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SECOND AMENDMENT AND COMMON SENSE



INDIA IN MY SOUL



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Editorial

Second Amendment and Common Sense

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By Musafir



We are losing young and not so young lives every day to gun violence in these United States of America. Our lawmakers appear on cameras to give cookie-cutter statements after each tragic incident and the media pundits repeat the same recycled commentaries for about a week and then their topics change as does the weather. The NRA and gun lobbyists show vapid concerns while the rest of us brace for the next tragedy to hit home again. Even our president blames everything on mental disorder evading the topic of reform needed in gun laws lest he should displease his constituency.

Mr. President, take the moral leadership. This is your chance for greatness. Abe Lincoln became great because he did the right thing despite opposition from within and without. Are we the only country in the world that has people with mental disorder? I don't think so, but we have

the highest gun fatalities by far. This is due to the fear tactic applied by the National Rifle Association (NRA) in the name of Second Amendment. Second Amendment has become a shield for gun activists to intimidate anyone from taking any action in regards to reforming gun laws.

The Second Amendment reads: *"A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."*

"A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state." Some say that this is to prevent our federal government from becoming too powerful and coercive to deny us and the state their rights and liberty. So why do we elect government and have judiciary? Have we taken the law in our own hands? Don't we have the

system of check and balance to prevent that from happening?

Not only that. Very few of us are aware of the fact that the organization we know today as the National Guard came into existence with the above purpose (protect our rights and liberty) in 1636, when the Massachusetts General Court in Salem established that all able-bodied men between the ages of 16 and 60 were required to join the militia. So, we already have a regulated militia.

Let's use common sense: 1. "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state" was probably needed at some point in history. Things have changed so have time and circumstances. James Madison wrote the second amendment in 1791 in part to reassure his home state of Virginia, where slave owners were terrified of revolts and wary of northerners who would undermine the system. The militia were at that stage almost exclusively a slave-control tool in the south. As I said earlier, the times have changed and so have the circumstances.

Let's use common sense: 2. "the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

If so, why are ordinary guns or AK-15s not allowed in political gatherings, flights, concerts, sporting events, courts and in the Senate? This is because of common sense. We accept personal restrictions in our daily lives: we basically can't buy two packs of a powerful prescription decongestant in one week; if you withdraw more than \$10k in cash of your own money from a bank, you have to fill out a form and explain why; if you make multiple purchases with your credit card out of town and don't tell your bank, they may put a hold on your card. If you drive without a seat belt, you can get a ticket and a fine. How about our rights being infringed then?

I am not a constitutional expert nor have I studied law, but I can recognize mayhem when I see one. I also know that this must be stopped. Yes, the people should have a right to keep and bear arms for self-defense, but they don't need an arsenal consisting of twenty AK-15s and other military style assault weapons with magazines capable of delivering up to 900 rounds of killer bullets per minute. Dear NRA, doesn't this go in your head? Where is your common sense? And Dear Parents, why shouldn't you go to the prison for not keeping those lethal weapons of mass destruction away from your children?

What Can Be Done? The Second Amendment or any constitutional amendment cannot be changed, but the constitution can be amended to mitigate the stupidity inherent in the Second Amendment. For example, one clause in Article 4, Section 2 of the original Constitution says that a slave who escapes to a different state cannot be freed by laws in that state, and remains the property of his owner. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery, so this part of the original text no longer applies though it's still there.

Additionally, the framers of the Constitution did not foresee that Americans would one day possess over 300 million guns and would insist on the "individual right" to own assault rifles capable of killing scores of people in seconds. But the Second Amendment makes thousands of us die each year.

Why can't we do something effective against this mayhem? A majority of Americans favor changes in gun control law. In the upcoming 2018 congressional elections in November, ask the candidates whether they would initiate a constitutional amendment to mitigate the second amendment or not. Don't worry about party affiliations and partisan politics. Send the right candidate to Washington DC. Dear Countrymen/women, do the right thing.

Discourse Interrupted

By Musafir

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Apar Singh was a proud Sikh who never spoke ill of anybody. He was my bridge



partner and we occasionally played pool together. He was fiercely competitive and physically fit at 86. At the same time, he was a very kind. He'd check on me, whenever I'd miss the bridge game for longer than a week. He was always brief in his phone conversations, "Keep healthy and walk every day," he would remind me.

If I complained about anyone in particular, he'd say, "Look at their virtues and ignore their vices."

When alone, we used to have philosophical discourse. During our last discussion, he said to me, "In our Indian religions the following five vices, lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego are the sources of all evils and they must be avoided."

"But is that not impractical? Those are natural human emotions and we cannot get rid of them," I argued, "these impositions are not natural and have been laid down by someone on us to adhere to."

"Yes, the emphasis is on us to avoid those vices for a reason. I agree, no one is perfect, but our goal should be to maintain a balance between pragmatism and the ideals to maintain harmony in our lives."

"So you believe in the middle path and, by the way, this (middle path) is well highlighted in Buddhism too," I replied to impress him.

"Anil Saab, It's mentioned in all Indian religions including Sikhism. Do what is practical for you but not accepting these

emotions as vices may actually lead to imbalances. I feel these five emotions have a very important role to play in our lives but their negative impact cannot be ignored,” concluded Apar Singh.

“But how can one get rid of attachment? You have children and grandchildren. Tell me honestly, can you lose attachment to them?”

“Attraction or attachment to a person you love can be quite healthy in moderation, but don’t get so much entangled that it disrupts their lives and yours. For example, at a community level, it is extremely important for the community and for its members to be interested and engaged deeply with one another. However, we don’t get so much attached to them that we become dysfunctional in our day to day life. The same standard should be used for loved ones also. It is a true manifestation of the spirit of ‘the world is one family’ and it is also far better than being obsessed with oneself.”

“For that reason, another vice, anger also can be an excellent watchdog in alerting a person to the need for self-defense. We can use anger as a valuable guide and catalyst that spurs us to action,” I expanded the subject to another emotion.

“You are right but it is usually thoughtless or unkind actions or disappointments that evoke this in us. Anger, if interpreted and controlled correctly can be an excellent stimulus for goading one towards working for social justice, for making things right. The tragedy is that we use anger to harm someone. Again, like attachment we make this very personal,” Apar Singh explained.

“Excess of anything is bad, even perhaps virtue. I would, however, make an exception for love and friendship. I feel strongly and sincerely that one can never have enough of both of these!” I supported him.

We decided to continue our discourse the next day. The next day I got the news that Apar Singh suddenly fell in his driveway when coming home from Gurudwara (Sikh temple) and died instantly. Later someone said during his funeral, “Only those who are pious die peacefully without suffering. I smiled at a life well lived. However, I’d have loved to complete the discourse before his departure to his heavenly abode.

My Life as A Snob: By Musafir

The very first time I met Elizabeth Prescott Townshend, I figured out that I was a cultural void. She talked in a highbrow accent while I uttered cliché and talked in TV idiolect. During business meetings, half the time I couldn't understand what she was talking about, but for some reason she never failed to impress the bosses and me. She'd walk into the meeting room with head up, shoulders back making direct eye contact with everyone. She definitely had an air of superiority about her.

My colleagues didn't particularly like her. According to them she was a snob. In my eyes she was cultured and I wanted to be like her. Someone leaked my desire to be a snob to her.

"Hahwahya?" Elizabeth was standing in front of my desk. "Wanna be a snob like me, huh?"

"Yes," I said gently.

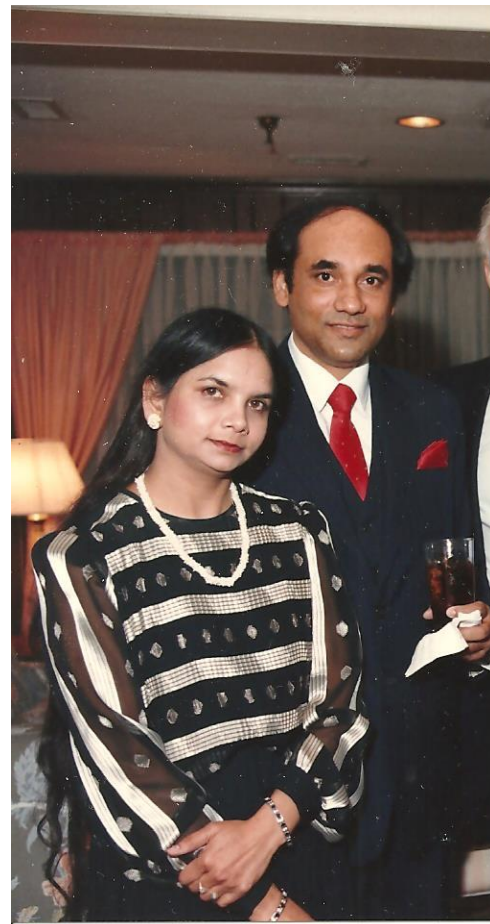
"Ha! Ha! Ha! Hoi Polloi?" She always laughed in measured accent with three syllables. I liked the way she waved her right hand across her forehead from left to right. Later I adopted her laughter style. It looked very different and cool for sure.

"Yeah!" I replied. "You are heck of a schmoozer. I want to emulate you."

"Supah!"
I'm goin
down to Flaw-
ridda for a
week. Can ya
wotta my
plant over
thahe (there)
evahyday? I
leave
morrow."

Next morning as I entered her office with a small pale of water, all my colleagues gathered around me and started giggling. I found out that she had played a prank on me. It was an artificial plant.

I learned a lot from Elizabeth. Every day I developed a greater degree of narcissism in which I thought I was better than my regular friends. I always needed to distinguish myself from other people. I also noticed that being a snob meant being selective. A snob must have



Musafir and wife Reva in 1987

standards about everything, such as what restaurant he visits, to which grocery store he shops in because being a snob also meant being epicurean and a connoisseur.

“Okay, how about these JC Penny bags?” Elizabeth came storming into my office one day with an empty tea cup in her hand. “Next time, at least, have the decency to hide your cheapness in a Saks Fifth Avenue tote.” I noticed that a snob must walk with a tea cup preferably an empty one to avoid any spills.

She had no tolerance for the way my colleagues dressed. “I’uk at those shoes. Can ya imagine leavin the house with that? One doesn’t have to be avant-garde, but being so wacky and gross! Uh, Ah!

I soon started remembering expensive brand names. I noticed that Elizabeth always went for cheese and wine in office parties (alcohol was permissible those days) while I devoured on chips and buffalo wings and gulped soda.

“Stop gulping Tawnic,” Elizabeth frowned.

“Sorry Elizabeth, I don’t know nothing bout cheese and wine.”

Elizabeth looked at me with disgust and uttered, “Povvo! Don’t act a bogger.” She slowly narrowed her eyes and walked with her goblet delicately holding at the stem.

That was the kick I needed to rave my engine. Whenever I went to a restaurant

with my uncouth friends, I always complained that the food was cold. I started sighing quite often ‘Uh’ ‘Ah’ Uh.’ While my friends listened to pop music, I would put on my headphone and listen to Mozart and talk about going to opera. I stopped participating in small talks with friends by keeping a poker face.

I stopped looking at the menu in restaurants. I’d hand that over to the waiter and ask for chef’s recommendation instead. I started to one up my friends on their vacation stories by boasting, “Oh, you spent summer in upstate New York?” “That’s so over. I prefer northern Italy.”

Soon my boss started disliking me and gave an F in people’s skill. I lost my chance for promotion until I showed improvement in that area. At the same time, Elizabeth got promoted and became my boss.

She called me in her new office and said, “You need to work on people’s skill and give up pretending being a snob,”

“But Elizabeth, you are my role model. See how far snobbery has taken you on the career path.”

“Listen carefully to me,” she continued earnestly, “I didn’t acquire snobbahy nor was it thrust upon me. I was born a snob. My fathah was a snob, my grandfathah was a snob. My great-great grandfathah was a snob and you can’t be one.”

I liked the way she paraphrased Shakespeare’s famous quote from ‘Twelfth Night’. At that very moment I decided to go back to my regular avatar.

ESSAY

SEARCHING GOD

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BY MUSAFIR



When I was younger I often used to debate in my mind whether God created us or we created the concept of God. After maturing I came to the conclusion that whoever or whatever created all of us is God because it's beyond anyone else's ability to create, maintain and destroy the entire universe and beyond. I didn't need to be a theologian or a savant to know that.

I also spent some time reading about the concept of God as described in three most populous religions in the world, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. I found stark similarities in the concept of God in all those religions. However, I also found that those beliefs were not above contentions and contradictions.

God in Christianity is the eternal being who created and preserves all things. There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus

Christ, the messenger who is considered the son of God.

However, the above statement has always been debated by different scholars, branches of Christianity and schools of thoughts. The concept of God is different in the Old Testament versus the New Testament. Later, the religious scholars put their heads together to abate and reconcile the differences.

Another controversy (that was later reconciled by the scholars and religious councils) was about the concept of trinity, Father, Son, Holy Ghost. Some followers of Christianity considered them as three different entities. Later it was decided that it was the same God in three persons.

The differences about the concept of God still exist. For example, Mormons believe (According to Joseph Smith) that God was once a man on another planet before being exalted to Godhood. Many

Christians cite The Bible in claiming that Jesus was God.

In the religion of Islam, belief in Allah is the single most important tenet. The Muslim name for God is "Allah," which is simply Arabic for "the (al) God (Ilah)." Muslims believe that Muhammad was Allah's chief servant and messenger.



I find Islam (submission) easy to comprehend. The concept of Allah never changes in Islam. Every Muslim child and



adult clearly understands the concept of one God no matter where on earth that person resides. There has been no deviation or reconciliation in God's concept in Islam. According to one Islamic scholar, Allah's will "is all we have, and we have it in perfection in the Quran

I am a Hindu. According to Hinduism

there is one God, the supreme spirit, called Brahman. Brahman has many forms permeating in the entire universe. Most Hindus believe that Brahman is present in every person as soul. It is also called the atman. Brahman encompasses everything and all phenomena. Brahman is one, without a second (Ekam evadvitiam).

The Vedas are the earliest Holy book of the Hindus. The Vedas conceptualize Brahman as supreme. In the Upanishads (appendices to Vedas), God has been described as Sat-cit-ānanda (truth-consciousness-bliss) and as permanent and of highest reality.

Hinduism allows its followers to worship God in many forms such as nature (wind, fire, etc.) and devas (divinities), thus it is misconstrued as polytheistic.

All religions believe in the existence of only one God who created the world; who is all-powerful and sustains everything. All religions including Christianity, Islam and Hinduism worship the same God in different names such as God, Allah and Brahman. They are different but similar.

(The writer is not a theologian. If you want to contradict, correct and/or educate him, you are very welcome to do so.)

Book Review

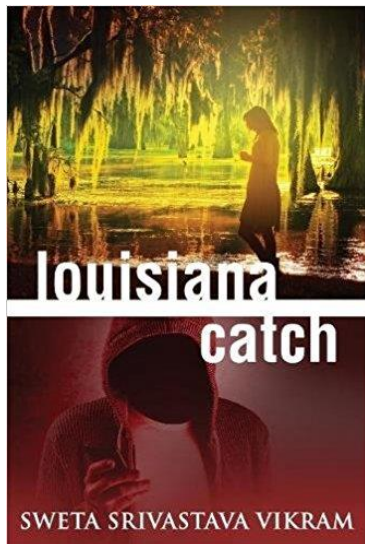
Louisiana Catch

Author: Sweta Vikram

Publisher: Modern History Press (to be released on April 10, 2018), 253 pages

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("Louisiana Catch" is a terrific work by Sweta Srivastava Vikram. I was an early reviewer for the book and absolutely loved it! Get your copy today on Amazon.com)



The upcoming Novel, "Louisiana Catch" (release date April 10, 2018) by the author Sweta Vikram focuses on marital rape and abuse of

women through the narrative of its protagonist, Ahana Chhpra. It's an extraordinary story clearly defining the line between love and lust, adherence and violation and reciprocity and rape in a relationship.

The story opens with a young woman in her 30s (Ahana) who has filed for a divorce after putting up for ten years with her husband, Dev whom she accuses of repeated marital rape, being ill-tempered and violent. Soon after the story begins, Ahana's mother who was her greatest supporter and confidant passes away. Ahana is grief-stricken and heart-broken due to the double whammy. Enter her closest cousin, Naina, a free-spirited colleen who is from New Orleans, Louisiana. Naina,

a shrink herself convinces Ahana to join an online support group where she (Ahana) meets the antagonist of the story, Jay who resides in the US. Ahana tries to explore Jay who happens to be an online stalker and a fickle character. They meet in New York towards the end of the novel. Jay proves himself to be a lecher, intrusive, boorish, philanderer and violent. Though Ahana doubted him to be of dubious character from the very beginning, Jay left no doubt about his character in their first face to face encounter in New York.

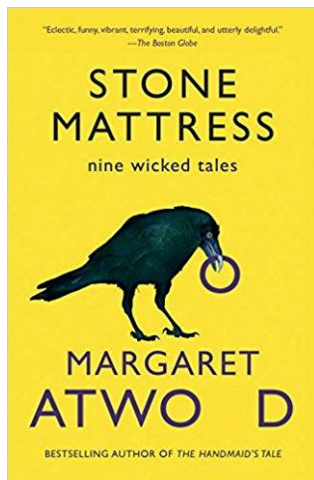
Ahana is also assigned to represent "No Excuse" campaign (a voice behind women not accepting violence) in New Orleans on the insistence of her leader, Shelly Roy. She gets an opportunity to work with Rohan Brady, Adonis, enlightened and intelligent person. Finally, Ahana comes to the US and becomes romantically close to Rohan.

Sweta has very clearly defined the line between intrusion (rape) and courtship through Ahana's relationship with Rohan. Their sexual tension intensifies to the cusp but doesn't reach culmination since Ahana didn't approve of it. Rohan understands this and reciprocates by respecting Ahana's boundaries.

In the end, Ahana gives a powerful speech at the conference in New Orleans, "Truth: No is a complete emotion, word and sentence. Rape is never. As a survivor, you are not to blame. It's OK to be angry, but it isn't OK to carry shame."

The novel could have been even a better read if some words like f*#@#k and matron were not overused. Some Indians and Delhi-dwellers may sense prejudice as Ahana could not find a man in Delhi who was decent nor did she come across any woman past middle-age who was not a busybody except her own members of the family.

Stone Mattress: Nine Tales
Author: Margaret Atwood
2014 original publication date.



"Margaret Atwood understands old age. As simple as that. And what's more - she gives this understanding such potent expression that one just sits back and marvels... A book of 9 stories. "9 Tales", she calls it. The first three have interconnecting characters - the same events are told from different perspectives. It's like a wonderful short novella on its own. Tales 4 and 5 - sorry to say - were not my cup of tea, and they also didn't fit thematically into this particular collection. But the rest of them -

Anything that could go wrong with a woman on Delhi streets happened to Ahana despite her elite surrounding and privileges.

"Louisiana Catch" is a terrific work by Sweta Vikram. She has used very expressive language in building up the characters in the story and has succeeded in sending her message to all who care about women's struggle.

-Reviewed by Musafir

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spectacular gems, each one - have more than made up for the two, making it so easy for me to give the book 5 stars. Humor and bitterness, insight and bewilderment are balanced so perfectly in description of advanced age - each story is so unique in its plot, certain ideas and descriptions are so relatable. A very powerful statement in the last story - I think that was my favorite.

Here is what one protagonist says of herself: "Be prepared.... It's a lifelong failing: she has never been prepared. But how can you have a sense of wonder if you are *prepared* for everything? Prepared for the sunset. Prepared for the moonrise. Prepared for the ice storm. What flat existence that would be."

-Reviewed by Irene Rudra



Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri



Angela Hayes, who gets raped and murdered 7 months ago, still hasn't got justice and this pushes her mother to take extreme steps. Mrs. Hayes, settles on a plan of action and rents three billboards that haven't been used for years to make a hard-hitting point. The billboards read- "RAPED WHILE DYING", "AND STILL NO ARRESTS", "HOW COME CHIEF

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri is another agenda movie directed by Martin McDonagh. The basic idea is political, that is demeaning the police force. This is an Oscar-nominated film which also won the best picture award at Golden Globes.

It is a tragic-drama that unfolds to come out as a shocker to the audience. Three billboards explore the dark side of humor amid a tragedy and leaves the audience in a dilemma whether to smile at the moment or get caught up in the drama. The story begins in a fictional small rural town, Ebbing in Missouri. Mildred Hayes, a mother of two, is dealing with the death of her 19-year-old daughter. The character played by Frances McDormand, has delivered a brilliant performance in the grief-stricken story of a mother.

WILLOUGBY?"

Hayes rages a direct war against the administration by questioning their progress in the case. Mildred is the strongest character in the heart-wrenching drama. The billboards do their job but it goes all wrong as Willoughby (Woody Harrelson) urges Mrs. Hayes to take down the boards. The billboards trigger the wrong person – a racist, homophobic officer Dixon (Sam Rockwell), who later creates miserable situations for Mildred. Dixon is constantly schooled by his old mother on how to go about with the stuff and it's terrible.

The movie is drab and boring, a perfect Oscar winner.

Reminiscence

India in My Soul by Musafir

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I miss India. I have visited India at least 15 times since coming to the USA in 1974. Whenever I visited India, it was quick and short. A family wedding or ailing relatives were persuasive events. My two brothers (one passed away) and my sister in three different cities

added variation. I never stayed long enough to be intimate with them. A short visit, interspersed with calls on old friends were the routine.

I marveled when Indians in the US told me that they visited the homeland every year. Some did so to the exclusion of all other countries. They saw London or Dubai at most for a day on their way to Delhi, Patna or Lucknow. I wondered my links to India were weaker than theirs.

Of course, I missed my brothers, my cousins, my friends. I missed celestial Indian music and the baffling breadth of Indian cuisine. But, meanwhile, I got busy with new neighbors to know, new colleagues to cultivate,



(1970: Musafir, sister Minni, sis-in-law Madhu, elder brother Arun, cousin Chetan, younger brother Anup)

new friendships to develop. I cultivated interest in American music, baseball, football and basketball. Cricket became an odd sports for me and ultimately I lost interest in that.

Somethings never left me though. I still like Ghalib's poetry, Premchand's stories, Indian classical music and old Bollywood songs. Maybe, these are the triggers that still draw me to India. I want to spend more time there and explore the places I have not visited. But my health won't allow me to do that anymore. It is not easy; it's too complicated to describe here.

Of the countries I have visited in the last 45 years, India's cities are certainly the most polluted. Every time I go there, I catch some kind of bug and I get sick. Transport is chaotic and bothersome. I spend an enormous amount of time sitting in cars that move in traffic at snail's pace or don't move at all for long periods. I enjoy the food, especially as it is quite different from what I normally eat, but the standard of hygiene is low, and I have to trust my luck to escape from intestinal trouble. The water

is murderous. When I was younger and healthier, those did not matter as much but now they do.

Then why do I crave going to India? I want to because it is there. India is in my blood and soul. It is with me every moment of my life, no matter where I am. It gave me the language I dream in. It gave me the community that nurtured me. It gave me my childhood memories, my adolescent dreams, my adult hopes and aspirations. It gave me my parents, my siblings, my wonderful set of caring, forgiving, generous friends.

Its land was my landing ground and my take-off point. Its grass, its mud, its very dirt and filth were my sandbox, its narrow streets and winding alleys my playpen. I learned here, laughed here, worked here, and lived here always earnestly. Wherever I am, India rests in my pores and in my heart. I have to go there. Yes, it is a pilgrimage, for pilgrimage is not just a visit to a shrine or a holy place, it is also a journey into one's innermost soul.

“Trade War: The Sky Is Falling Down, Again” **By Musafir**

“Lord, what fools these mortals be.” (Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night’s Dream).

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The sky is falling down again and Chicken Little is running for cover. This time it is the Trade War. The American industry will be destroyed and the Americans will suffocate under the burden of indirect taxes because the Chinese and the European gods are furious and breathing fire on us wanting to retaliate and impute us. Oh Boy! Didn't I hear this before?

On Thursday, March 1, 2018, President Trump announced tariffs of 25% on steel and 10% on aluminum, promising that they would protect U.S. producers “for a long time.” The media pundits have been busy predicting grave economic consequences for the US economy as a result of Mr. Trump’s announcement. The news channels can’t get over their indefatigable coverage of retaliation from

China and Eurozone. The economists are insatiably predicting apocalypse now (as usual). The Wall Street indices plunged by 1,100 points in days following the above announcement.

Relax! Don’t panic yet. Think for yourself; do some research. I did. What happened when Mr. Trump slapped hefty tariffs on imports of solar panels and washing machines from China on January 24, 2018? Despite the doomsday predictions by the media and economists alike, China lowered the price of washing machines to compete in the U.S. market and decided to build the solar panels here on the U.S soil. How soon do we forget!

First of all, China and Eurozone are no Mother Teresa. They have been taking advantage of the USA’s generosity for years without reciprocating despite America’s cry in wilderness and now they are crying foul again. Let’s examine the facts:

USA normally sets import duties between 5 to 12% which includes imports from China. In contrast China levies 13% tariff on food and 18 to 30% on industrial goods and electronics imported from the U.S. Eurozone places 6.4% tariff on industrial and 16.1% on food items coming from the U.S. India has put 100% duty on Harley Davidson exported from Wisconsin and charges 60% duty on auto parts. USA charges 0% on motorbike imports from India. The maximum import fee charged on all Indian goods doesn’t exceed 6%. Brazil and Japan have similar stories. That’s a topic for another day. (Sources: Chinaimportal.com, Export.Gov, China-briefing.com, commers.gov)

Fear mongers have been spreading the rumor that import duties proposed by Mr. Trump will add indirect tax to the U.S. consumers. Yes, to some extent! Soda and beer cans will cost one cent more and automobile will cost on average \$45 to \$145 more depending on the model. That's peanuts compared to how many steel and aluminum industry jobs it will save. Nothing is totally free in this world.

If China and the Eurozone decide to go on trade war with the USA, they can't win. The U.S. economy remains the largest in the world in terms of GDP. The \$19.42 trillion U.S. economy is 25% of the gross world product. USA is the greatest spender in the world outpacing the rest by a wide margin. USA's GDP per capita is \$57,638 compared to Eurozone's per capita of \$39,100 and China's \$6,333. Who'd the world like to do business with without affecting their own economy? Go figure!

The Eurozone unemployment rate is 9.4% while the USA is inching towards full employment. China being a communist country, their figures are always dubious. Additionally, China is losing its competitive advantage quite fast. Chinese labor is getting more expensive. Consulting firm Oxford Economics estimated recently that China's unit labor costs were just 4% lower than those in the U.S. It's now cheaper to pay factory workers in Japan than in China, per unit of output (Source: www.bloomberg.com). In case you have not been paying attention, Mr. Xi Jinping just became a lifelong dictator of the Chinese people so that he can avoid the wrath of his countrymen in coming days. Just the other day, the Europeans were going gaga on the prospects of China replacing the USA as the new moral leader of the world. "Lord, what fools these mortals be." (Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream).

The US Commerce Secretary, Mr. Wilbur Ross summed it up succinctly, "American employees have borne the brunt of all the imported steel and aluminum that's been coming in. Corporate America might complain, but the president is taking up the banner of Mr. and Mrs. America."

(The writer is not an economist. If you want to contradict, correct and/or educate him, you are very welcome to do so.)

American Scene

Are We Failing Our Children?

By David Beagan

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I felt sorry for Betsy DeVos, US Secretary of Education struggling through her recent interview on 60 Minutes. I haven't had the stomach to actually watch it, I just saw the clips where she answers with a brave smile that yes perhaps she should have visited some failing Michigan schools. It could be argued that Ms. DeVos shouldn't play favorites with her home state, she represents all the states. Then again, as an exemplar of a tanking school system, why not investigate what is going wrong in her own backyard. Ms. DeVos came off as someone who took the job as Education Secretary

for the prestige of serving in the President's administration, but who really doesn't care to do the work to address the problems with American education. At the end of the day, she is rich, she will be alright. I feel bad for the students who will have a worse life because the education system failed them and the U.S. economy which will be less prosperous.

As reported by the Pew Research Center, U.S. Students rank in the middle of the pack among all of the nations in math, science and reading. The US

is among the top in K-12 spending per pupil at \$12,500 per student each year.

A big problem is the entrenched bureaucracy in the governmental education institution. As with any large institution it seeks to preserve itself primarily often at the expense of providing a quality education. One of the trends in education is to do away with grades. Here is the kind of thinking I find baffling. Jeffery D. Robinson, Ph.D., in an opinion piece (Detroit News March 18, 2018 "Standardized testing promotes broken system, hinders learning") opens the article with the statement:

"There is a problem with standardized testing in urban school districts: Nobody knows what the children are being tested for."

And the article ends by reiterating the point:

"Why then should standardized test continue to be administered to children in urban school districts when no one knows what the children we are being tested for?"

Funny thing is, nowhere in the article did the author provide any justification or evidence for the bold claim. Aren't the fundamentals that we all know will be tested for? Aren't there previous year's tests that can be reviewed? I wonder, is it the student's performance that you fear being tested, or the is it the teachers' performance that it is feared will come under scrutiny?

While it is understandable that we wouldn't want to bruise young children's tender feelings, I question whether anything in life is accomplished without some risk -- risk of failure. Keep the grades, but also give the class a grade, overall, as a whole. This sends a message to the students, while each of your individual successes are important, the success of the team as a whole is important too. Let some students mentor other students. Yes, this could lead to conflict if a very low performer is seen to be dragging the whole class down. This is where leadership of the teaching staff comes in, reiterating to the students that in life we are often part of a team.

I have often heard it said, just don't teach kids, teach them *how* to learn. Now this is easy to say, but just how do you do this? One of the key elements is to understand that ultimately you are your own teacher and you are responsible. That doesn't mean teachers are not necessary, even vital at certain key points, nevertheless instill in students that they are running the show, the directors of

their learning process -- ask questions if you don't understand, even challenge the teacher if you think they are off base. Teachers can be wrong or mistaken occasionally, taking it in stride and explaining to the students that being wrong is also a stepping stone to understanding. Also, learning how to learn involves reflecting on your own learning process, what works for you and what doesn't. Having a student teach another person what they have learned can be an effective tool. There have been high hopes for technology in the classroom. At best the results have been mixed. Alan Kay, former researcher at famed Xerox Palo Alto Research center and Apple fellow is now a foremost expert in computers in schools said in 2010 that the potential of technology in schools has been squandered.

Technology has often been a burden to the education process. Teachers have lacked the tech savvy and skills to operate the computers and computers can break down and maintenance is not always in the budget. Now with the advent of cheap tablet computers, ubiquitous cell phones, and reasonable high-speed internet, it does have a role in the classroom. Especially for teaching rote learning. For math, a great example is this math graphing calculator that I stumbled on one day, [desmos.com](https://www.desmos.com). It can run on anything with a web browser, a laptop, a tablet computer, or even a cell phone. It was developed for students and teachers, totally free, and easy to use. It is about the most intuitively easy program I have ever used.

Some contend that every student should learn how to code computers. As someone experienced in this area, I think all students should have some exposure to what it is like to code, to get an appreciation of what coding is about. But I know from experience it is not for everybody. With exposure, every student who may have a hidden talent and interest in computer programming, coding, will have the opportunity to pursue it as a career. A key thing about coding is that the student is the creator. An important element of computers in the classroom is that students create things, whether it is writing, art, computer aided design or whatever.

As we continue into the future, people are our most precious and vital resource. But without a good education that resource can be wasted. We need to be willing to think different and do what works.

Current Affairs

Space Mining and Colonization Compiled by Musafir

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The United States started exploring space 60 years ago. It landed the first human on the lunar surface almost 50 years ago. Since then their robotic probes have orbited all the planets and gone beyond the solar system. Now America is aiming at more value added projects leaving day to day launchings to low cost operators like India and China. Like any other previous initiatives, the U.S government is transferring space exploration to private companies in the spirit of capitalism.

The United States is interested more in colonization of planets and space mining where the benefit lies. The work has already started. Space X just launched its Falcon rocket last week, the most powerful rocket in the world today. It plans to land a human on Mars by 2024. Five other US companies are almost ready to relieve NASA of low orbit missions including sending tourists on space excursions.

Planetary Resources, based in Bellevue, Washington, announced its plans last year to make asteroid-mining a reality. The company hopes to send spacecraft to extract water and precious metals from near-Earth asteroids. Asteroids hold the resources necessary to enable a

sustainable, even indefinite presence in space — for science, commerce and continued prosperity here on Earth. NASA has other projects underway to deal with space rocks. Earlier this year, the space agency announced its plans to capture an asteroid, drag it into orbit around the moon and send astronauts to investigate the space rock as early as 2021.

It sounds like something straight out of science fiction: mining for natural resources on an asteroid hurtling through space at tens of thousands of miles an hour. But in as little as five years, asteroid mining could become a reality. There is a reason why the US is working towards space mining. This is related to human history.

Humanity is a species in constant movement in quest of resources to sustain and improve life. Even as our needs have evolved, our basic drive to

access and control crucial resources has not dimmed. Wars have been fought over salt, spice, oil and rare minerals. As we are depleting earth's resources, the waging of wars for fresh water and other essential resources in the near future is a reality. The problem with natural resources is that they are limited and finite. Thus, nations have raced to stake claims to Antarctica and its resources including, but not limited to harvesting icebergs to provide freshwater supplies.

We have now started mining the deep seabed for valuable minerals and metals, such as nickel, copper and manganese and also rare minerals that are increasingly crucial for the high-end technologies required to build hybrid cars, wind turbines, and even the mobile phones. But ultimately the earth will run out of the resources needed to maintain the lifestyles we have grown accustomed to. We will inevitably strip this planet clean.

So the farsighted are looking beyond the confines of this blue planet. Imagine, a single 500-metre diameter asteroid can contain more platinum than has even been mined in the history of the earth and you can get an idea why so many are salivating at the prospect of tapping these resources. Then consider that there are over 2m asteroids in the asteroid belt, which has been valued by NASA at a staggering \$700 quintillion - that is \$100 billion for every person living on earth right now.

The end goal is still far away, as efficient resource extraction will eventually require the creation of deep-space mining colonies which will have to be relatively self-sufficient — using the resources found on asteroids to build new bases and even satellites and spaceships — and thus providing launching pads for the human colonization of the solar system. In time, we may even see a subspecies of humanity emerge, one better suited to life in the low gravity of space stations. One thing is clear though: our salvation lies in the stars.

(The article has been compiled using various sources: Air & Space Magazine-Smithsonian, Wall Street Journal, Machio Kaku, Physics of Impossible)



Mental Exercise

By David Beagan

Pecking Chicks

In a barnyard one hundred chicks are sitting in a circle. All at the same time, each chick randomly pecks the chick either to its right or to its left. What is the expected number of unpecked chicks?

(The expected number is how many unpecked there would be on average in the long run if this situation were repeated many, many times.).

Simple Addition

Substitute the same digit for each letter in the following addition problem.

```
  AAA
+ BBB
+ CCC
-----
BAAC
```

Smart Peasant

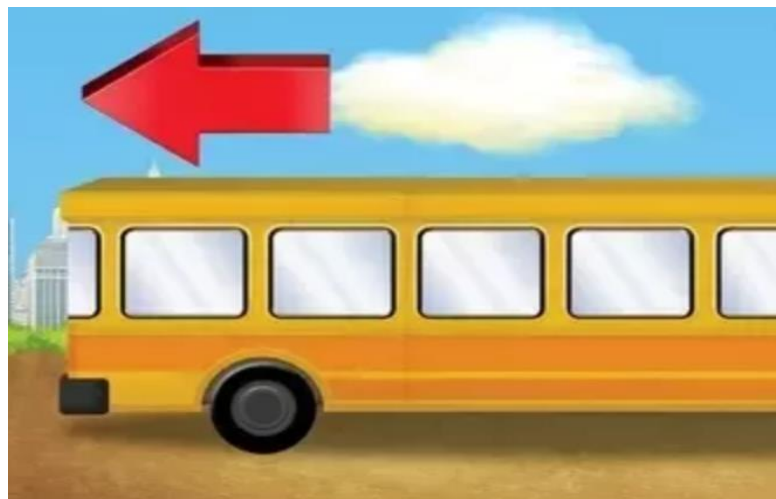
A peasant is convicted and gets the death penalty. The judge decrees that if his last words are a lie, he must die by hanging. If his last words are truth then he is to be beheaded. The peasant speaks and everyone is surprised that the judge cannot determine his penalty – and so is set free. What could the peasant have said?

Circle Triangle

Choose three points on a circle at random and connect them to form a triangle. What is the probability that the center of the circle is contained in that triangle?

Left or Right

See this Michigan school bus? It is hard to tell, is it going to the right or the left?



Answers

Pecking Chicks

If you look at this from the point of view of an individual chick, it has a 50% chance of getting pecked by the chick to its left and a 50% chance of getting pecked by the chick to its right

Simple Addition

```
  999
+ 111
+ 888
-----
1998
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Smart Peasant

The peasant said: "I shall be hanged!"

Circle Triangle

The first chosen point and the point opposite it divide the circle into two sides. If the second two chosen points are on the same side (50%) then the circle's center is outside the triangle. If the second two chosen points are on opposite sides then the circle's center is inside the triangle (50%).

Left or Right

School kids pick up on this right away. The school bus has a door on the right side. In the picture, you don't see the door, so it must be on the other side. The bus is going to the left.



A wink is a wink

By Asokkumar Lal

Oh, this simple wink
Has raised so much stink.
She's nothing but a simple lass
Sending her beau a nimble pass.

The boy is young, the damsel is beautiful,
Her smile infectious, and beauty is bountiful.
Her frivolous flirt takes us to the time
When we were young in prime.

Holding hands, bumping hips,
Light embrace, brushing lips,
Sweet nothings we all miss
So, don't whine at her tease.

A girl winking at a boy
It brings us so much joy,
Happy life, Full of fun
Two hearts gonna be one.

To all critics, I do appeal,
Know what young hearts feel,
Happy song of chirping birds, morning sunshine,
The simple wink, gentle kiss and love sublime.

FEEDBACK

INDIA IN MY SOUL

Musafir's article about India is a gem!!! It's so touching, so true to the core, so poetic, that I felt very emotional just reading it... It also has a photo of Musafir at younger age with his siblings where you can easily recognize him even without the description. I thank Musafir for opening his heart to the readers.

Irene Rudra
Texas, USA

I read the whole article. Very touchy and well informative . Thanks for sharing your views and your sentiments

Niru Prasad
Michigan, USA

Loved your article. I also can not take India out of my system. We have gone to India almost every year in the last 25 years. We love the food there but eat it now with more caution. We love the love we receive there like nowhere else. We love the people - friends and relatives. We try to see India as much as possible. The crowds and dust does overwhelm us. I also get physically sick by the time I am ready to return to USA. It is a feeling of great relief to come back to our adopted home. Come to think of it, we have now two homelands. We are really blessed.

Chaitanya Swarup
Michigan, USA

VICTIMIZATION OF WOMEN

I was disappointed to read your article, "Victimization of Women" in the Winter 2018 issue. There is a passive acceptance of the "culture of sleaze" which has been around since the "origins of mankind". That's abhorrent to me. Using your logic, there was nothing wrong if the British colonized the world for a long time, if there was slavery in America for a long time, and if women were not allowed to vote in America for a long time. You also seem to imply

that nothing much would happen if women do speak up against sexual misconduct. Do you expect women to keep putting up with sexual misconduct? And saying that "as long as there are givers, there will be takers" gives the impression that the victims are as much to be blamed as the perpetrators of crime. That's akin to blaming a rape victim for the rape, instead of blaming the rapist. Finally, no viable solution to the problem has been proposed.

Pradeep Srivastava
California, USA

DISCOURSE INTERRUPTED

I enjoyed reading your article, "Vis-a Vis Discourse Interrupted" (LinkedIn, February 28, 2018). Mr. Singh may have been a Sikh, but he understood the teachings of Hinduism better than many Hindus. Not only that, it seems he not only understood Hinduism, but also tried to practice it in his day-to-day life, which is commendable.

I would just make a few points, as follows.

One, Hinduism has identified six obstacles to spiritual growth, namely, lust (kam), anger (krodha), greed (lobha), pride (madd), delusion (moha), and envy (matsaraya). Mr. Singh got five out of six right! Incidentally, "moha" in Sanskrit is "delusion" in English. However, in Hindi, "moha" means "attachment", as Mr. Singh has interpreted. I would personally prefer the Sanskrit version because our scriptures were originally written in Sanskrit.

Two, Gita says that lust, anger, and greed are the triple doors to hell. I don't see anything redeeming about these evil tendencies.

Three, attachment indeed is evil. True love must be selfless and unconditional, resulting in performing one's duties towards a loved one selflessly through performing selfless actions (nishkama karma).

Four, anger too is evil, as per our scriptures,

including Gita, as mentioned before. Below are some of the quotes on anger.

Pradeep Srivastava
California, USA

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MY LIFE AS A SNOB

Very humorous article. Please keep this up.

Shashi Prasad
New York, USA

I just read Musafir's humor article "My Life as a Snob", and it really made my day on this cold gloomy morning! I laughed out loud! Musafir's scope of writing styles amazes me: just the other day I read his very emotional and touching article about India, and today - this hilarious one that cheered me up so much. Well done!...

Irene Rudra
Texas, USA

Good to read your article re God. All the three religions have collectively the largest following & believe in one God who has deputed His representative(s) in this world to mend and reform.

The simplest definition or formula of God is:

God = € (sum total) of One who is:

Omnipresent (present every where) +

Omniscient (knows every thing) +

Omnipotent (most powerful)+

Timeless or Eternal (present in the past+ in the present + in the future).

I think all religions agree on the afore said traits of God 100%.

Rajendra Srivastava
Lucknow, India