

**Thought  
for the day**

The best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up.  
— Mark Twain

**OPINION 9****PICTURE THIS**

**YOUNG PROS:** Students perform a traditional dance during the Children's Film Festival at Bal Bhavan **PICT/SATISH BADIGER**

# Forgotten art of conversation

**Anita Nair**

is the best selling author of *The Better Man, Ladies Coupe and Mistress*. Her new book is *Goodnight & God Bless*, a collection of literary essays. Her books have been translated into over 26 languages around the world.

It happened in a strange way but late last year it occurred to me how little we talk anymore...

Most of December was devoted to repairs at home. They weren't exactly 'if I don't do it now the roof will fall on our heads' type, but more to do with maintenance. More than poets and perhaps on par with politicians, contractors have a certain way with words. Especially when it comes to promises. So the contractor looked at what was considered the scope of the work and promised to have it done in a period of time that could be borne with gritted teeth rather than a total collapse of the nervous system.

The workers arrived. The work began. The workers didn't arrive. The work paused. Thus began a whole new cycle in my life.

Meanwhile most of the rooms lay in disarray stripped of furniture and purpose. Marble dust covered every available surface including the leaves of house plants and the dog's snout. What I thought was going to be a spit and polish job was acquiring the dimensions of the building of the pyramids.

I watched helplessly as men came and went and progress was measured by inches.

The house hummed but as evening fell, it acquired an eerie silence. In the best interest of our gadgets, we had unplugged the TVs and put the radio and music system away as well.

And that was when it struck me - how little we talk contributed to the noises in our homes. Conversation has dwindled to almost banal essentials rather than sharing of thoughts, ideas, dreams or even a laugh.

The quality of our silence - what was considered the cornerstone of a good relationship was weighed down by white noise. The television, the radio, the telephone, the music, the ipod, the mobile - in countless ways we have filled up spaces where words ought to have flourished.

Instead of talking among ourselves, we plunk ourselves in front of the TV and watch TV hosts talk.

We huddle in chairs across each other and hear the nonsensical prattle of radio hosts... we punch keys on our mobile phones and air our secret thoughts and daily lives to strangers across the world instead of the person in the room... it is as if we need to distance ourselves from talk.

And I think of evenings when the family gathered either in the living room or around the dining table and minds were exercised. Of dinner parties where the conversation went late on into the nights and persisted even at the door step... we were simply loathe to stop talking. There was so much to say....

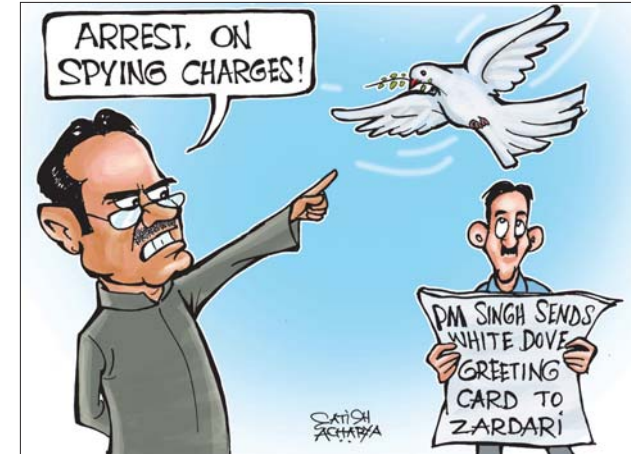
In 18th and 19th century Europe, cafes were home to both coffee and cake and conversation.

Ideas were brewed along with coffee and as the aroma rose so did the wave of culture. Perhaps what is needed is the return of the cafes in our lives.

With the changing times, art and culture might find new cradles. But we just may forget to talk, to converse... and how sad that would be?



**A LOT CAN HAPPEN OVER COFFEE:** Cafes have been home to art, culture and conversations over the years. Sadly, the cafe culture has dwindled **FILE PIC**

**SATISH ACHARYA****LETTER****Too many holidays**

Sankranti/Pongal still had its pleasant moments - the food, the flowers, the fun.

But really, there are just too many festivals and holidays.

With the economy down and people losing jobs, can we afford the number of holidays we have throughout the year?

It's either festivals, or national days or some leader's birthday, death day, whatever..

Added to that is the umpteen number of strikes and rallies and bandhs.

Everything comes to a standstill. Yet, it is amazing how India has managed to progress and prosper to such

an extent that it is now the envy of most other countries.

Just imagine how much more we could have achieved if we didn't have so many holidays during the year.

Talking of festivals, the fervour and the enthusiasm has reduced tremendously now.

Some working people who look forward to a holiday, find it better to just relax than to go through all the additional cooking and pooja that is a part of any festival.

Kids too find these festivals boring now. They would rather play their video and computer games than join in the festivities. Even studies are a better option, they say.

— **Seetharam** via email

**POINT OF VIEW****Alimony, always a pain**

Divorced techies, already reeling under the recession, are going to court with the plea that they can no longer pay the same amount of alimony to their ex-wives, which they used to pay earlier.

Alimony is a good thing for the woman who will have to fend for herself once she is divorced, especially if she takes the kids along with her.

But there are so many cases where this legal boon to women is a nightmare for the men.

There are so many instances where women end the marriage at the drop of a hat and immediately seek compensation.

It is a known fact that in the US and other countries, girls marry rich guys, split within days and claim a huge amount as compensation. Not that this doesn't happen here in India.

An acquaintance of mine

was married to an Indian in Canada and returned after about a year. She has reportedly sued the husband for an alimony of \$1 million Canadian dollars!!

Another person I know, works night shifts. His wife is at home all by herself

during that time.

He found out that she has been in touch with her boyfriend and he even visited her when the husband was at work. She even went away for

days to be with the friend.

When he couldn't take any more of this, he filed for a divorce. But the wife and her parents filed a counter case of dowry harassment - this after many years of marriage and there was no dowry given or taken.

Poor guy had to go into hiding until he managed to borrow enough money for a bail. It's not always the women who suffer, but guys too.



**Nirmala Rao**

**Have your say!** We want to hear from YOU. Here's how you can send us your letters, comments and yes, even pictures.

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