, why doesn't she pursue a BA correspondence for her independence. She replies, "I learned to ride a bicycle, that's it", Jagdish distinguishes freedom from independence, but Gayatri then turns the question back on him. The exchange reveals her peculiar relationship with freedom. Ironically, her younger brother throws her bicycle into a well, destroying her means of freedom. Yet the bicycle also evokes the film's larger imagery of life's cyclical entrapment. Is her brother taking away her freedom, or unknowingly releasing her from another cycle of *maya*? However, the contradiction remains. Sitting in the all-male section of a cinema hall, feeling slightly uncomfortable yet liberated, or agreeing to ride with an unknown man in the first proposal Gayatri's identity emerges through momentary choices rather than a larger long-term ambition. Even her eventual refusal to associate herself with Jagdish in the end after his self-annihilation testifies to the same. She decides to escape instead to put an end to one's own existence. No matter how intimately entwined he may be with her life, she resists the expectation that another person's tragedy must dictate or lead her choices. Gayatri's freedom exists in fleeting

acts of agency. Independence never mattered but at last she finds it anyway, without seeking, simply by insisting on feeling free even when the world keeps throwing the bicycle away.

I think through its characters, situations, and imagery, the film taps into the spirit of the places via grounded myths, folklores, idioms, and everyday choices, capturing the shifting patterns of human behaviour. In doing so, it documents the city and its people in all their lived reality. The claim that the film redefines surrealism as a genre unravels itself by shifting the question towards whether each moment in the narrative should make sense on its own terms or its sequences should approach a climax which gives it meaning. I believe that life, in its complete sense is difficult to comprehend, because it declines to follow a sequence or a linear flow. It can only be grasped or understood in fragments, in brackets, in the momentary experience of events. History, philosophy, aesthetics, politics, propaganda, myths, newly emerging technology and religion do not take turns to exist independently; they coexist in an abnormal hodgepodge. Surrealism being the genre closest to life in its rawest form therefore can not envelope the narrative in linearity. It keeps jolting you, throwing a dozen things at you all at once, then suddenly slows down into nothingness, bending time between stillness and frantic acceleration. Therefore, every second, every frame in the film carries a flavour, what Indian aesthetics names as *rasa*. True surrealism, therefore, does not lie in constructing an order that becomes comprehensible in the end or to make the story more relatable to our everyday life whereas *Om Dar-B-Dar*'s fragmented, recycled, completely rejected images evoke what might be called *Tiraskṛta rasa*: an aesthetic pleasure born from what we normally disperse. Exactly, this is where the film's anti-familiarity develops: dialogues, visuals, music, sound effects, art, colours, do not go hand in hand with one another, they collide-unite strangely, and produce discomfort, which ultimately matters and makes the viewer pay heed to something which is hard to follow. By disturbing that very sense of familiarity, *Om-Dar-B-Dar*'s classical presentation of surrealism refuses to become another machine, another system which produces the orthodox, serving us beyond what we already know how to make sense of. The film released in 2014, arrived 26 years after its compilation to the audience. One can wonder how far Indian experimental-underground cinema has travelled since, and who even today, dares to take its absurdity further.



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Because of the success of science, there is, I think, a kind of pseudoscience. Social science is an example of a science which is not a science; they don't do [things] scientifically, they follow the forms-or you gather data, you do so-and-so and so forth but they don't get any laws, they haven't found out anything. They haven't got anywhere yet-maybe someday they will, but it's not very well developed, but what happens is on an even more mundane level. We get experts on everything that sound like they're sort of scientific experts. They're not scientific, they sit at a typewriter and they make up something like, oh, food grown with, er, fertilizer that's organic is better for you than food grown with fertilizer that's inorganic-may be true, may not be true, but it hasn't been demonstrated one way or the other. But they'll sit there on the typewriter and make up all this stuff as if it's science and then become an expert on foods, organic foods and so on. There's all kinds of myths and pseudoscience all over the place.

I may be quite wrong, maybe they do know all these things, but I don't think I'm wrong. You see, I have the advantage of having found out how hard it is to get to really know something, how careful you have to be about checking the experiments, how easy it is to make mistakes and fool yourself. I know what it means to know something, and therefore I see how they get their information and I can't believe that they know it, they haven't done the work necessary, haven't done the checks necessary, haven't done the care necessary. I have a great suspicion that they don't know, that this stuff is [wrong] and they're intimidating people. I think so. I don't know the world very well but that's what I think.

Doubt and Uncertainty

If you expected science to give all the answers to the wonderful questions about what we are, where we're going, what the meaning of the universe is and so on, then I think you could easily become disillusioned and then look for some mystic answer to these problems. How a scientist can take a mystic answer I don't know because the whole spirit is to understand-well, never mind that. Anyhow, I don't understand that, but anyhow if you think of it, the way I think of what we're doing is we're exploring, we're trying to find

"Science Which Is Not a Science..."

You see, one thing is, I can live with doubt and uncertainty and not knowing. I think it's much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers which might be wrong.



ASTRONOMER BY CANDLELIGHT

Art By Gerrit Dou (1613 - 1675),

Credits: Museum East Pavilion

everything, so be it, that would be very nice to discover.

If it turns out it's like an onion with millions of layers and we're just sick and tired of looking at the layers, then that's the way it is, but whatever way it comes out its nature is there and she's going to come out the way she is, and therefore when we go to investigate it we shouldn't predecide what it is we're trying to do except to try to find out more about it. If you say your problem is, why do you find out more about it, if you thought you were trying to find out more about it because you're going to get an answer to some deep philosophical question, you may be wrong. It may be that you can't get an answer to that particular question by finding out more about the character of nature, but I don't look at it [like that]. My interest in science is to simply find out about the world, and the more I find out the better it is, like, to find out.

There are very remarkable mysteries about the fact that we're able to do so many more things than apparently animals can do, and other questions like that, but those are mysteries I want to investigate without knowing the answer to them, and so altogether I can't believe these special stories that have been made up about our relationship to the universe at large because they seem to be too simple, too connected, too local, too provincial. The earth, He came to the earth, one of the aspects of God came

to the earth, mind you, and look at what's out there. It isn't in proportion. Anyway, it's no use arguing, I can't argue it, I'm



Richard Feynman

Excerpt from: *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out*

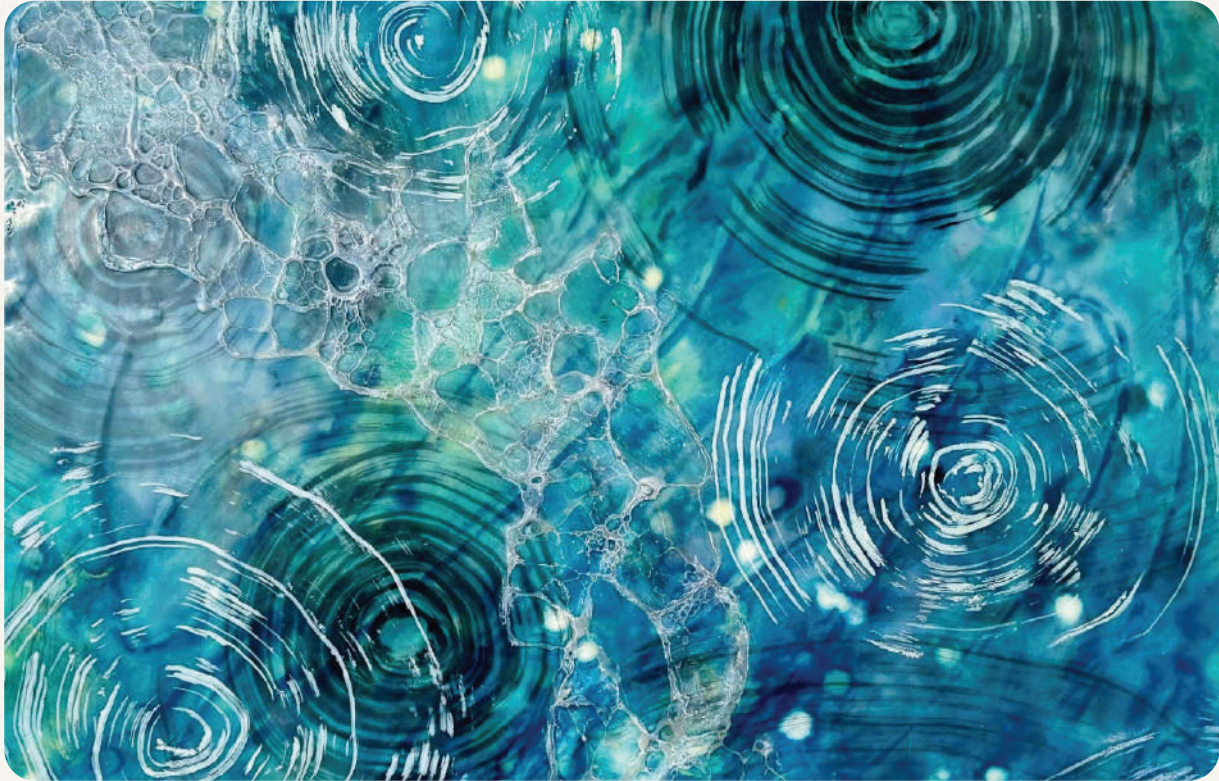
just trying to tell you why the scientific views that I have do have some effect on my belief. And also, another thing has to do with the question of how you find out if something's true, and if all the different religions have all different theories about the thing, then you begin to wonder. Once you start doubting, just like you're supposed to doubt, you ask me if the science is true. You say no, we don't know what's true, we're trying to find out, and everything is possibly wrong.

Start out understanding religion by saying everything is possibly wrong. Let us see. As soon as you do that, you start sliding down an edge which is hard to recover from and so on. With the scientific view, or my father's view, that we should look to see what's true and what may be or may not be true, once you start doubting, which I think to me is a very fundamental part of my soul, to doubt and to ask, and when you doubt and ask it gets a little harder to believe.

You see, one thing is, I can live with doubt and uncertainty and not knowing. I think it's much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers which might be wrong. I have approximate answers and possible beliefs and different degrees of certainty about different things, but I'm not absolutely sure of anything and there are many things I don't know anything about, such as whether it means anything to ask why we're here, and what the question might mean. I might think about it a little bit and if I can't figure it out, then I go on to something else, but I don't have to know an answer, I don't feel frightened by not knowing things, by being lost in a mysterious universe without having any purpose, which is the way it really is so far as I can tell. It doesn't frighten me.

Boundary Line between Classical and Quantum Behaviour

The interesting thing is that the particles themselves have not changed; what has changed is the way they occupy space and interact with one another.



Suppose I have two balls, ball 1 and ball 2, and I throw them together. After five minutes, I try to catch them. I can easily identify which is ball 1 and which is ball 2, even if the balls look exactly the same, because I can trace back the paths they have followed. This is possible because the balls have definite trajectories. If the balls collide with each other somewhere along the way, ball 1 will never become ball 2 because they are classical objects.

Now, instead of two balls, suppose I have two electrons, electron 1 and electron 2, one in each hand. Imagine a hypothetical scenario in which I throw the two electrons together and return after five minutes to check which is electron 1 and which is electron 2. Will I be able to distinguish between them if they have collided along the way? Can I determine the paths followed by the electrons? The answer is NO! It is not so easy.

When we analyse the situation

quantum mechanically, we encounter wave-particle duality. The electrons we have thrown behave like particles, but at the same time, they also behave like waves. The wavelength of these waves is given by de Broglie as h/p , where h is Planck's constant and p is the momentum of the particle. The famous Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle tells us that the position and momentum of a particle cannot be simultaneously measured with absolute precision. In our case, this simply means that if two electrons are moving very fast, we cannot precisely determine both the position and the velocity of an electron at the same time.

If we predict the velocity precisely, the position of the particle will remain uncertain. We may know the spread, or the fuzzy width, within which the particle can be found, but we cannot predict its exact position within that spread. Mathematically, for an ideal system or an ideal gas of particles in thermal equilibrium at temperature

T , the spatial width is characterised by the thermal de Broglie wavelength, $\lambda = h/\sqrt{(2\pi mkT)}$, where k is a constant called the Boltzmann constant. It represents the average size, or fuzzy width, of a particle's wave packet.

For a particle with a higher mass, such as a ball, the thermal wavelength is very small (of the order of 10^{-34} metres). However, the centres of mass of the balls are centimetres apart and can never achieve a closeness of the order of their wavelength because the uncertainty in the positions of the atoms at the surface of a ball is about 10^{-11} metres. For lighter particles, such as electrons, the wavelength is larger and plays a very important role. The evolution of this wave with time is governed by the famous Schrödinger wave equation, and the solutions to this equation are called wavefunctions. Wavefunctions

are physically abstract, but the square of their absolute value represents the probability density of finding a particle in a given space or region.

Now, let us return to the electrons. They exist in fuzzy clouds described by wavefunctions, or more precisely, by the squares of their absolute values. There is no definite line or path along which they travel. The uncertainty accompanies them. Wavefunctions are like waves that describe their positions. Electrons are no longer simply particles; they exhibit wave-particle duality. When they behave like waves, an electron can be found anywhere within its wave packet. Its position is described in terms of probabilities.

When two electrons come closer, their fuzzy clouds and wavefunctions come closer as well. The probability of finding electron 1 in the second electron's fuzzy cloud can become the same as the probability of finding it in its own cloud. We can relate this to the ripples created in water when we throw pebbles into a pond. Suppose we throw two small pebbles into a pond. Concentric waves form, and if the points where the pebbles were thrown are close to each other, these waves meet. They do not simply bounce off each other; instead, they merge, add up, or cancel out. After they overlap, we cannot tell which water molecule has moved in which direction. Similarly, when two quantum particles come closer, we cannot distinguish between them. If their wavefunctions overlap, each particle's possible position can extend into the space occupied by the other. This indistinguishability marks the boundary between the classical and quantum worlds.

The question arises: how close can the particles come to remain indistinguishable? We can think of a minimum volume in three dimensions in which a particle can exist, such that no other particle can occupy the same quantum state. This volume would simply be λ^3 , which we can call a quantum state. The total number of available states, or the total number of particles that can occupy a volume V without overlap, would be V/λ^3 . In a unit volume, the number of available states would be $1/\lambda^3$. This is called quantum concentration or maximum quantum capacity.

We can define the quantum degeneracy parameter, or density ($\lambda^3 \times N/V$), in phase space, which is a six-dimensional space consisting of three position coordinates and three momentum coordinates. It is the actual number of particles per unit volume (n = number of particles per unit volume = N/V) divided by the maximum quantum capacity. Physically, it tells us the average occupancy of the available quantum states in phase space, or how many particles are packed into a single



Pawanpreet Kaur

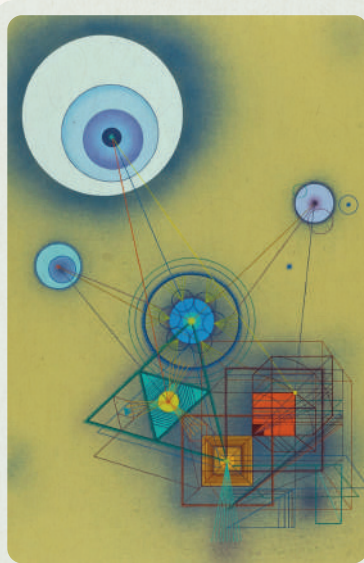
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coordinate-and-momentum block of volume h^3 .

If the density is low, n is much less than $1/\lambda^3$. This means that the actual number of particles is smaller than the number of particles that can occupy a unit volume, so there will be little overlap. On the other hand, if the density is high, the number of particles becomes much greater relative to the available quantum capacity. This leads to overlap between the wavefunctions, and the system must be treated quantum mechanically. The greater the number of particles, the higher the density, the smaller the distance between the particles, and the greater the overlap.

When the density is low, for example, there may be a thousand quantum states available for every particle. In this case, the particles are spread out, isolated, and highly distinguishable. The system then behaves classically. On the other hand, when the density is high, the wave packets are forced closer together and overlap, making the particles indistinguishable. Here, the parameter that determines whether the system behaves quantum mechanically or classically is the density.

In this way, the boundary between classical and quantum behaviour is not a fixed line separating two different worlds. It depends on how closely the particles are packed and how much their wavefunctions overlap. When particles are far apart, their individual identities can be distinguished, and the system behaves classically. As the density increases, their wavefunctions begin to overlap, and the quantum nature of the system becomes important. The interesting thing is that the particles themselves have not changed; what has changed is the way they occupy space and interact with one another. This is where the classical picture of individual, distinguishable objects begins to break down, and the quantum picture takes over.



Eye in The Sky

I have remarked that the materialist, like the madman, is in prison; in the prison of one thought. These people seemed to think it singularly inspiring to keep on saying that the prison was very large. The size of this scientific universe gave one no novelty, no relief. The cosmos went on for ever, but not in its wildest constellation could there be anything really interesting; anything, for instance, such as forgiveness or free will. The grandeur or infinity of the secret of its cosmos added nothing to it. It was like telling a prisoner in Reading gaol that he would be glad to hear that the gaol now covered half the county. The warder would have nothing to show the man except more and more long corridors of stone lit by ghastly lights and empty of all that is human. So these expanders of the universe had nothing to show us except more and more infinite corridors of space lit by ghastly suns and empty of all that is divine.

~G.K. Chesterton

Art by Emil James Bistram
Credits: LACMA



Curated Givenness

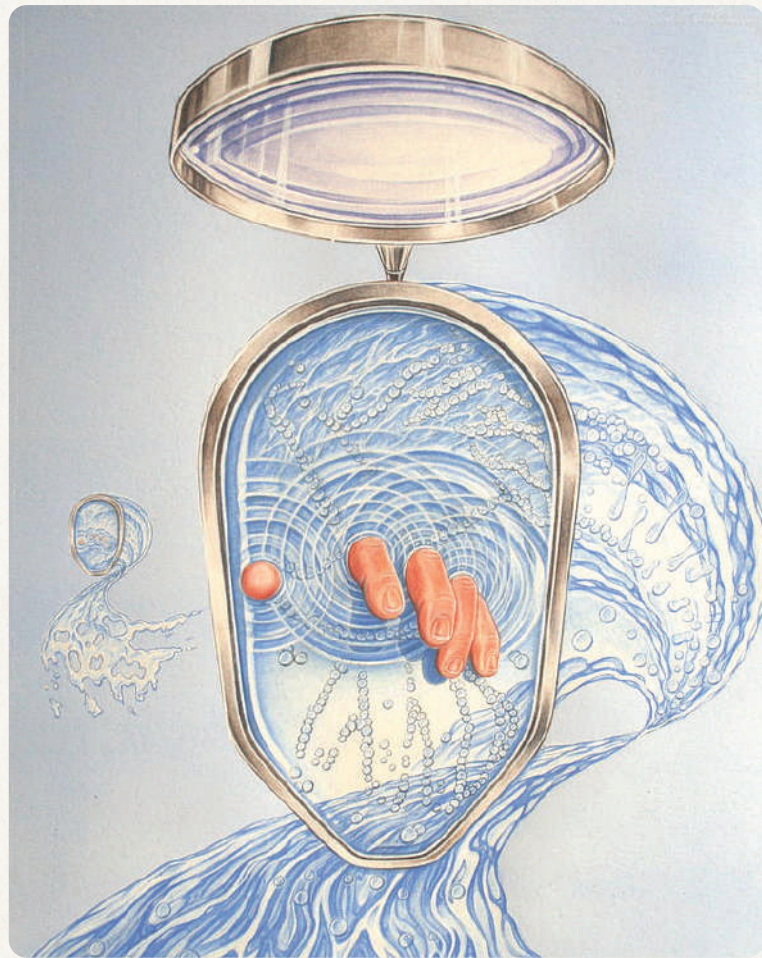
Directing Attention, Shaping Reality

Representation becomes powerful when it occupies the givenness through which reality is encountered, making a selected image of the world appear to be the world itself. The problem, then, is not only its unequal visibility; it is the possibility that a partial representation captures our experience of the whole.

Media—traditional and digital—curates our givenness. By givenness, I mean the way the world appears to us before we start thinking about it—the immediate sense of what feels real, important, and present in our everyday experience. What makes this process concerning is that curation can capture how we experience reality, making a particular version of the world seem more real and important while other possibilities fade from our attention. Through curated givenness, the reality presented to us can gradually come to be understood as reality itself, rather than as one representation of the world among others.

The concern of curated givenness is not limited to social media, because our experience of reality is formed through multiple mediated forms—digital, traditional, academic, cultural, visual, and institutional. These forms differ in their methods and tools, but they can participate in the same process: selecting what becomes visible, familiar, meaningful, and therefore experientially real. Examining these different forms is therefore necessary to understand how curation operates across different dimensions of human experience, rather than treating it as a problem specific to one medium. The central concern is how mediated forms of reality shape what we come to know, perceive, and live as reality.

Taking the example of geography, algorithms make us think, especially as Indian users, that the whole world is made up of only a few countries—not even continents, but a few countries such as the USA, top European nations, and some rich Gulf countries as well. What this does is limit our understanding of the world, making it appear as if these few countries constitute the whole world, while the rest of the world recedes into forests, barren land, or oceans. The under-representation has caused a limitation in understanding through the process of exaggerated representation, where what appears repeatedly begins to define what counts as the world itself.



PIERCING THROUGH

Art by Eric De clerq, Credits: fineartamerica

When a handful of powerful countries occupy our attention, they begin to appear representative of the world itself, while the societies that receive less visibility recede from our everyday understanding. The relative absence of less-visible societies does not necessarily make us forget that they exist; rather, their existence becomes less immediate and less meaningful to us. We may know that the world contains many

countries, cultures, and histories, yet experience its significance through a much narrower representation.

This condition closely echoes the insight of Guy Debord, who argued that modern life is increasingly mediated by representations, where what is seen begins to replace what is directly lived. Representation becomes powerful when it occupies the givenness through which reality is encountered, making a

selected image of the world appear to be the world itself. The problem, then, is not only its unequal visibility; it is the possibility that a partial representation captures our experience of the whole.

This same structure extends from geography to ideology, as social media platforms promote certain narratives of freedom, justice, and duty while undermining others. Shoshana Zuboff argues that surveillance capitalism transforms human experience into behavioral data to “shape, predict, and modify human behavior for profit.” Tarleton Gillespie similarly shows how platforms curate information and “shape the contours of public discourse.” Zeynep Tufekci observes that algorithmic systems are designed to maximize engagement, often amplifying “emotionally charged, sensational, or polarizing content,” which in turn “can shape what people see and believe.” Taken together, these accounts show that social media platforms do not merely host diverse perspectives but participate in organizing a normative horizon in which certain understandings of freedom, justice, and duty are elevated, while others are rendered marginal or suspect.

A significant example can be seen in the mediated representation of Islam, which, given its global presence, is disproportionately subjected to reductive framing in the form of Islamophobia. Islamophobia is a concept that is an academically accepted topic, and still faces the process of under-representation—whether at the academic, media, or societal level. Yes, this is still considered a least-favoured topic across these disciplines. As Edward Said writes, “Islam is peculiarly covered in the Western media,” often through “a small number of fixed images and clichés,” indicating how repetition narrows what can appear. Here, repetition does not merely reproduce a particular representation; it can make that representation increasingly familiar, allowing it to acquire the appearance of normality. This repeated framing produces a patterned visibility that gradually stabilizes as common sense. Islamophobia, in this sense, emerges less as a fixed ideology and more as an effect of repetition, where selective exposure shapes perception and can even lead individuals to view their own traditions through a lens of critique or devaluation.

What becomes clearer at this point is that the issue is not simply about what we know, but about what we are able to live as a meaningful experience. Although we know for a fact that the world consists of seven continents, with many countries and ethnicities, and that we live in a universe where multiple levels of realities exist, but the over-representation of certain elements captures our givenness,

allowing dominant representations to shape our knowing the world while other possibilities recede from lived experience. Thus, what is repeatedly encountered becomes immediate, while what is merely known remains distant from our being-in-the-world.

In this way, curated givenness does not erase knowledge but pushes it into the background, where it exists only as information, no longer capable of being meaningfully lived. This tension can be further clarified through Martin Heidegger's distinction between the ready-to-hand (*zuhandenheit*) and the present-at-hand (*vorhandenheit*), where knowledge of plurality remains abstract and informational, while algorithmically curated information becomes experientially dominant, effectively reversing the relation between reality and representation. The result is an ontological dissonance within *Dasein* itself, where one knows the multiplicity of the world yet inhabits a diminished experiential horizon structured by repetition.

This becomes even more visible at the level of everyday perception, where repeated exposure quietly shapes how we feel and respond. Even if one truly believes that all people are equal, something else is happening in the background. When we keep seeing the same kind of faces again and again—actors in films, influencers on Instagram, models in advertisements—they begin to feel normal without our awareness. Repetition can therefore establish familiarity before conscious judgment, making certain appearances function as implicit standards of normality.

And once something feels normal, it starts to guide our reactions. A person may consciously reject any racial hierarchy, yet still find themselves more attracted to lighter features, or thinking a white presenter seems more professional, or trusting a foreign (white) YouTuber more than someone local saying the same thing. Even in everyday life, this appears in subtle ways—people recommending skin-lightening products or praising a child for having fair skin as if it were an achievement. Fanon's account of racialization reveals how racialized norms become internalized, splitting conscious belief from lived perception: “the black man has two dimensions... one with his fellows, the other with the white man.” Through repetition, racialization becomes embodied, making racialized standards feel natural even without explicit belief. What operates here is not conscious choice but repetition, where what is seen most often begins to feel right, while what is less visible begins to feel less important or less desirable.

These disciplines do not merely present information but shape the horizon through which life is understood, often leading traditionalists

to accept modern narratives as truer than their own and criticize their traditions. As Foucault notes, “each society has its regime of truth... the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true.” Through structured visibility, what we repeatedly encounter shapes what we expect to see and, ultimately, what we choose to look at. The curation of givenness operates within an algorithmic bubble, narrowing our experience of reality by allowing particular representations and values to dominate while alternative realities recede. Repetition and familiarity reinforce this capture, making selected realities feel natural and self-evident. Consequently, our expectations and preferences are shaped by the very conditions through which the world appears to us, leading us to choose what the algorithmic bubble has already made familiar.

This narrowing of the horizon can also be understood through Byung-Chul Han's idea of the “inferno of the same.” For Han, genuine encounter with the Other creates the possibility of self-transcendence and self-transformation, because alterity interrupts the familiar and takes the self beyond itself. This is also where Eros becomes important: Eros is directed toward what is other, toward what cannot be completely absorbed into the self. When curated givenness repeatedly returns us to what already fits our preferences, however, this movement toward alterity is weakened. We remain within the same, where desire is continually reinforced but the possibility of transformation through encountering the Other becomes increasingly distant.

And so, the circle closes. We are shown a particular world until it becomes familiar, and because it has become familiar, we begin to choose it; because we choose it, it is shown to us again. Slowly, the world we were given becomes the world we seem to have chosen. This is perhaps the quietest power of curated givenness: not that it tells us what the world must be, but that it can curate the very conditions through which the world appears to us, making the reality it repeatedly presents feel like the world we naturally wanted.



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Religious scriptures, dictionaries, books, and scholarly writings have always helped people find solid answers to their questions. The only thing that has changed is the way of accessing that knowledge. Earlier, we used to search through several sources, but now we can get our things done in seconds. Our questions started becoming more personal. We are asking AI about faith, scripture, religious practices, morality, and what we should believe or do and what we shouldn't. Within seconds, we receive our responses that bring so much information together in a way that feels like we're talking to someone genuine. People are coming up with questions like: What does my religion say about this particular situation? What does this verse mean? Is this practice permissible/right, and what about its background? What should I believe?

Any AI tool, such as ChatGPT or Claude, can find religious texts, interpret them, and explain even unfamiliar terms and languages. They summarize what scholars, muftis, pandits, or gurus are saying about it and bring convincing information together in seconds. And all this raises a serious concern about its authority.

We know how social media and its impact are booming and how people are super active on it regardless of what's happening in their lives. Consider a person having thousands or millions of followers, yet he holds no scholarly or institutional authority traditionally related to religious guidance, but still people are taking that particular person seriously and following him deeply in the core. It might be possible that people

get attracted to the way they explain or present their point in a clean, aesthetically pleasing way, with full facts and figures.

Social media is all about who gets heard and seen. We were already living through a change in religious authority before AI arrived. Undoubtedly, it has a great positive impact too because now we have a greater number of people talking and taking a stand on their religion publicly. But it does create a lot of interpretation among the believers, too.

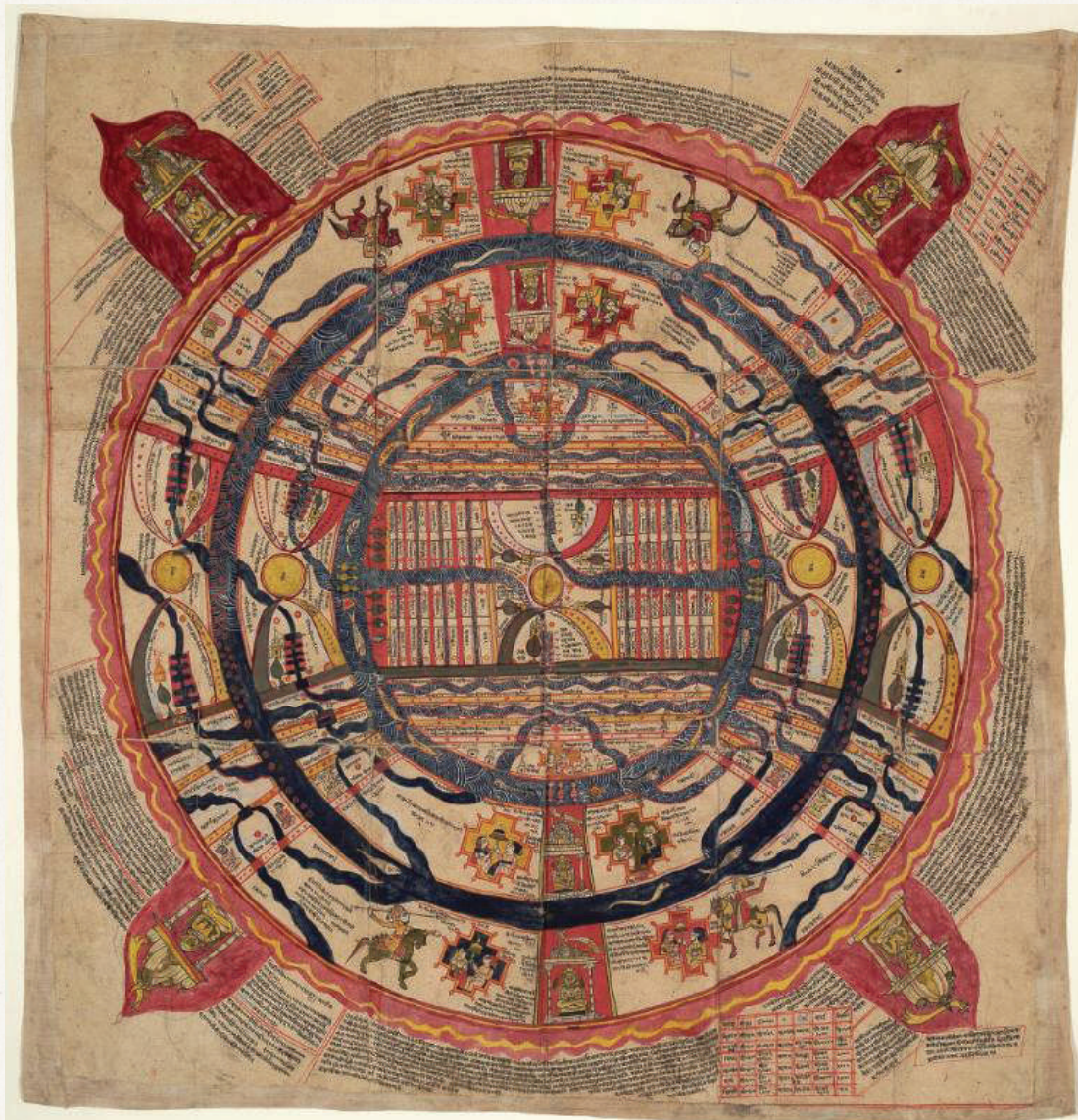
All this, in turn, gives a good number of people to AI to confirm those interpretations. Think of it like what happens when an individual turns to AI to learn about religious interpretations, but the deciding factor hangs around which interpretation to trust? This is the most ignorant problem.

The ability to speak about religion doesn't mean you have the authority to speak for a religion. That is what AI is doing. Knowing what religion says is completely different from interpreting it, applying it, or possessing the authority to guide someone through it. High visibility doesn't prove the reliability of an explanation.

As far as I've noticed, it is easy to miss the flaws while reading an AI-

generated religious answer because you'll end up receiving something that is remarkably convincing and closer to the interpretation when asked. The answer may appear with fully quoted scriptures

and scholarly mentions while connecting it with historical contexts, comparing what recent scholars are saying, and then interpreting it in its own



JAIN MANDALA
Credits: Cornell
University

way. It feels convincing or complete because no pieces are left to question, and it further leads to a readable conclusion.

Researchers have begun examining this situation by testing AI systems on religious material and on how they handle knowledge, belief, and facts. The following research has given us a solid reason not to ignore this distinction.

A 2025 study in the *Journal of Digital Islamic Research* titled “Artificial Intelligence in Islamic Guidance: Assessing Chatbot Performance and Jurisprudential Adherence” tested 5 Islamic chatbots with 80 questions on Islamic law. The Qur'an, Hadith, and jurisprudential reasoning were even assessed by the researchers. Ask AiDeen resulted in producing incorrect versions, and none of its responses reached the study's highest categories. It failed to sound trustworthy and didn't give an instructionally sound educational output.

Another separate 2025 *Nature Machine Intelligence* “Language Models Cannot Reliably Distinguish Belief from Knowledge and Fact,” tested 24 language models across 13 tasks using 13k questions. Belief, knowledge, and fact were involved in this

too. Again, it was difficult to distinguish these categories consistently.

Each of them has examined different problems, and none settles the question of religious authority. But if taken together, this research points to a question of accuracy within AI while contributing to religious answers.

What Happens When Religious Doubt Becomes an AI Prompt?

Some religious questions are difficult to ask aloud. We are embarrassed to confess something; we hesitate to bring those embarrassments into a mosque, temple, church, or gurudwara because it feels too personal and controversial at the same time. AI has removed that hesitation that people have carried for years. You can type something you would never say aloud and ask AI to guide you on that.

The quality of the answer depends on how the question is phrased. Someone who receives an answer they dislike might add more context, explain their feelings, or ask the same question differently. The next response may offer a different interpretation. You may see a finished answer without seeing which interpretive choices produced it. Its authority will be dependent partly on how the conversation develops.

When we ask a human religious authority, the answer will follow a proper conversation. The concerned person may ask: Which tradition we follow, What happened in that particular situation, What his/her religion believes or why it is important to us.

But unfortunately, AI skips those counterquestions, and the results are completely derived from the way you've given the prompt/command. While considering human religious authority, we know who is speaking, what position they hold, and where their interpretations are coming from. With AI, those distinctions become blurry. AI brings conclusions in the same polished voice that we want to listen to.

AI can gather centuries of religious thoughts into a few organized sentences, but we should be aware of the fact that authority begins where reproduction ends. Who's responsible if that explanation shapes us in what we believe, question, or reject something. Is AI worthy of being trusted while dealing with religious questions?



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Daniya Fatima, the emerging poet from Kashmir, explores themes such as love, betrayal, childhood, and emotional suffering through her writing. Using familiar everyday images and accessible language, she evokes pain and makes it relatable for the reader. Fatima's strength lies in her ability to make personal emotions

empathetic without relying on elaborate language. However, some poems explain their feelings too directly, leaving limited room for ambiguity or reader interpretation. Her imagery is most effective when it carries the emotional weight of the poem rather than merely reinforcing what the speaker has already expressed. What makes her poetry peculiar is that though she evokes relatable pain, the poems end with a reclamation of the self.

Editor

White Tulips

December. The canteen. Smell of burnt coffee. Noise.
Laughter bouncing off walls.
I look up. She's there. Across the table. Him beside her.
I can't look away.
Memory hits. Hard. Old arrangement of bodies. He
beside me. She across.
Before the fracture. Before the betrayal.
I knew them once. She was my best friend. He was my
only one.
A friend asks him about his favorite flower.
She says red roses.
Red. Blood red.
I look at him. Already looking at me.
I hold his gaze. Like a knife. Pressed into ribs.
Every broken breath. Every piece of me. He made me. He
left me.
I want to tell her.
He loved tulips. White tulips.
He loved rain. August rain.
He loved poetry. Ghalib's poetry
He loved walks. Wet streets. Cold drizzle. Chai steaming
in our hands.
Warmth in a world that isn't.
I can't say it. Words stuck. Stone in throat.
Maybe favorites changed. Maybe he changed. Maybe he
broke the world with me in it.
So I look away.
But I feel him. Ghost gaze. Side of my ribs.
Hollow. Pressing.
I laugh.
Brittle. Sharp. Fake. At someone else's joke.
Just to not fall apart. Right here. Right now.
And December rains.
And I bleed.
And I exist.

The Waltz

They dance in the dark, a waltz of fractured vows, feet
tracing the same dead pattern one crushing the other,
bone on bone, the bruise blooming in silence.
She wears her endurance like mask, smiling as his hands
learn the curves of another's skin, smiling as her heart
cracks and cracks again. They call it a mistake, nothing to
cry over.
Stay. For the children.
So she stays.
The choreography tightens its grip. The children gather
the shards in their pockets, learning that love is a wound
you keep reopening, that mending is a myth for fools.
They turn and turn through a music that has outlived
them, the applause loud enough to drown the cracking of
the floorboards. Her chest is a locked room where the air
thins by the day.
She stays because rent is due, because leaving feels like a
failure, because love in this house
is only another word for survival.
But she is fading, note by note, inside a song she never
chose. And the children they will hum it too, until
their own voices vanish, until the music swallows even
their screams.

The Lake and the Tree

I found it again this morning
A thin silver band, cold in my palm,
Buried in the wreckage of my desk,
And it pulled me under before I could breathe.
I remember you asking,
"What would you be in your next life?"
"A tree," I said,
Roots clutching earth, leaves trembling for wind.
You paused
That long pause holding everything
You've never said
"I will be the lake beside you."
I must have blinked,
Because you explained
There's a way a lake holds a tree
Not like a shadow, not like a reflection,
But like hunger,
Like it's been waiting for it since the first drop of rain.
Now, every memory of your voice
Is water spilling through my ribs,
And I am drowning before I even lie down.
I see it again
My hands scattering your ashes
Into a lake surrounded with trees,
The wind tearing you into pieces I cannot stitch,
And my chest hammers,
Hammers,
Hammers,
As if it could crack open and pour me into the water.
The day doesn't exist.
Keys sit like lies on my desk.
Work waits like a corpse.
I lay flat on cold marble,
The hardness pressing into my spine,
Into my teeth, into my lungs,
And I hope,
I hope the lake opens its mouth and swallows me whole,
Root to water, branch to sky,
So I can find you,
So I can breathe,
So I can finally feel the weight of us again.
But the lake does not answer.
It waits.
It waits with the patience of centuries.
And I lie here,
The water rising in my chest,
Listening for a voice that will never speak,
Clinging to the cold marble
Because even the floor will not let me go.

*"I wish I could show you, when
you are lonely or in darkness, the
astonishing light of
your own being."
- Hafiz*

*"Being deeply loved by someone
gives you strength, while loving
someone deeply gives you courage."
- Lao Tzu*

To peel a Blood Orange

They say to peel a blood orange,
Is perhaps the most valorous thing.
To hold something so bright,
So fiercely alive,
And still choose tenderness over haste.
To undo it slowly,
The way storm-light parts at dusk, Like learning
the language of something That does not wish to be
easily known.
And there I am
With stained fingertips,
Covered in your strange crimson,
Evidence of closeness,
Proof that beauty is rarely untouched by ruin.
Perhaps love is not in holding, But in the patience
of opening.
In the willingness to be marked by it.
And if that is true,
Then to peel a blood orange
Or to love you
Must be the bravest thing of all.

Combing Ghosts

Mum said, comb Grandma's hair Before she leaves.
I brought the brush, trembling,
Expecting silk, a river of stories whispered
From the girl she once was.
But the strands were spiders
Thin, silver, trembling
Like old ghosts trying to remember their bodies.
Resilient, yes, but already fraying.
"Grandma, did you inherit your hair from your mother?"
I asked, fingers tracing her scalp,
Careful as a thief,
Gentle as a prayer,
I had seen the slow desertion of my mother's hair,
And my own already fleeing me like frightened birds.
She smiled. A brittle, small thing. "My mother's hair
shone like moonlight," She said.
"Thick, long, luminous." Her eyes drifted into rooms I
could never enter.
"Then why is yours gone?"
The brush hovered
A question in my hand.
"You lose hair when you lose something," she said.
Her voice was iron wrapped in velvet, Heavy with
decades of loss.
I did not understand.
I wanted to understand.
She spoke again.
"I lost my parents at eighteen,
Then my brothers, their children
Gone, one by one,
As if the world swallowed them whole."
Her bones did not shake.
But mine did.
Something inside me cracked,
A tiny shard
That split the rhythm of my heartbeat.
Loss does not merely take
It digs in, it gnaws, It steals the unnoticed things:
Hair, laughter, life itself.
I combed on,
A silent keeper of grief,
Each knot a prayer,
Each stroke a wound too deep to mend.
When she left,
I held the silvered remains in my palms
Soft, ghostly, defeated
And in that moment
I felt closer to her than life had ever allowed:
Holding, in my fingers,
All that she had lost.



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Arjita Sharma's poetry draws on personal relationships and familiar human experiences to explore broader concerns such as identity, belonging, mortality, and the passage of time. Her writing is direct and emotionally accessible, often moving between the intimate world of family and the larger questions of social and collective identity. A notable feature of her work is her willingness to engage with difficult subjects, including death and emotional loss, without making them inaccessible to the reader. Her poetry is most engaging when personal emotion opens up a larger reflection on human experience.

Editor

My Boy of the Nation

Close your eyes there's blood in the mud,
You're a little babe now, hush!
Plug your ears the sounds are too loud
You're still my sweet boy now, hush!
Stink up your nose and take a shower
The water is fine and you're still just a kid now, hush!
There's a letter from the nation.
Open your eyes and uncover your ears,
You're needed now, my sweet boy.
Fulfil your duty to them first.
At last, when you've sacrificed yourself at their alter
I'll wait for you at your pyre
I'll cover your ears for you then.
Hush!

In a Letter to my Father

I sit by the stairs, looking at the leaves of your plant.
The birds are chirping their songs but I can't decipher.
The wind blows soft, but the Sun is very harsh.
The Sun is very harsh father.
I have my notebook but my pen is crying.
My pen cries for you, it cries because of you.
The pen has never seen such a dilemma father,
Where do I put the crying pen, the ink stains your house?

The day I was cremated

I bend over one last time as the flames engulf my being,
The chafing of the ropes causes my veins to explode
And the fire now burns my bare blood.
Adrenaline pulsates in my now empty veins.
A vessel of anger I am not.
My body cries but my soul must feed
My body dies, as my soul feels content,
The adrenaline is now ice and I am fire.
My arms chafe no more and the ropes are now ashes
My unholy body accepts the flames as my soul
embarks further.

My life in autumn

Autumn teaches me life,
The crisp air whispers my way
It tells me to lie flat.
It's okay to let go, and it's okay to fall down.
For all those who fall, will rise again
Amidst the blossoms of spring
It says to me,
I, my dear am your solace
Lie down in my lap
And let me hear your soul.
Cry and weep.
For only those who fall into me
Will feel the life my sister brings.



Daman Gambhir

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to notice something in the faces that laypeople often overlook. There is a depth in his portraits; you can spend hours looking into the eyes of his subjects, drawn to their stillness and trying to understand what lies beneath their expressions. He also paints still life and landscapes. A room, a stretch of water, a distant hill, or a quiet corner of a house can hold his attention, and, through his paintings, he invites us to look again at things we might otherwise don't care.

Daman Gambhir, based in Chandigarh, maintains a studio where he teaches drawing and painting on weekends, and spends his weekdays on his creating his own artwork.

At first glance, his work seems representational and closely related to the world around him. His interest in portraits is evident where he seems

For *Makrand*, exhibiting Daman's work is a way of bringing this kind of art to our readers. We hope you will spend some time with these works, especially the portraits, and see what you find in them.

Editor

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*You did not wish to see the face of the Unknown;
you will see its mask.*

— Victor Hugo, *Préface de mes œuvres et post-scriptum de ma vie.*

