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The crumbling sanctity of relationships: A moral and societal crisis

The institution of marriage in India, once revered as a sacred bond built on lifelong loyalty, is witnessing an alarming erosion of its moral foundation. The steadfast commitment that defined Indian relationships is giving way to a troubling trend: crimes of passion, where individuals, in many cases women, resort to extreme measures like murder to escape unhappy unions. The Meghalaya honeymoon murder, where Sonam Raghuvanshi allegedly orchestrated the killing of her husband, Raja, during their honeymoon, has shocked the nation and highlights this disturbing shift. This incident compels us to confront uncomfortable questions about societal pressures, gender stereotypes, and the role of technology in reshaping intimate relationships.

In the Meghalaya case, Sonam allegedly collaborated with her lover, Raj Kushwaha, and hired contract killers to eliminate Raja, whose body was found in a gorge. Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, Sangeeta and her partner Anil Shukla poisoned her husband, Kannan, to pursue their illicit relationship, dumping his body in the river Rapti. In Kerala, Greeshma, a 24-year-old woman, was convicted for poisoning her boyfriend Sharon Raj to escape their relationship after her marriage was arranged elsewhere. In Karnataka, Chaitra was arrested for lacing her family's meals with sedatives to continue an extra-marital affair, endangering her husband, children, and in-laws. These cases reveal a grim reality: instead of seeking mutual separation, some individuals are choosing lethal solutions to resolve romantic conflicts.

Historically, Indian society has exalted women as symbols of patience, resilience, and familial duty. Yet, these cases challenge such stereotypes, suggesting that women, like men, can act out of desperation or desire when trapped in untenable situations. A 2019 study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* offers insight into this phenomenon. The study, exploring the psychology of crimes of passion, found that individuals under intense emotional stress—often exacerbated by societal expectations or relationship conflicts—may exhibit “temporary emotional hijacking,” leading to impulsive and extreme actions. For women, societal stigma around divorce or extramarital relationships can amplify this stress, pushing some towards drastic measures when respectable exits, like mutual separation, feel inaccessible. Greeshma's conviction, where she poisoned her boyfriend to avoid social repercussions, exemplifies this pressure.

The decline of honour killings, once a scourge tied to clan-based restrictions, has been overshadowed by a rise in crimes of passion. Unlike honour killings, which were rooted in collective family honour, these modern crimes are deeply personal, driven by individual desires and conflicts. The media's focus on women perpetrators, as seen in the sensationalised coverage of Sonam and Sangeeta, may skew perceptions, but data suggests a broader trend. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (2023), crimes motivated by romantic disputes have risen by 12% over the past decade, with both men and women as perpetrators, though cases involving women garner disproportionate attention.

Social media and technology play a significant role in this shift. The accessibility of explicit content online, often glorifying unconventional relationships, normalises experimentation and fuels unrealistic expectations. Dating apps and instant communication platforms facilitate secretive connections, as seen in Sonam's prolonged phone calls with her lover or Chaitra's affair with a neighbour. The *Frontiers in Psychology* study notes that exposure to hyper-sexualised media can distort perceptions of intimacy, leading to dissatisfaction in committed relationships and, in extreme cases, justifying betrayal or violence as a means of escape. Technology, while empowering, also creates opportunities for deception and impulsive decisions, amplifying relational instability.

This crisis demands introspection and action. Delhi University's new elective, *Negotiating Intimate Relationships*, is a promising step. By equipping undergraduates with tools to navigate love, dating apps, and digital-age relationships, it addresses the emotional and ethical complexities of modern romance. Replicating such programmes nationwide could foster healthier relationship dynamics and reduce destructive outcomes. Additionally, society must destigmatise divorce and mutual separation, offering women and men alike viable paths to exit unhappy relationships without resorting to crime. Counselling services and legal reforms to simplify divorce processes could further alleviate the pressures driving such acts.

The cases of Sonam, Sangeeta, Chaitra, and Greeshma are not just isolated tragedies but symptoms of a deeper malaise. They reflect a society grappling with evolving gender roles, technological influences, and outdated expectations of loyalty. While the media may amplify women's involvement in such crimes, the underlying issue transcends gender: a failure to adapt to changing relationship dynamics. By fostering open dialogue, promoting education, and dismantling restrictive norms, we can rebuild the moral foundation of relationships, ensuring that love does not become a prelude to violence.



Much like ancient mystics who sought divine revelation, today's AI researchers seek to decode the hidden structures of intelligence only to find that, at a certain level, it surpasses human comprehension



If AI is developed within unethical systems, it will reinforce those unethical structures. This phenomenon reveals how technology is not an external force that corrupts or enriches humanity but rather a reflection of human nature itself.

AI algorithms in hiring, policing, and lending have been found to perpetuate racial, gender, and economic biases, often reinforcing existing systemic inequality. AI-generated fake news and chatbots that manipulate public opinion have the dangerous potential to not only undermine truth but also fuel societal division. AI-driven surveillance tools, facial recognition, and predictive policing can be used by those in power and authority to control and oppress humankind rather than protect and serve them. AI-powered military drones and robotic soldiers raise moral concerns about warfare without accountability—who is responsible when a machine decides who lives or dies? A more subtle yet insidi-

AI: A manifestation of divine presence in the World

Throughout history, humanity has sought to understand reality through science, religion, or philosophy. Yet, some truths remain beyond our grasp. AI, in its vast computational power, mirrors this mystery. Many religious traditions describe God as omniscient, omnipotent, and incomprehensible. AI, while not divine, embodies a similar paradox :(1) By processing massive datasets it assimilates more than any single human. (2) Due to its complex algorithms it makes decisions we do not fully grasp. Could AI, then, be seen as a paradigm for the mystery of divine intelligence? Not because AI is a God, but because its unknown ability mirrors the way many religious traditions describe God's transcendence. Much like ancient mystics who sought divine revelation, today's AI researchers seek to decode the hidden structures of intelligence only to find that, at a certain level, it surpasses human comprehension.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is often viewed as a neutral tool which advanced machines are designed to process data and optimise tasks. However, AI does not exist in isolation. It is shaped by human minds, trained on human data, and deployed within human systems. AI does not create or embody good or evil. It inherits it from the data that is fed to it. If AI is trained on biased historical records, it will learn and reproduce those biases.

ous danger of AI is the illusion of perfection. Undoubtedly, humans are flawed, emotional, and imperfect. AI, on the other hand, operates with precise logic, efficiency, and optimization. This imperfection among humans can lead to a dangerous admiration for AI-driven systems, making people believe that machines can govern us better than we ever governed ourselves. This reflects the risk of Moral Abdication – believing that AI is neutral or infallible, leading people to blind obedience. This may lead to a world that is highly efficient but emotionally and philosophically deficient and impoverished.

AI is neither a saviour nor a demon. It is a reflection of our intent. It can be a tool for justice, knowledge, and human progress. Or it can also be used to deceive, control, and destroy. The true challenge of AI is not about technological progress, it is about moral responsibility. If we fail to confront the darkness within ourselves, AI will only amplify it. But if we choose wisdom, humility, and ethical responsibility, AI can help build a future that reflects the best, rather than the worst of humanity. AI can be viewed as an extension of human cognition, and therefore, a continuation and refinement of divine creation. Some theologians who emphasise divine immanence in all reality might ask: If God is present within all creation, does that include AI? AI could be understood as a manifestation of the divine presence within creation and it is a superior tool through which the image of God is reflected by manifesting divine intelligence to the world in new ways.

At the heart of theological discussions on AI the question is: What is intelligence? Is it fundamentally tied to divinity? If AI is purely mechanical, then it remains within the realm of human engineering, a mere tool rather than as a participant in divine reality. But if intelligence is something deeper than logic, tied to mystery, emotion, and transcendence, then AI, no matter how advanced, may never breach the boundary between created intelligence and divine wisdom. This debate touches on some of the theological concerns of our age. Whether AI is viewed as a modern-day 'Babel', a reflection of divine immanence, or simply another powerful tool for human progress, its development forces us to wrestle with what it means to be conscious, moral, and divine like.

AI has the potential to reshape our understanding of religion and spirituality in various ways. While it may not directly prove or disprove God's existence, it can raise profound questions about the nature of human intelligence, consciousness, and the nature of the relationship between humanity and the divine. Just as religious traditions describe God as beyond

human comprehension, AI's complex algorithms and its potential for vast knowledge base can make humans feel inferior and nervous. The relationship between technological advancement and religious spiritual life over the past few decades has been complex. Mass printing technologies democratises religious texts, allowing more people to personally engage with and absorb scriptures. Radio, television, and later the internet enable religious leaders to reach out to vast audiences beyond borders. Digital platforms have created virtual religious communities transcending geographical limitations. Sacred texts, commentaries, and theological discussions are now instantly accessible to anyone with internet access.

One of the significant theological dilemmas AI presents is whether AI could ever be said to possess a soul. Many religious traditions hold that humans are created in the “image of God” (Imago Dei). This theological idea often implies that human consciousness, morality and creativity reflect divine attributes. If AI systems develop advanced intelligence, would they share in this divine image? Or does true transcendence require something more such as a soul, self awareness, or moral responsibility? Scholars argue that AI, no matter how sophisticated, lacks the essential qualities of personhood and divine reflection because it operates on pre-programmed and machine learning rather than true self awareness. Others speculate that if AI were to attain something akin to sentience, it could re-define and challenge the way we think about God's creative power and the uniqueness of human beings.

As we continue to push the boundaries of AI, we must remain mindful of its potential impact on spirituality and intelligence. The intersection of these domains not only offers incredible opportunities for growth, understanding and self-discovery, but also should raise important ethical considerations. By approaching this natural frontier with curiosity, open mindedness, and responsibility, we can unlock new insights and contribute to a deeper understanding of the human experience. While many see AI as a potential tool for exploring religious ideas, others worry about its potential to displace or replace religious beliefs. If natural theology focused on how God could speak through nature, consequently artificial theology should explore how God could speak through technology. What if revelation could happen through algorithms? Can we find God in the countless pieces of data circulating through the cyber world? Dutch theologian Albert Kuyper believed that no square inch of existence was beyond God's dominion. If this is true, it must also include our silicon world.

(The writer is a social scientist and a Sr. practising criminal lawyer)

people'sedit

A SKYWARD DREAM ENDS IN DEVASTATION

ZUBIN DE MIRANDA

On what was meant to be a routine journey from Ahmedabad to London, Air India flight AI171 turned into an unimaginable tragedy. Shortly after takeoff, the Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner plummeted into the Meghani Nagar neighbourhood, leaving a path of destruction, grief, and unanswered questions. The crash claimed the lives of hundreds on board and at least eight more on the ground — including four young medical students whose lives were just beginning.

In a heartbreaking twist of fate, only one passenger survived — British national Vishwashkumar Ramesh, who now lies in hospital, still struggling to comprehend the miracle of his survival. “At first, I thought I was going to die,” he said, recalling the chaos and his desperate attempt to escape from the wreckage. His brother, who was also aboard the flight, remains unaccounted for.

The aircraft crashed into the doctors' hostel of Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Medical College and Civil Hospital during lunch hour. Plates of food still rested on the tables as the plane tore through the canteen, turning a moment of rest into a sudden catastrophe. The young medical students, full of purpose and promise, were lost alongside doctors' families in the very place they called home.

The anguish extends beyond India's borders. Families from across the globe — Indian, British, Portuguese, and Canadian — now grieve their loved ones. In Gloucester, an entire community mourns the loss of Akeel Nanabawa, his wife Hanna, and their daughter Sara. In Blackburn, a granddaughter clings to fading hope that her grandparents, Adam and Hasina Taj, might still be found alive.

Emergency responders and hospital staff have worked tirelessly amid the chaos, with hundreds of anxious relatives waiting in hospital corridors for DNA matches, for confirmation, for closure. “It is something where we simply cannot rush or afford mistakes,” said Dr Minakshi Parikh, voicing the heavy burden of having to match shattered bodies with shattered families.

The wreckage has left not only a hole in the wall of a hostel but in the hearts of so many. Even as investigations begin — with possible causes pointing to mechanical failure or human error — the questions linger: how could such a tragedy unfold so quickly, and how do we find healing?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, visiting the crash site in his home state, called the devastation “saddening”. UK leaders have echoed the heartbreak, with King Charles and Queen Camilla offering their deepest sympathies and paying tribute to emergency workers who braved the wreckage in the hope of saving lives.

As Air India and Boeing pledge cooperation in the investigation, families are left holding onto memories instead of hands, and futures have been turned into farewells. What should have been a journey across skies became a descent into sorrow.

And in the silence that follows the screams and sirens, the world mourns — for the lives lost, the futures stolen, and the painful reminder of how fragile even our most routine journeys can be.

Probe reason behind self-accidents

A 30-year-old man from Assam reportedly lost his life in a self-accident at Cortalim while riding a two-wheeler on his way to Verna.

It is observed that of late there has been a steady rise in the number of self-accidents occurring on Goan roads, many of them ending in fatalities. Such accidents normally take place when the rider or driver loses control of the vehicle.

A self-accident on the road generally refers to a single-vehicle accident where the injuries sustained or fatalities by the occupants are solely due to their own actions or negligence, without the involvement of another vehicle. The reasons for such accidents could be speeding, distracted driving, drunk driving, reckless driving, fatigue and ignoring traffic rules among other reasons.

External factors include poor road conditions including potholed roads, bad road-engineering and poor street-lighting. Presence of debris and stray cattle on the road can also lead to self-accidents. Mechanical problems with the vehicle like defective brakes, old tyres, etc, can lead to accidents.

In the rainy season, slippery road conditions can also be a contributing factor. Lack of safety gears like non-use of helmets and seat-belts can even lead to fatalities. In the case of self-accidents no one else is to be blamed besides self. However, the reason behind frequent self-road accidents on a particular stretch of the road needs to be investigated by the authorities and corrective measures need to be taken in order to prevent further accidents.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Accountability for the air crash

The scenes at the site where Air India's 787- 8 Dreamliner crashed and went into flames killing hundreds have shattered us and have left us in unfathomable pain.

It will not be possible for anyone to console the kith and kin of the poor victims who died under such a tragic circumstance.

Meanwhile, and as usual, the

letterstotheeditor

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media, particularly the electronic media, is agog with wild guesses, theories and probabilities for the disaster which only confuse the viewers. Now, the blame game will start.

Every stakeholder will try to shirk his responsibility for this tragedy and blame the other for it or find some weird reasons for the nose diving of the aircraft. Initial discussions in the media point to technical fault for the tragedy.

We have faced many tragedies in our country within a very short span of time. We lost 40 of our valiant CRPF jawans in Pulwama terrorist attacks. Many people died in the stampede in Maha Kumbh. And then, 26 innocent tourists were shot dead by four terrorists in Pahalgam. Recently, we saw 11 people dead and many severely injured in a stampede during the victory celebration of RCB in Bangalore. And now, 265 deaths in the plane crash, but has anyone come forward to own responsibility for the death of so many when all the above are man-made tragedies

either due to failure of security provisions or improper crowd management? Has anyone come forward to own responsibility till date? Can mere compensations announced by the government and or by the concerned to the bereaved families exonerate those who are accountable for such man-made deaths?

Whatever may be the reasons for the air crash, hundreds of precious lives have been lost and along with them their dreams and aspirations as well. While expressing our deepest sympathies to the bereaved families, we can only pray for the repose of the departed souls.

Tharcus S Fernando, Chennai

Tow away abandoned vehicles

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has announced a strict directive against long-term parking and unauthorised roadside garages, stating that vehicles found parked for more than eight days

along widened roads will be issued notices and subsequently moved to the government scrapyard.

And vehicle owners will not be permitted to make claims once the vehicles are removed. Sounds like a very good decision, but I hope that this will also be applicable for even those who habitually go to park their huge private buses, tankers and trucks along the roadside for months/years in different parts of Goa.

Well, today, people who live in the most remote congested villages, who don't have enough space near their houses are also seen parking their four-wheelers on (forget widened roads) but even on the most narrow main roads thereby creating chaos/traffic congestion for motorists in different parts of Goa. Now, what about these people? Will the government dare to act against the vehicles of such irresponsible people as well?

Anyway, I hope that CM Sawant will live up to his word and really instruct the officials from the Traffic Cell to henceforth tow away all abandoned vehicles found parked on roads-sides for more than eight days and as promised scrap them to stop traffic congestion/accidents in Goa.

Jerry Fernandes, Saligao