

## EDITORIAL

## Make reading accessible to all

World Book Day is one of the most celebrated days in literature. World Book Day is a global event created to celebrate literature and reading. World Book Day has evolved to include e-books, making reading accessible to all readers, whether they prefer traditional books or digital formats. The World Book and Copyright Day, also known as World Book Day and International Day of the Book, is celebrated across the globe on April 23, to promote the joy of reading books. This global event is dedicated to recognizing the profound impacts books have on individuals and societies. On this day, the celebrations take place across the world to highlight the scope of books and their ability to inspire, educate, and unite people from diverse backgrounds. Reading is a very good habit that one needs to develop in life. Good books can inform you, enlighten you and lead you in the right direction. There is no better companion than a good book. Reading is important because it is good for your overall well-being. Once you start reading, you experience a whole new world. When you start loving the habit of reading you eventually get addicted to it. Reading develops language skills and vocabulary. Reading books is also a way to relax and reduce stress. It is important to read a good book at least for a few minutes each day to stretch the brain muscles for healthy functioning. Reading improves your vocabulary and develops your communication skills. It helps you learn how to use your language creatively. Not only does it improve your communication but it also makes you a better writer. Good communication is important in every aspect of life. The habit of reading is one of the best qualities that a person can possess. Books are known to be your best friend for a reason. So it is very important to develop a good reading habit. We must all read on a daily basis for at least 30 minutes to enjoy the sweet fruits of reading. It is a great pleasure to sit in a quiet place and enjoy reading. Reading a good book is the most enjoyable experience one can have. World Book and Copyright Day holds a special significance as a day dedicated to honoring authors, books, and intellectual property protection. Originating from the vision of Vicente Clavel Andres in 1922 to celebrate the legacy of Miguel de Cervantes, the day now commemorates the birth or death anniversaries of notable writers, including William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes.

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## Historic legal battle unfolds over Gyanvapi

BY  
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GORADIA

**Amidst the legal wrangling, a deeper narrative emerges, one of contested ownership, religious desecration and the enduring scars of history**

The legal hearings, whether in the court at Varanasi or the Supreme Court, over the past many months regarding the worship at Gyan Vapi, carry ethical interest. The statures of the lawyers of both sides in these courts appear to be comparable. It has occurred to neither lawyers nor laymen that one side argues in defence of their clients' rights of worship; the puja in the tekehana, whereas the opposing side also has argued that they have been the owners of the edifice in question. Also, it has not occurred to the judges, leaders and clients; in fact, no one else that the property is an acquisition by dacoity; i.e., loot in whatever sense. There was no mosque in that vicinity at all, until 17th century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb via a firman (a royal decree) had the Kashi Vishwanath Temple destroyed, except for the western side, which still unmistakably bears the evidence of the structure being originally a temple,

in the form of its carved walls.

The fervent followers of the Mughal emperor are not embarrassed that the Hindu devotees of Kashi Viswanath since the mid-17th century and even in independent India, have to worship in a small temple, because of lack of any more space. For over three centuries then, an illegitimate structure stands, welcoming the followers of Aurangzeb's bigoted ideology. The judges in this case should soon begin trials. It should be declared that this is a trial over a place of worship that was robbed and desecrated, not a dispute between two equals. The law of adverse possession cannot apply here.

"The Europeans should clearly understand that this spirit of Mohammedanism is unchangeable and that, if by any mischance, India should again come into the possession of men of this creed, all the churches and colleges and all the Mission institutions, would not be worth a week's purchase". So wrote Reverend Mathew Atmore Sherring, an English official. The Muslims did not harm the Christians of British India. But he was so upset at the vandalism he saw in Banaras that he could not help speaking out.

Reverend Sherring was a devout, maybe slightly bigoted evangelist member of the

London Missionary Society, dead against idol worship. And yet he said it would not be difficult to find twenty temples in all Banaras of the age of Aurangzeb (1658-1707). This is the case throughout the whole of northern India.

His description of the desecration of temples by the thousand and their blatant conversion into mosques, mausoleums, dargahs, palaces or pleasure houses has to be seen to be believed. In his view, if there is one thing about the Mohammedan period that Hindus remember better than another, it is the insulting pride of the Musalmans (sic), the outrages that they perpetrated upon Hindu religious convictions and the extensive spoliation of their temples and shrines. "When we endeavour to ascertain what the Mohammedans have left to the Hindus of their ancient buildings in Banaras, we are startled at the result of our investigations. Although the city is bestrewn with temples, it is unlikely that there are many which are old".

Reverend Sherring continued, that the diminutive size of nearly all the temples in India — except for the south — that exist is another testimony to the stringency of the Mohammedan rule. It seems clear that Mughal emperors forbade the Hindus to build spacious temples and forced them to



erect only small structures, for their idols and those of no pretensions to beauty. The consequence is that the Hindus of the present day, blindly following the example of their predecessors of two centuries ago, commonly build their religious edifices of the same dwarfish size as formerly. These observations speak volumes about the trauma that the Hindu psyche has suffered as a result of the impact of Islam.

Sherring writes that just as Muslims yearn to visit Mecca and the Christians, Jerusalem, the Hindu heart goes out to Banaras. If the Hindus refer to any one city as their holiest, it is Banaras. Aurangzeb tried to change its name to

'Muhammadabad'. The temple of Bisheswar, regarded as the god of all gods, was systematically demolished by Aurangzeb during the 17th century. The new temple was built at the behest of Rani Ahilyabai Holkar long after Aurangzeb's desecration. As already explained, all the temples built during the Mohammedan rule in Banaras had to be diminutive in size. It transpires that the demolition of temples was inspired not only by a hatred for idolatry or greed for loot but also by a desire to humiliate the Hindus. Or, else, how does one explain that the masjid built by Aurangzeb is bang next to the Gyan Vapi or the well of knowledge?

Sherring has also

referred to Al Baruni, an important source of Indian history of the medieval period. He came to India with Mahmud of Ghazni. Although Sherring casts doubts on Al Baruni's contention, nevertheless, he mentions that Ghazni reached as far as Banaras during his ninth incursion into India. In 1194 AD, Shahabuddin, better known as Muhammad Ghori, after defeating the Kannaujian monarch, Jaichand, marched to Banaras where he is reported to have destroyed a thousand Hindu temples.

*(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Raja Sabha; views are personal)*

## Anxiety over job loss

BY  
PRISHA KHANNA

**It is crucial to analyse the psychological impact so that employees are better equipped to navigate the uncertain AI waters**

Artificial intelligence (AI), considered the best invention of humankind, is slowly making our worst nightmares come true. AI is already doing most jobs better than we ever could and the human cost of it is jarring.

The prevalence of AI and its ability to replace several automated tasks in the workplace have now become a direct threat to the social position of employees. Individuals who fear losing their competencies and independence to the automotive wave are more likely to perceive AI as a greater threat to their identity. Those who have an increased sense of work responsibility and seem to have a heightened sense of importance for their role also tend to experience an increased identity threat (Mirbabaie et al, 2021). Lack of awareness and preparedness to work with AI is a prominent reason

for this.

These are some leading factors for employees to experience uncertainty and anxiety about being replaced at their jobs. Unfortunately, their anxieties have a reason to exacerbate in recent times.

Goldman Sachs has estimated that about 300 million jobs could be lost or degraded due to this rapidly evolving technology. There has been an influx of investments in global AI projects in recent times. From 2021, \$94 billion worth of investments have been made towards AI (Kelly, 2023). Such a growth trajectory can only mean higher job insecurity in the coming years.

Layoffs and Displacement

So far, 2024 has already seen 32,000 employees become victims of mass layoffs in top companies like Google, Amazon, Meta (Bhati, 2024). The trend seems to be nowhere near stopping and its psychological implications are slowly coming to light. The sheer lack of empathy portrayed by the organisations often leaves employees feeling expendable. It creates an atmosphere of fear, uncertainty and lack of trust in the organisation. If such big companies can throw thousands of brilliant employees out of jobs, then the rest of us need to let go of our perceived bubble

of employment security. Frequent layoff cycles have a proven long-term impact on the mental and emotional well-being of workers. It results in increased stress levels, reduced self-esteem and anxiety owing to the uncertainty that surrounds one's employment. Added to this is the fear of impending financial unpredictability (Kelly, 2023).

As employees across jobs are watching the strength of generative AI grow at an unprecedented rate, there is a constant fear that machines may one day replace human workers. This fear of job loss is labelled as job displacement anxiety. Studies show that workers across sectors report feelings of anxiousness regarding their future employment and the relevance of their skillset in the fast-moving industry requirements. PwC's annual global workforce survey from 2022 revealed that at least one-third of the respondents reported concerns regarding the chances of AI replacing them at their workplace (Cox, 2023).

Implications of job displacement anxiety go way deeper than apprehensions about the future. The psychological impact is significant and has been found to take a toll on the motivation and well-being of

employees. It is crucial to analyse the psychological impact of the situation so that employees across the globe are better equipped to navigate the uncertain AI waters.

Psychological Implications

The impact of AI in the form of mass layoffs, combined with the constant worry over the future of their career, is pushing employees under immense psychological burden. The loss of employment is bound to bring with it a gush of negative emotions. The shock and disparity of having been laid off are most often followed by reduced self-esteem and various symptoms of anxiety and even depression. These symptoms are elevated when there is a growing financial and social insecurity that grips displaced employees. The resultant panic can negatively impact day-to-day functioning and may, in fact, even hamper one's ability to secure another job. The reduced self-esteem may eventually lead to reduced self-worth and distorted self-perception which may lower one's overall productivity and various other cognitive abilities like concentration and decision-making. (Laker, 2023)

Those who are not subjected to such a displacement are still impacted by the lack

of job security. The fear that they may be the next one to be laid off often leaves employees feeling stressed and anxious about the fate of their jobs. The additional workload on them owing to organisational downsizing exercises increases symptoms of burnout and deteriorates the mental and physical health of the employees (Laker, 2023).

A study conducted using a French survey revealed that mass layoffs result in an increased consumption of prescribed psychotropic drugs by employees who were not displaced. The significant increase has been attributed to possible reasons stemming from job insecurity and what it means for employees, their financial security, families and health (Clainche & Lengagne, 2019). People on either side of the job displacement crisis have something to fear. Thus it becomes imperative for individuals to constantly stay a step ahead in their professional journeys. The future of work is to work with AI, not against it.

Taking on AI The Future of Jobs Report 2023 suggests that at least 44% of the existing workers' skills will be disrupted in the next five years. This means that continuous learning and upskilling are now

more important than ever. It is important to critically evaluate the job market and recognise skills that AI can't replace such as empathy, leadership and social influence, which can be honed and used to one's advantage. While AI may be eating up several jobs, it is already creating many more jobs that never previously existed. It is vital to recognise and grab the right opportunity. (World Economic Forum, 2023)

The rapid advancement of AI and machine learning has irreversibly remoulded our workplaces. The key to navigating the challenges that come with this automation is embracing the growth mindset of constantly learning. Adaptability will prove to be a crucial factor in staying ahead of the curve and safeguarding future careers for the existing workforce.

The need of the hour is for individuals to strongly consider investing in personal and professional development and for organisations to facilitate this process for their employees. Such proactive initiatives can help carve the path for a more resilient workforce that is equipped to work in the age of automation.

*(The author is Psychology student at FLAME University, Pune)*