THE HINDU
Sunday, December 22, 2024

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From the mountains The women of Camp Kharu; Suket Dhir's 'snow leopard in a helmet' biker jacket for the 'Journeying Across the Himalayas' festival; tattoo tools from the Northeast; tools to make the *tati*; and Siddho's *The Indus that Flows from my Kitchen*. (ROYAL ENFIELD, HEADHUNTERS'INK, MANOU)

IN 2025, LOOK TO THE HIMALAYAS

A recent festival in Delhi, showcasing the cultures and conservation activities of a 100-plus Himalayan communities, could kickstart more conversations and collaborations for the region

Aditya Mani Jha

A large Ladakhi house typically has two kitchens. *Yarkhang*, the summer kitchen, is a basic functional unit located on a higher floor, while the winter kitchen, *chansa*, is marked by its lateral sprawl, brass and copper cookware, and a *thap* (hearth) around which family, guests and visitors gather. It is the fluid potential of the kitchen – transcending its role as a mere space for cooking, into a central aspect of Ladakhi culture "that brings together traditions and ceremonies, mirroring the seasonal rhythms of the land" – that resonates with multidisciplinary artist Tsering Motup Siddho. And the fact that this culture is changing rapidly.

At the recent inaugural edition of 'Journeying Across the Himalayas', a festival presented by motorcycle manufacturing company Royal Enfield, and dedicated to the cultures of a 100-plus Himalayan communities, Siddho explored the *chansa's* transformation (because of migration, lifestyle and other factors) in his installation *The Indus that Flows from my Kitchen*: through paintings, photographs, and a video recording of the metalworkers of Chilling, a village in Ladakh's Zanskar valley, who make utensils.

"The 'other' comes into play in how we understand the self," says the 32-year-old artist. "Ironically, tourists helped us Ladakhis understand our own unique traditions. Just as living away from home opened my eyes to the transformation [for instance, plastic replacing brass] and the need to preserve our cultural heritage." As people interacted with his installation at the Travancore Palace, they shared similar stories. "A Sikkimese designer told me how he could see the same changes in his parents' kitchen. This is why sharing stories is important – it makes us think, reflect and find connections."

Strings unusual

Photographer Manou is also working with the Royal Enfield team to design small handbooks for adventure riders to the Northeast and Ladakh "featuring local people and their stories to help visitors act in a more conscious and connected way". One of them is Nagaland's Kevesho Tetseo, father of the famous folk group Tetseo Sisters, who crafts the *tati* (far right), a single-stringed musical instrument of the Chakhesang Nagas.

No longer India's untapped frontier

Himalayan states and Union Territories – Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Tripura, Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand – cover about 18% of the country's area. Its cultures, cuisines, and communities, however, don't always make it to the mainstream. Now, a new guard of artists, environmentalists, chefs, designers and tastemakers are helping change the narrative. By protecting, promoting and sharing their traditions and landscapes.

As visitors from across the country engaged with some of these cultural, entrepreneurial and conservation efforts at the Delhi festival, it was also a reminder about why we need to pay more attention to these communities and their stories in the new year.

And the stories are plenty.

Growing a tattoo garden

Morangam Khaling, known professionally as Mo Naga, is an ethnographer and tattoo artist who is pioneering neo-Naga designs. Based in Manipur, he belongs to one of the smallest Naga tribes, Uipo, with a population of less than 2,000. For the past decade he's been documenting native tattooing practices, and in the last year alone, he travelled over 2,500 km across the Northeast to collect specimens for a tattoo garden he's planting in Manipur – to preserve the dying species of plants and herbs used in traditional tattooing.

"Our tattoos tell the stories of our past and present. More importantly, they tell us about our connection with our immediate environment," he says. Though traditional tattooing practices stopped over half a century ago, Khaling is talking to village elders, collecting information, and bringing back traditional tools. "When I started, there wasn't a lot of documentation. But things have improved over the last couple of decades, especially with artists discovering social media."

A Fellow of the Delhi-based Foundation for Contemporary Indian Art's (FICA) Himalayan Fellowship for Creative Practitioners, he says his efforts are already helping the younger generation connect with their cultural heritage. He is seeing visible effects in how they interact with it in the form of graffiti on the streets of Kohima in Nagaland, on merchandising, and even in motifs used in popular festivals, including the Hornbill Festival.

Risha and suspended loin looms

Designer Aratrik Dev Varman, of Ahmedabad-based label Tilla, has been documenting *risha*, the indigenous textile tradition from his home state Tripura, for some time now. His 15-foot installation at the Delhi festival amplified its story. It drew from the simple ingenuity of the backstrap loom – a modular structure that can be rolled out, hung, and extended if necessary.

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When food travels

Food is one of the ways that the Himayalan belt's stories are crossing over to the rest of the country. And what was once a trickle has now become a sizeable flow. There's award-winning chef Nilza Wangmo and her all-woman restaurant Alchi Kitchen in Ladakh — who takes her traditional fare such as *timsthuk* (a hearty noodle soup with peas and dried cheese) and stinging nettle soup to pop-ups in Delhi and Mumbai. And chef Prateek Sadhu, one of its biggest voices. The Kashmiri who formerly helmed Masque in Mumbai is bringing the region's indigenous culinary wisdom into mainstream conversations about Indian cuisine through the dining experiences at Naar, his experimental 20-seat restaurant in Kasauli.

KIRAN DESAI'S LEXICON OF LONELINESS

The Booker-winning author says her new novel, releasing next year, will explore both the critical and beautiful aspects of being alone

Stanley Carvalho

Booker Prize-winning author Kiran Desai's third book, *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny*, is slated for release in 2025. The Indian-born American author has been working on this novel studiously for two decades, which seems a long time even for a 700-page tome.

Talking at the Bangalore Literature Festival last week, Desai spoke candidly about how she worked every day of the week, and "vanished into an ocean of stories, where real life becomes ghost-like and books become real life, like in a way the past becomes more vivid than the present". It was a challenge, she said, "to put together the book lying in pieces".

The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny is a lexicon of loneliness or solitude, said Desai, adding that it is not just the critical parts of being alone but also the beautiful and the spiritual sides of it. "A lot of readers will understand the global epidemic of loneliness; you shouldn't be afraid to be personal about it. In the midst of brokenness, a window opens to invention."

Desai was 24 when her debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was published in 1998. A comic satire, it revolved around a dreamy, introspective young man torn between his filial obligations and a desire to be left alone.

She's (Anita Desai) more interested in being a spare writer, subtracting more than adding. I think I've gone the other way. As I age, I'll also go her way

New work A lot of readers will understand the global epidemic of loneliness, says Kiran Desai. (ANNETTE HORNISCHER)

This book, she admitted, was simple, written very quickly and taught her how much she loved writing although it didn't capture the darker parts of her work. "I think I was just trying to recover a childhood version of something of India I knew I was losing," she said.

Like a worker ant

Her second book, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), which won the Man Booker Prize "was a harder book and took me a while to write", she continued. The novel tells of a 1980s rebellion by the ethnic Nepalese in the Himalayan town of Kalimpong.

Desai doesn't venture out much, yet writes about everything around her. Her writing process is slow, and with characteristic candour, she admitted at the Festival that she writes in a "jigsaw puzzle way" and takes a long time to construct her work. She noted that sometimes one has to continue working without perspectives and maintain an ant-like discipline to keep going.

It was natural for Desai to grow up within the writing life of her renowned mother, author Anita Desai, whose works include *In Custody*, *Baumgartner's Bombay*, and most recently, *Rosarita*. Seeing life through her mother's lens, discipline came naturally to her growing up, said Desai, adding that their writing styles are different. "She's (Anita) more interested in being a spare writer, subtracting more than adding. I think I've gone the other way. I think, as I age, I'll also go her way."

However, some of the landscapes tend to overlap in their books. Both, mother and daughter escape to a Mexican village to write, and the same stray dog and scorpion figure in their works.

Desai, now 53, left India in 1986, moving initially to England and then to the U.S. where she continues to reside. Yet, she feels she is getting closer to India because of the large Indian diaspora and its passionate engagement with political developments back home. What's more, Desai lives in New York's Jackson Heights, a predominantly South Asian immigrant neighbourhood.

Inspired by Husain and Rushdie

Alluding to the success of Indian immigrants in the U.S, she reckons it is largely due to "this idea of secular democracy dinned into our heads as children and the way we grew up that made us very tolerant". However, with a hint of regret, she observes that secular democracy is being seriously challenged now both in the U.S. and India.

Desai also referred to some pivotal political and historical moments that impacted her, finding a way into her writings. She recounted her experience of witnessing the Sikh-Hindu communal riots in 1984 as well as the Babri Masjid riots in 1992. "Those two were really enormous experiences in my life and made me think deeply."

Talking about secularism and democracy, Desai couldn't help but remember the 'Bombay boys' – Ismail Merchant (who made the film *In Custody/ Muhafiz* based on Anita's book), M.F. Husain and Salman Rushdie – and expressed her gratitude to them for inspiring her and teaching her to work with an open heart and great vision.

The writer is a Bengaluru-based independent journalist.

Living between boundaries

Inspired by the life of Pakistani nuclear physicist Abdus Salam, M.G. Vassanji's latest is all about navigating dilemmas

Sanjay Sipahimalani

Physicists seem to be having a cultural moment. Last year, there was Christopher Nolan's Oscar-sweeping *Oppenheimer*, based on the American theoretical physicist's biography by Kai Bird. Then came Benjamin Labatut's *The Maniac*, a novel that explored the life of polymath John von Neumann. Now, there is M.G. Vassanji's *Everything There Is*, inspired by the life of Pakistani nuclear physicist and Nobel Prize recipient Abdus Salam.

What first intrigued Vassanji about Salam, as he puts it in his author's note, was that while most physicists of his calibre have been agnostics, Salam was a devout Muslim. However, the author goes on to clarify that all the characters and incidents in the novel are his inventions, "including cameos by Feynman, Dirac, and Gell-Mann... only the physics is real".

Vassanji's protagonist is named Nurul Islam, publicly acclaimed for his contributions to the Theory of Everything, and privately caught between science and faith, as well as morality and desire. These conjoined threads run throughout the book, a fictional exploration of such issues in a complex world. The sections on quantum physics are commendably and clearly handled, especially for the uninitiated.

Primarily set in the 70s, *Everything There Is* begins with Nurul's visit to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he is invited to deliver a guest lecture at MIT. Here, he meets Hilary, graduate student and designated chaperone, and there is an almost immediate chemistry between them. This relationship forms one pole of the novel, with the other emerging when a radicalised student challenges Nurul after his lecture, questioning whether he is claiming credit for theories explicated by other physicists.

Everything There Is
M.G. Vassanji
Context
₹699

Weak and strong forces

The novel expands to include other aspects of Nurul's world, particularly his family in London, which consists of his wife Sakina, their two sons and a daughter. Sakina happens to be his father's elder brother's daughter, and the marriage had been arranged by his family in Pakistan. The husband and wife share a close, loving relationship, even if she plays second fiddle and often finds herself out of place in chilly London.

A tapestry of Nurul's earlier days is woven throughout the narrative. We learn, among other things, about his childhood in a small Punjabi town: the pride that his father, a perfumer and part-time muezzin, takes in his achievements; and his minority community's sense of estrangement, mirroring the plight of Pakistan's Ahmediyyas. The lasting consequences of India's Partition are starkly humanised, especially when it comes to the fate of Sharmila, his childhood sweetheart.

Gratifyingly, Vassanji also probes the perspectives of Hilary and Sakina, the two women in Nurul's life – although the results here are more limited than with his central character. Nevertheless, the attempts to incorporate their complementary angles are welcome, as they alternate between being the weak and strong forces in his life.

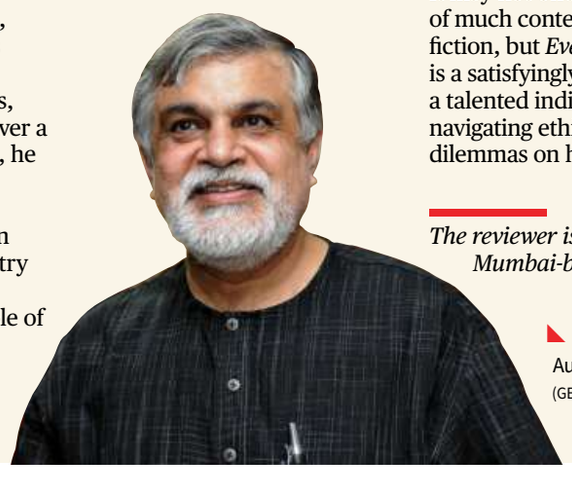
Paradoxes of Nurul's life

Slowly and surely, Vassanji involves us in the paradoxes and dilemmas of Nurul's life and ways of thought. His approach to science is akin to the Neoplatonists: when asked how he reconciled the Quran and fundamental physics, he answers: "One [is] a matter of faith and conviction; the other that of observation and reason." He adds that the equations and laws of physics reflect "through that sublime mirror – the human mind – the workings of God's Creation, its wonders". Similarly, he takes pride in the achievements of the pioneers of the Islamic Golden Age, such as Ibn Sena and Ibn al-Haytham.

The physicist's initial refusal to help with his country's nuclear programme earns him the ire of those in the establishment as well as fanatics – with tragic results that unfold as the book progresses. Later, he reverses course, allowing himself to be persuaded by arguments of deterrence in light of India's own nuclear ambitions.

There is something pleasingly old-fashioned about Vassanji's novel, from the courtliness of the dialogue to the genteel portrayal of a life lived between boundaries. It may not offer the novelties of much contemporary fiction, but *Everything There Is* is a satisfyingly serious look at a talented individual navigating ethical and moral dilemmas on his own terms.

The reviewer is a Mumbai-based writer.



Author M.G. Vassanji (GETTY IMAGES)

View from the hospital bed

Garth Greenwell's new novel takes a compassionate look at life, love, and art during the pandemic

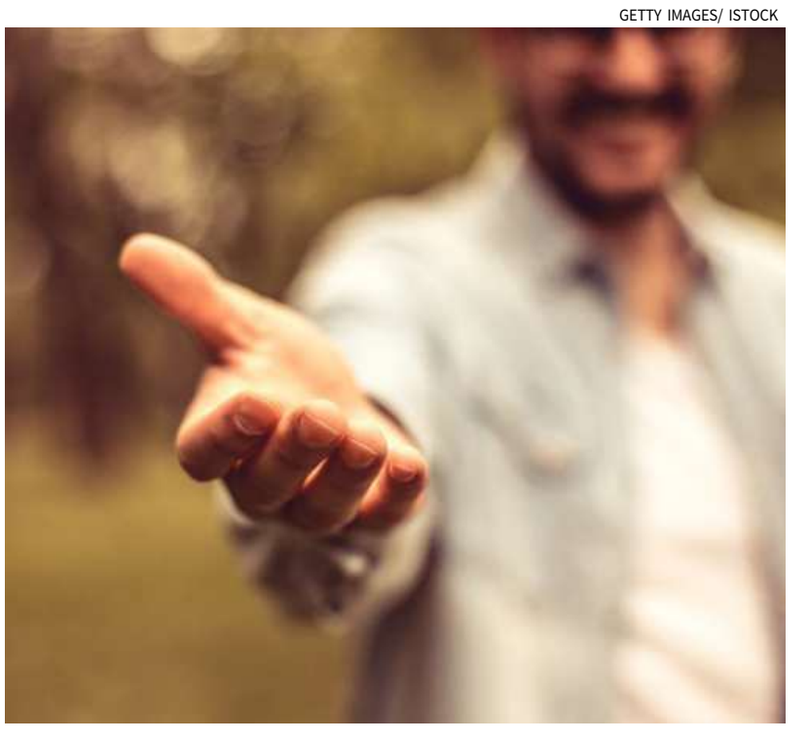
Sharmistha Jha

In *Small Rain*, author Garth Greenwell's nameless narrator grapples with pandemic anxiety as a pain in the gut forces him to go to the hospital, a place he feels is the most unsafe amid the COVID-19 crisis of 2020. His inner turmoil mirrors the collective anxiety of people around the world. The narrator thinks of colleges reopening as the number of active COVID-19 cases rises: "It's like watching a car drive straight off a cliff, a friend said, but slowly, deliberately, a slow-motion suicide."

The emergency trip to the hospital is going to alter the narrator's life in ways that he cannot foresee. Pushed into situations that are painful and scary, he turns to art to find solace. Soon, it becomes a bridge between him and a nurse when they find common ground in 'Westron Wynde', a song with roots in medieval poetry. This is where the book derives its title from.

Greenwell creates a narrator who has dedicated his life to art and poetry, and art gives him his life back while he is isolated in hospital. He makes meaning of life through art and he experiences longing for his partner through art. Poetry becomes his object of devotion. "All art is a message, we want to communicate something but not entirely graspable something, maybe there's a kind of sense only non-sense can convey; so that the poem becomes not just a message but an object of contemplation, of devotion even, inexhaustible," the narrator says.

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK



Small Rain
Garth Greenwell
Picador
₹750

Things fall apart

The author places his character inside layers of brokenness: the narrator lives with his partner inside a house that is damaged, in a country that is falling apart under the pressures of the pandemic and divided along fault lines of race. The country is a part of a broken world that is being ravaged by a climate catastrophe, where bird species are fast disappearing.

As with Greenwell's other novels, *Small Rain* is also concerned with human relationships. The narrator is struck by the asymmetry between patients and caregivers at hospitals. He becomes emotionally attached to his favourite nurse, Alivia. Her actions carry deep meaning for him while for Alivia, the narrator is just one of many patients she cares for as a part of her job.

The time spent at the hospital transforms the narrator's life. It changes how he thinks about his body, his work, and it changes his relationship with art, which gains a new spiritual dimension. At the end of his hospital stay, the narrator comes to care for his body that he has loathed for most of his adult life. Somewhere in the humdrum of daily life, he had also forgotten to appreciate the small joys of a romantic relationship. However, now, he cannot wait to return to his partner, L. *Small Rain* is a compassionate work of literature about life, love, and art in the times of a global pandemic.

The independent reviewer and editor is based in New Delhi.

BREAKING GLASS CEILINGS

A new book profiles one of India's leading anthropologists, Irawati Karve, who lived and worked on her own terms

Mini Kapoor

Urmilla Deshpande and Thiago Pinto Barbosa open their page-turner of a biography in 1927. A young woman, all of 22 years old, was setting sail from Bombay for the port of Hamburg. She was Irawati Karve, who had already broken glass ceilings and would go on to be among India's leading anthropologists. Besides helping shape the field in India and mentor countless students, she would write a collection of essays on the Mahabharata called *Yuganta*, to controversy, to acclaim (it won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1968), and to lasting fame as it would remain a steady seller down the decades.

For now, tall of frame "with pale translucent skin, and grey-green eyes framed by round, silver-rimmed glasses", she was headed for Berlin to pursue her Ph.D at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics (KWI-A). Her husband of less than a year, Dinkar Karve, was at the Bombay port to see her off. He too had been in Germany for higher education, and before her departure had provided her with a smattering of German and his old personal contacts who gave her a home away from her Pune home.

Measuring skulls

If her life before Berlin had been strung together with personal assertions – to pursue higher studies, to marry the liberal and progressive Dinkar – now in Berlin she would show her intellectual autonomy. Her supervisor at the institute was Eugen Fischer, who would later join the Nazi Party, and whose work informed Adolf Hitler's idea of "racial hygiene". Irawati was assigned to compare skulls of Europeans with those of "other races" to demonstrate that comparatively "white Europeans were logical and reasonable".

The authors, one being Irawati's grand-daughter and the other an anthropologist based in Germany who did his Ph.D dissertation on Karve, use phrases involving the words "race" and "racial" in quote marks as a measure of the disrepute that "race science" has come into – but at the time of Irawati's Berlin sojourn it was widely prevalent. And as the authors point out, the hypothesis that she was expected to clinch included herself among the "other races" that were supposedly less logical and reasonable.

Irawati found no such thing, and thereby she did, as the authors write, "what no one else, in the entire history of KWI-A had done. She had stated that she could not observe any correlation between racial differences and the measured skull asymmetries". Fischer was not pleased, and gave her "the lowest possible grade".

Two traits of Irawati are evident in the telling of her Berlin sojourn – her powers of empathetic observation, putting in words the gathering atrocities against Jewish persons, and her respect for her subjects, even dead ones. "Forgive me," she would say to each skull before beginning her investigation.

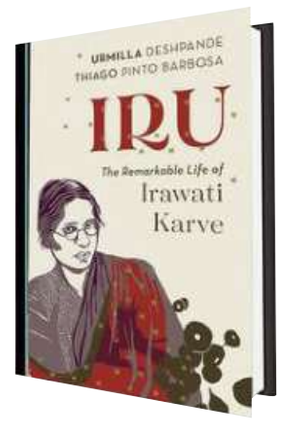
Studying diversity

Once back in India, she was affiliated for most of her career with the Deccan College, starting in the sociology department and later founding the department of anthropology. She travelled far and wide in India, using sample collection techniques learnt in Europe. Over her career, she used her powers of observation and her meticulous field work to "understand who we are". In the course of her life's work on kinship patterns, "she strove to understand the diversity of languages and ethnic groups in India". She always listened, and responded in person, in books, in essays, in recollections. "Are you me then? Are you me?" she asked the skeletal remains of a young woman who lived 15,000 years ago.

The story Deshpande and Pinto Barbosa tell of her personal and professional life is stranger than fiction, and it would seem natural that they use the narrative techniques of fiction to place the reader in Irawati's mind. It does mean that the biography has an episodic character, and perhaps the distance from the subject is not far enough to convey how others in her personal and professional circles saw her – but it provides a vivid picture of Irawati Karve's interior and external engagement.

The writer is a Delhi-based critic.

Wonder woman (Clockwise from left) Irawati Karve; with husband 'Dinu' at the house on Law College Road, Pune, 1931; and 'Iru' with human remains from the Mesolithic period, in Langhanaj, Gujarat, February 1944.
(COURTESY: URMILLA DESHPANDE)



Iru: The Remarkable Life of Irawati Karve
Urmilla Deshpande and Thiago Pinto Barbosa
Speaking Tiger
₹699

Violent display The Godhra train set on fire by a mob goes up in flames, on February 27, 2002. (AP)

Shadows of the past

Zara Chowdhary looks back at the 2002 Gujarat riots when she was a teenager

Sushila Ravindranath

She was 16 in 2002 when Gujarat saw an uprecedented flare-up of communal riots. It upended her life in ways she could not have imagined, but Zara Chowdhary, who teaches at the University of Wisconsin, lived to tell the tale.

A "burning train set Gujarat and India on a new path," writes Chowdhary in her unflinching yet unsentimental memoir, *The Lucky Ones*, in which she reprises the tragedy and its aftermath, and simultaneously tells the story of a family with worries of their own.

The Lucky Ones
Zara Chowdhary
Context/Westland Books
₹699

Road to healing

While other books on the riots like Revati Laul's *The Anatomy of Hate* and Manoj Mitta's *The Fiction of Fact-Finding* went into several aspects of the violence and the reasons for it, Chowdhary's is a personal tale of anguish, and the difficult road to healing.

A fire on a train at Godhra which left over 50 kar sevaks or Hindu volunteers returning from Ayodhya dead led to fingers being pointed at "Gujarat's bogeymen: the Muslim citizenry".

The State erupted in targeted violence and more than 2,000 Muslims died – the number is disputed by the government – and over 50,000 became "refugees/escapees/survivors in their own country".

Taking readers through the initial days of panic, curfew and violence that she and her family faced, Chowdhary writes about the upsetting fact that her final school-leaving exams had been postponed. But the riots and the "unbelonging" within her own home led to the memoirist looking at the big picture. Thus, she also weaves in the subcontinent's brutal political and national history, particularly the rise of the right-wing and its impact on democracy.

From the horrors that befell Bilkis Bano, and her brave fight, to the killing of Congress leader Ehsan Jafri in the Gulbarg Society massacre, Chowdhary ensures nothing will be forgotten. She lists the number of mosques, dargahs, temples and churches that were damaged or destroyed in the mayhem too.

Ties that bind

Alongside, it is also a story of a teenager who is beginning to see the frayed relationship between her parents, and the strain that it puts on the family. Amid the madness, Chowdhary and her family, holed up in their flat at Jasmine Apartments in the old city of Ahmedabad, are saved by another resident, the 80-year-old Mrs. Pant, when the police come knocking. Chowdhary traces the history of Ahmedabad, which is not unused to communal violence, but she writes that nothing prepared them for 2002.

Her father, an uncompromising government servant, got transferred to punishment postings throughout his career. His father – and Chowdhary's grandfather – was influential enough to be able to get those orders overturned. A two-year stint in Vadodara was a happy time for the family as there was harmony all around.

In an especially charming chapter, Chowdhary talks about her love for Sanskrit. A forgotten classical language, once the preserve of upper-class Hindus, Chowdhary studied it for three years along with Gujarati and Hindi. She says of Sanskrit: "Everything about the language works in neat tables and tablets. Yet it is fluid. It tinges the air with something otherworldly, from millennia ago."

Although something is taken away from Chowdhary forever, *The Lucky Ones* is a moving account of survival. It is a story of unspeakable horrors, but told without any bitterness.

The reviewer is a Chennai-based writer and critic.

IN 2025, LOOK TO THE HIMALAYAS

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The multi-striped composition consisted of two sets of intersecting threads, criss crossing to reveal a play of opacities in six segments.

"Craft and textile ecosystems of the mountains are special and very fragile. And their stories aren't often told," he says, explaining how festivals like 'Journeying Across the Himalayas' present these ecosystems, not in isolation, but as a composite whole. "The interest is not focused on the object, but the entire ecosystem that supports the weaving of that textile. And it is interesting to be exposed to different material cultures because it seeds innovation."

Visitors asked questions; they spent time poring over old *risha* textiles and modern interpretations; and learnt about the weavers and their history through a short film that supported the installation. "We need to interact with such stories more, and be open to each other," he adds.

Hunter to conservationist

Some of the most important stories from the region are around organised efforts rooted in sustainability and conservation, spearheaded by local communities. Folks such as Rita Banerji of Green Hub – a platform that empowers youth in conservation action and social change by using the visual medium – are helping amplify these. "We create an ecosystem around our long term partners, who want to work with their communities, through various collaborations," says Banerji, adding that Green Hub has supported youngsters across the Northeast since 2015. And since they partnered with Royal Enfield in 2022, they have scaled up their work, with the latest being a conservation grant "to support grassroots practitioners with work around sustainability, social enterprise and conservation".

One of the biggest success stories is Wangmei Konyak, a former hunter from the Konyak tribe. He has been involved in conserving acres of forested land in his native Changlangshu, a village near the Indo-Myanmar border, and creating a corridor for wild animals. He has also helped bring new laws to prevent hunting at certain times of the year, and encouraged local farmers to contribute their *jhum* (land used for slash-and-burn agricultural practices) towards the conservation effort.

(Clockwise from above) Rita Banerji; Mo Naga with a village elder; *risha* installation; and Kevesho Tetseo in a *thipiqhu* shawl. (SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP, HEADHUNTERS' INK)

Ice hockey, anyone?

Over 90% of the country's national ice hockey players hail from Ladakh. Here, the social impact of the game is profound. It has turned makeshift rinks into arenas of change, uniting communities and empowering women players, too. Currently, proposals are underway to take the players all the way to the Winter Olympics in 2042.

Responsible tourism

While tourism is a mainstay of the region, it hasn't always been the most sustainable. A case in point, albeit across the border: the stories about trash on top of Mount Everest. Earlier this year, 11 tonnes of rubbish, four corpses and a skeleton were removed from Everest, Nuptse and Lhotse mountains. So, it's inevitable that sustainable tourism is a big part of the storytelling from the area. Royal Enfield Social Mission's green pitstops is a recent initiative. Camp Kharu, the first to open (in June), is located in Kharu, about 50 km outside Leh. Managed by self-help groups of women, they serve as a platform for local communities and travellers to interact. The café and exhibition space are designed using local material and rammed earth architecture, underlining how new construction can be in line with cultural and sustainable practices.

Snow leopard watch

Designer Suket Dhir's Jaanbaaz biker jacket (pictured on P1) at the exhibition in Travancore Palace sees the snow leopard in a helmet. A tribute to the elusive cat in Ladakh, it has been fashioned entirely from his eponymous label's offcuts in 15 years. Dhir, who has been on several road trips to the Himalayan region, says that "the experiences here are so internal, they are indescribable. I am also inspired by the emotional and physical resilience of the people here and want my children to imbibe that".

Gaddis and eco-anxiety

One of the installations from the festival that stayed with me indirectly referred to the vulnerability of the Himalayan belt. Soujanyaa Boruah and Shyam Lal's *Project Tension* highlighted the knowledge of the Dhauladhar landscape as encountered and built by the pastoral lifestyle of the Gaddi community.

In a darkened room filled with artefacts from a shepherd's life – *dera* (tent), axe, rope, hookah, etc. – the viewer was invited to sit on a mattress and watch looped videos and a short documentary depicting their daily routine. The husband-and-wife duo engaged with the shepherds in artistic-ethnographic exercises of recall, wayfinding, and storytelling – which brought to light many things, including their worry about climate change and the degradation of the grasslands. *Project Tension* began life when Shyam and an SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) academic, Nikita Simpson, embarked on ethnographic research about the mental health of Gaddi women. "There is no Gaddi word for 'tension', so they just use the English word, which I found fascinating," Boruah says. "While doing the research, I realised for the first time what 'eco-anxiety' truly is. How climate change and a transforming landscape affects people; there are so many interconnected issues."

PHOTO: MANOU

More storytelling, please

A comment heard throughout the exhibition and beyond has been: 'I didn't know so many projects were happening there, or the scale of them.' Having people from the various communities on location, sharing their work, stories and experiences, also helped forge connections. "The Himalayan belt is so rich, be it the culture, food, art, textile, and language. A lot of it is being lost now, without it ever being brought to the mainstream. Which is why stories from there are necessary, as are collaborative projects," says Sunil Rajagopal, who leads sustainability at Royal Enfield. He adds that the region "only gets less than 3% of the overall CSR spend in India", which is deplorable when the Himalayas is, essentially, the third pole. As we go into the new year, the need of the hour is more collaborations, investments and visits to the region. Because, as Banerji points out, "How do you know what you are losing till you see it?"

– With inputs from ***Surya Praphulla Kumar***

The writer is working on his first book of non-fiction.

TRIBUTE

ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

ZAKIR HUSSAIN AND THE GLOW OF FIREFLIES

Lasting lessons of kindness from the legendary percussionist and composer who died last Sunday in San Francisco

Anil Srinivasan

Have you seen fireflies in the wild? On those nights when the beat of a thousand lives pulsating forms its own soundscape, and the glow of these wondrous creatures creates a visual miracle – a phenomenon.

If you ever met or moved in the presence of Zakir Hussain, this is perhaps the image in the mind's eye – a sort of wondrous spectacle of someone beyond the ordinary. Imagine the residual glow of millions of flashbulbs dissipating into pinpricks of light – particles dancing, colliding and finally settling into one human form. This would just about begin to describe the effect Zakir had by just entering a room. I like to think that in her own way, Nature conferred some amount of bioluminescence on a chosen few. Zakir probably led that pack.

Sometime during the autumn of 2006, I attended a solo piano recital at Carnegie Hall in New York. The performer was not particularly famous, but the programme consisted of Bach's *The Art of Fugue,* and as a student, this sounded too good to miss. The performance was not memorable, and there were passages that the soloist struggled through. I remember that a few attendees even left during pauses.

In those lovely days before smartphones, we did not have a choice but to seek distraction by gazing at other attendees or the upholstery. Somewhere far ahead sat a familiar figure in a mustard yellow pullover. He sat straight, attentive and alert. It was Zakir Hussain. At the end of the programme, he went up and shook the hands of the performer warmly, and said something that made her smile. I followed Zakir from a distance, too shy to meet him directly but wanting to know what he thought. A passerby stopped him and said something dismissive of the performance. Zakir smiled. His reply has stayed with me ever since. "It was sincere." Measured, and with no trace of irony.

Art of listening

His qualities presented themselves as lessons time and again. I recall being introduced to him backstage at The Music Academy in Chennai for the annual tribute to Mandolin U. Shrinivas, another bioluminescent human who left us abruptly in 2014. Zakir was surrounded by multiple legends, and in the midst of a conversation about another performance, he paid attention to the introduction and then looked at me to just ask, "And how did the piano choose you?" Again, a turn of phrase so unexpected and yet profound.

I am not qualified to describe his artistry. I can only write about what that experience unfailingly was, each time. When the tabla became him, and he became it. Watching those fingers speak melodically had a hypnotising effect, and yet the human powering it would be smiling directly at you, conversing with those sparkling eyes with the other musicians on stage. You would get every form of communication if you heard the tabla deeply enough. Humour, in a passage so redolent with heavy meaning; surprise and exclamation at the end of a particularly busy *swara* exchange; a soft caress when you are expecting fireworks or its converse. Like the seagull in Richard Bach's bestselling novel, this was the language that he spoke from a space that transcended mere technique or concert-play.

Like many music lovers across the globe, I have heard him in multiple settings. From the *Shakti* recordings and concerts to the immortal concerts with all our favourite legends across generations, including Pt. Ravi Shankar and Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia. Soundtracks from India on global platforms rarely omit Zakir, and he will continue to be the sound of India for a long time to come. Fortunately, we live in an age where technology has archived much of his work. What we will not have are those lessons one gets by just being around him. Of treating the stage as a sacred space, for instance, with no room for offensive language. There was just so much method to his treatment of every space.

Powerful musical alliances

Listen to his albums with Béla Fleck on the banjo or even the Global Drum Project where he teams up with rock band Grateful Dead's drummer Mickey Hart and others. Listen to all the Shakti recordings with the old crew and John McLaughlin. The tabla is being defined in them, with a melodic voice all its own. Measured, with absolutely no sense of irony.

His exhaustive list of accomplishments – performances, awards, film scores, dynamic collaborations, appearances, honours – do not bear repeating as they are too well-known for any one article to reiterate. A big win this year? His historic three Grammy Awards in February.

He was our rockstar. The OG. The smile that stayed in the room, the charisma that charmed everyone, from the ushers in the auditorium to the elite guests who sat in the premium seats. That very special quality of making you feel that the conversation was just about you and him, and that you mattered.

Bioluminescent, like fireflies that merge with the stars at twilight, glittering with eternal light.

The writer is a pianist and educator based in Chennai.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

*Soft drink giant Coca Cola announced last week that it was dropping its plastic reuse targets and decreasing its recycling goals.

GEOFFREY BAWA'S BENGALURU MOMENT

Artist Aparna Rao and architect Channa Daswatte on crafting a bridge across time, through re-editions of the Tropical Modernist's furniture

Deepthi Sasidharan

Architect Geoffrey Bawa is one of Asia's strongest luminaries – with his nod to modernism, distinctive approach to create spaces suffused with light, and use of indigenous materials. His legacy is also the story of Sri Lanka.

For a nation that has continually braved political and economic crises, responses to solving a problem had to be immediate. During a time of economic restrictions, Bawa created furniture for his spaces that were, like his architecture, drawn from his environment and inspired by the times. He worked with local metalworkers, woodworkers and even fibreglass boat builders, and incorporated handmade fabrics – often deviating from the formal practice of making furniture.

Now in a new exhibition, Phantom Hands has launched a collection of furniture and other material drawn from the architect's original designs. The Bengaluru-based modern furniture outfit, which began as an online store for vintage furniture, today showcases its creations in design galleries and furniture showrooms across the world. Exhibited at The Bawa Space in Colombo, this is the first time a furniture studio is presenting renditions; it's also unique because an artist explored the histories within his oeuvre, to consider how they can be meaningful to contemporary times and needs.

'Plurality of his practice'

Aparna Rao of Phantom Hands met Sri Lankan architect Channa Daswatte serendipitously in 2022, in Zurich. "Two weeks after my friend Jay Mehta introduced us, Aparna came to Sri Lanka and was enamoured by the story [of Bawa] and his designs," says Daswatte, who had worked closely with Bawa and is now chairperson at the Geoffrey Bawa Trust. "We started off thinking we would do six sculptural pieces that had been shown at the Deutsches Architekturmuseum [in Germany] in 2004." But the prototyping that followed left Rao unhappy.

"I found it difficult to relate to the pieces as they seemed to play a small part in his strong, iconic architectural spaces," she recalls. So, she went back to Sri Lanka in 2023, and things shifted. "When I saw more original pieces at the Kandalama hotel, I began to realise how many different ideas, and even worlds, Bawa had managed to meld together in a harmonious way. I was intrigued by the plurality at the heart of his practice, something that had eluded me from afar."

The exhibition, titled *Design in the Moment*, features 22 re-editions, prototypes and material samples from the architect's practice – all hand-built in Bengaluru.

Edited excerpts from an interview with the curators:

Why is this exhibition important?

Daswatte: Design is not always pre-meditated; it needs to come from within to resolve a problem of the moment. Bawa's architecture was very much a response to the economic restrictions, wars and tight budgets that Sri Lanka faced in the 1960s and '70s. He demonstrated his ability – whether it was building a hotel for tourists or the furniture needed for it. This approach becomes more and more important today, as we think of being sustainable and responsible in the world... to design with thought and impact and the materials you have. Good design endures if there is thought behind it.

Why are the pieces called re-editions?

Rao: We [Phantom Hands] thought that the idea of a 'reproduction' is incorrect because we do so much research into what an 'original' piece must have looked like. Then, we contemporise it – to look like it was made today and not in the 50s, but without losing any of its character. The idea of re-edition suggests that process of research and interpretation. I was also aware of the question of what it means to replicate a Bawa piece at this time in Bengaluru [and not Sri Lanka], and whether it would fit into the same space as some of the other pieces in our catalogue.

Inspired and inspiring (Clockwise from left) Furniture at Geoffrey Bawa's Colombo residence, Number 11; Channa Daswatte; Aparna Rao; and re-editions of sofas and the Bentota lounge chair. (COURTESY THE GEOFFREY BAWA TRUST)

You must have had to consider a completely different subset of materials.

Rao: Yes, there is a big shift because the first six designs were wood, with the exception of one metal chair. The ironic thing is that I don't understand wood; I understand paper, metals and composite materials, and precision machining a lot better because of my primary life as an artist. So, I made versions of prototypes and continued till it led to 'my version'. We got the exact same type of fabric, vibrant and strong in character [but unsuitable for contemporary production], and with some technological interventions, were able to achieve what we wanted. The essence of the piece is unaffected, and only amplified by becoming more precise and contemporary.

Daswatte: Everyone is happy with the level of detail in these pieces. The Barefoot company – founded in 1964 by one of Bawa's original suppliers, Barbara Sansoni – helped source the textiles. The materials were chosen so that they would work in Sweden or Japan. They are the same handlooms that Bawa used, but made stronger and better with technology. Also, since the tropical hardwoods that he used are no longer permitted, we used woods [such as teak and red oak] that are acceptable for the worldwide market. In that sense, we are also responding to the moment.

I also want people to think about how we design things. The skill of the designer is not to make something that has never been made before, but to make it useful and meaningful for the moment it is made for.

The exhibition, while partly a launch of this collaboration, also aims at presenting something that will excite international markets. After Colombo, the plan is to take it to Japan and China.

Design in the Moment *is on till May 31, 2025, at The Bawa Space, Colombo.*

The writer is the founder-director of Eka Archiving Services.

A merry (meatless) Christmas

As the West warms up to vegan and vegetarian feasts, will the trend catch on in India?

Table of plenty (L to R) A nut roast wreath; crushed potatoes with chilli and saffron aioli; and a Christmas pudding. (KAROLINE JÖNSSON AND NORSTEDTS)

Sudha G. Tilak

Move over, turkey and ham; increasingly Christmas in the West is also about nut roasts, lentil loaves, and Brussels sprouts.

Across the pond in the U.K., U.S. and Australia, festive tables are getting a plant-based glow-up with cookbooks such as *Happy Vegan Christmas* by Karoline Jönsson, *The Veggie Christmas Cookbook* by Heather Thomas, *Plants Only Holidays* by Gaz Oakley, and *Vegan Holiday Feasts* by Jackie Kearney. These gorgeous cookbooks don't just give you recipes – they give you ammunition to combat that one uncle who insists, "It's not Christmas without meat!"

The rise of vegan and vegetarian holiday cookbooks shows how traditions evolve. According to Cardiff chef Oakley, "Cooking with plants is peaceful cuisine, during one of the most peaceful times of the year, and I think our dinner tables should reflect that, too."

Even the U.S., where Thanksgiving traditionally worships a massive bird, is turning to jackfruit "turkey" and pumpkin curry pies. Talk about stuffing traditions into a new mould.

These vegetarian cookbooks are all about transforming the season of excess into one of ethical indulgence and wellness. Swedish author Jönsson says she chose a vegan diet "simply because we don't want to eat animals – not because we don't like the flavour of meat". She began to unearth both Swedish traditional plant-based dishes and invent some new ones for Christmas for her book.

For British cook Kearney, "there's something very lovely about having plant-based showstoppers on the table and it definitely encourages more people to try plant-based alternatives".

And why not? It's delightfully ironic serving a mushroom Wellington to people wearing reindeer jumpers. Or creamy cashew-based cheese boards that make you say, "Brie who?"

It isn't exclusionary

In India, Christmas has always been about tradition with regional twists. Each corner of the country celebrates with a festive spread that lets local ingredients shine. The Goan Christmas table might feature bebinca alongside roast chicken, while Kerala's Syrian Christian homes lay out *appam* and stew. In the Northeast, sticky rice cakes and pork curry join the festivities, and Tamil Nadu's feasts wouldn't be complete without chicken *biryani* and plum cake soaked in rum.

Mumbai-based Thomas Zacharias, chef and founder of The Locavore, a platform championing local food and sustainability, says that at his Kerala home where his grandma governed the kitchen, "vegetarian or vegan dishes have been very much present on the Christmas lunch table by default given the typical diversity in Indian meals". However, he finds that "in the drive for veganism and vegetarianism, it is unnecessary to look at meat alternatives as the primary draw of a festive repast".

Before the vegan trend caught on, India's own Tarla Dalal had drawn up over 200 Indian recipes and eggless versions of plum cakes for a vegetarian Christmas. Food bloggers offer traditional and inventive Christmas menus with Indian recipes from *samosa* pot pie to roasts made of sweet potatoes, cranberries and pecans, besides the traditional Anglo-Indian repast of potato and bandy coy (*bhindi*), dol mash (*dal*) from Chennai, or Devil's chutney and *junglee pulao* from Kolkata.

Hoihnu Hauzel, author of *The Essential Northeast Cookbook*, however, finds it difficult to comprehend a meatless Christmas. "Meat is considered a celebratory food for us, so it is difficult to imagine that a Christmas feast could be completely vegetarian or vegan." She recalls in her hometown, "People waited the whole year for that big celebratory meal on Christmas and meat was an important part of it." But a variety of regional greens, such as mustard leaves and bamboo shoots, do find their way into festive dishes with that Manipuri staple, pork.

Even as we adopt global trends like veganism, these regional twists remind us that Christmas in India is as much about celebrating our diverse culinary heritage as it is about spreading holiday cheer.

Cheeky tips for a veggie X'mas dinner

Rename dishes: Lentil loaf becomes "festive meatloaf". People won't ask questions.

Overdo the gravy: Mushroom-based gravy can make anything taste luxurious. Even cardboard.

Say it's trendy: Invoke Beyoncé's vegan phase. Nobody argues with Queen Bey.

The Gurugram-based journalist is the author of Temple Tales *and translator of* Hungry Humans.

PERSON OF INTEREST

KAVYA MUKHIJA: CAN DO EVERYTHING

Don't even think of carrying someone on a wheelchair, warns the young activist, as she shares a few basics about disability

Mukhija recently won the Diana Award, given to young people who display potential to "change their community, their country and the world". (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Kavya Mukhija, 26, wants to know from what angle I will approach this piece. She has reason to be wary. Inspiration porn, a term coined to describe a sentimental, ableist portrayal of disability, is widely in use when writing about people with disabilities (PWD). So rah rah stories about Mukhija may often include the phrase 'despite her condition'.

I am inspired by Mukhija, not because of or despite her disability (Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita, a congenital condition that affects joints, making them curved, stiff and that results in limited motion) but because she's forged in the same fire that drives young activists such as Greta Thunberg to advocate single-mindedly and relentlessly. Mukhija has been at it for 12 years.

"In India, when you have any kind of disability, advocacy becomes your second nature," she says, adding that she's spent her life encouraging those who manage restaurants, shops and other places she visits to make their establishments wheelchair accessible. But she's done more than speaking up in her everyday life.

At 14, she attended her first consultation, a meeting of The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights in Delhi. By the time she was in Class 12 in 2015, she was at the eighth Conference of States Parties (CoSP) to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Between these two events were many more international and domestic conferences.

Memes with purpose

During the pandemic came the realisation that she could create humorous memes referencing pop culture (like the series *Panchayat*) and make short Instagram videos using her experience to advocate more effectively. Once a volunteer for charitable trust Chronic Pain India, she is now its COO and youngest trustee.

Her work just won her the Diana Award, given to young people who display potential to "change their community, their country and the world". When we speak she's in London, a newly minted Chevening scholar getting her MSc in Disability, Design and Innovation. She's been in the city for two months and the daily business of living feels so much easier here. "Public transport is very accessible and wheelchair friendly," she says. "It has definitely made me more independent and free."

Schools and reality checks

Earlier this year, the mother-daughter duo co-authored a chapter on accessible education. It was for a report the Supreme Court commissioned from law university NALSAR and led to the country's top court declaring that accessibility was a fundamental right. Mukhija and her mother analysed 1,000 interviews of public school parents and their findings were both predictable and depressing. Schools rarely had accessible toilets, and those that did were either locked or used as storage rooms. Study materials were not accessible, there was no accessible transport and teachers were not trained to accommodate children with disabilities. "So with deaf students, for example, teachers were using spoken language," says Mukhija. Most schools didn't have special educators, and many had found a loophole in the rule that schools could not deny admission to PWDs, even those who did not have the appropriate documents. "They would say this school is not suitable for your child, take them to a special school," adds Mukhija, who fought her own battles with schooling.

After multiple rejections, one mainstream school agreed to admit her on the condition that they would not be able to help her with anything. "My mother had to quit her job to be with me in school as the school denied me any kind of support," says Mukhija.

Now her mother has moved with Mukhija to London, putting on pause for a second time her life as an activist with Astha, a non-profit that helps disabled children in Delhi's slums thrive. Mukhija's parents always encouraged her to believe that though she may have different needs, she was not different from other children. "They played a major role in helping me see myself as someone who could do anything and everything. They took me to hobby classes, enrolled me in dance classes," she says.

Lessons in disability

She wishes everyone understood a few basics about disability. Disabled people should not be treated as superior beings or inferior beings. Accessibility is a bare minimum for a dignified life at par with others and should not be an afterthought. Know that PWDs fight to get corporate jobs and are usually paid lower salaries. She wishes we would trash beliefs such as disability is a result of a parent's (usually mother) past karma. "New parents of children with disabilities waste a lot of the initial years finding a 'cure', taking child from one doctor to another, losing out on crucial years of early intervention and rehabilitation," Mukhija adds. Don't even think of carrying someone on a wheelchair, she warns. And when you meet a person with a disability, don't inquire about their medical diagnosis. "Don't say, 'Have you tried this medicine? Have you visited this temple?' In a public setting especially, it becomes quite an uncomfortable experience."

__Priya Ramani__ is a Bengaluru-based journalist and the co-founder of India Love Project on Instagram.

GOREN BRIDGE

Miracle in the cards

East-West vulnerable, West deals

Bob Jones

East had two key decisions to make in the auction. East made the good decision to pass rather than double four spades, believing that the opponents probably had a better spot than four spades, and he didn't want to encourage them to find it. South, however, jumped to slam in his massive club suit. South was a player who always had values for his bids, so East made the correct decision to sacrifice against six clubs, despite the adverse vulnerability. South carried on to a grand slam and East decided to defend.

It looks impossible to take 13 tricks on this deal, but South found a way. South ruffed the opening heart, drew trumps, and cashed the ace of spades. He started to run his clubs, leaving this position with two clubs remaining:

(Grid 2)

Dummy shed a diamond on the four of clubs, but what could East do? A spade discard and South would lead a diamond to the ace, ruff a spade, and claim with dummy all high. A diamond, instead, and South would cash both of dummy's high diamonds, dropping East's queen, and claim with his hand high. Beautifully played!

	NORTH ♠ Q 8 5 4 3 ♡ J ◇ A K 7 5 4 2 ♣ 8	
WEST ♠ 10 7 ♡ A K Q 8 7 6 5 3 ◇ 3 ♣ J 7		EAST ♠ K J 9 6 2 ♡ 10 9 4 2 ◇ Q 9 6 ♣ 9
	SOUTH ♠ A ♡ Void ◇ J 10 8 ♣ A K Q 10 6 5 4 3 2	

The bidding:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
4♡	4♠	Pass	6♣
Pass	Pass	6♡	7♣
All pass			

Opening lead: Ace of ♡

	NORTH ♠ Q 8 ♡ void ◇ A K 7 ♣ Void	
WEST ♠ 10 ♡ K Q 8 ◇ 3 ♣ Void		EAST ♠ K J ♡ Void ◇ Q 9 6 ♣ Void
	SOUTH ♠ Void ♡ Void ◇ J 10 8 ♣ 4 3	

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

What has December 22 ever given us?

Come on, ring those bells What did Edward Hibberd Johnson invent that we have in our homes today? (GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK)

Berty Ashley

1 This day in 1808, a composer debuted his Symphony No. 5 and No. 6, Choral Fantasy and Piano Concerto No. 4 (featuring himself as soloist) in Vienna. Of these, #5 known as 'Fate Symphony' became famous for its dramatic opening chords characterised as "fate knocking at the door". Who was this composer?

2 In 1851, this day, 'Jenny Lind', a steam engine specially shipped from England, hauled construction material. It ran from Roorkee to Piran Kaliyar (10 km) to take the material for a canal construction. What record did this set in India?

3 Pierre Jules Janssen has already been in these quizzes for discovering Helium in Guntur. On December 22, 1870, he escaped from the Siege of Paris in a balloon, not for his life but to witness a scientific phenomenon. What did he undertake this dangerous escape to see, only for it to be obscured by clouds?

4 This day in 1882, Edward Johnson hand-wired 80 red, white and blue light bulbs on a wire that could be rolled. He then took a dynamo made by his friend Thomas Edison and set his main item on it, so that it could rotate with the lights on it. He wanted to make a safer alternative to the candles that had been used till then. What did he invent, which we see during this season now?

5 In 1885, this day, Itō Hirobumi, became the first Prime Minister of Japan. Born Hayashi Risuke into a poor farming family, he eventually was responsible for shaping the constitution of Japan and moving it towards westernisation. When he was younger though, he was a member of a powerful warrior class where he got his name. What was Hirobumi before a politician?

6 December 22, 1887, is the birthday of a child prodigy who mastered trigonometry by age 12 and just a year later was discovering complicated theorems on his own. Who was this iconic person, who died young but according to Thomas Hardy was a 100/100 mathematician?

7 This day in 1891, Max Wolf, a 28-year-old German astronomer discovered an asteroid and called it (323) Brucia. What made it special was the equipment he used. What did he use to discover the asteroid, something we now use on a daily basis?

8 Born this day in 1923, Joseph Muhler was an American biochemist and dentist. He led the team that came up with the formula for Crest Toothpaste, which was the first to have certain compounds that protected teeth from cavities and decay. What type of toothpaste was this?

9 This day in 1932, a movie starring Boris Karloff was released in the US. It was the first to feature an ancient historical artefact as a villain. Karloff plays the title character of Imhotep. What was the title of the movie?

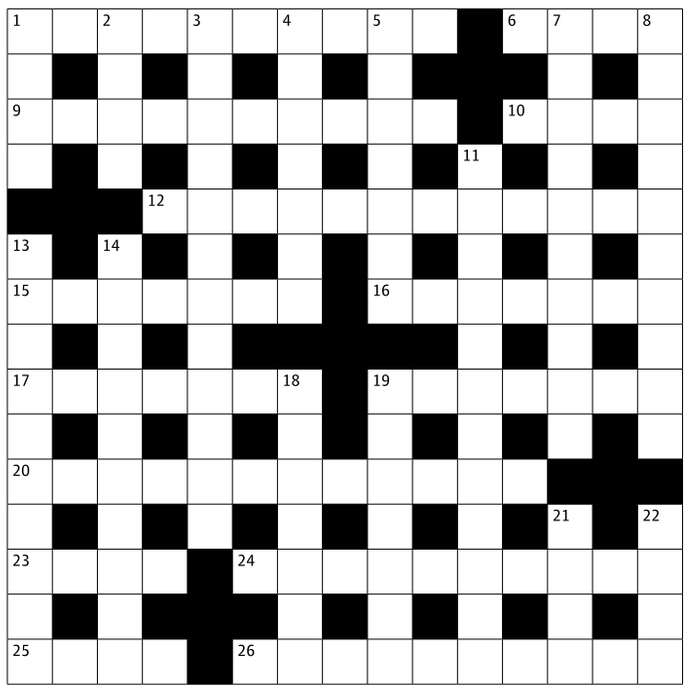
10 Celebrating his 82nd birthday today is Dick Parry. He is an English saxophonist. Among other things, the only non-full-time member of a legendary band to have played on four songs, over three albums. The band famously reunited onstage in 2005, along with him. How do we know this band, famous for lit up prisms, marching hammers and flying pigs?

A molecular biologist from Madurai, our quizmaster enjoys trivia and music and is working on a rock ballad called 'Coffee is a Drink, Kaapi is an Emotion'. @bertyashley

Answers

1. Beethoven
2. First Freight Train
3. A Solar Eclipse
4. Christmas tree lights
5. A Samurai
6. Srinivasa Ramanujan
7. A camera (astrophotography)
8. Flouride Toothpaste
9. *The Mummy*
10. Pink Floyd

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3337



Across

1 A letter is lenient (10)
6 Biblical character in thesaurus (4)
9 University department in which things may be granted? (10)
10 Atmosphere — ruination — that's regressive (4)
12 Food for the young fish initially diving deep (6,6)
15 Seizes chair's comfortable features (not masculine) (7)
16 I refuse to believe in a model bank robbery (7)
17 Blocks two-thirds of the toady protuberances (7)
19 Trembling, drool about new American football star (7)
20 What makes... what makes the world go round... go round? (5-7)
23 Gripped in booby trap (4)
24 More than one character in finest robe lampooned, being flash here (6,4)
25 Complaint heard in E. London, somewhere in E. London (4)
26 A monkey and 20 ponies? (5,5)

Down

1 Ring? Strip (you made out) (4)
2 Where one inevitably ends up emulating the locals? (4)
3 Part of religious group, saint prays for means of repelling creepycrawlies (6,6)
4 Some laceless items, podalically oriented — not starchy, principally? (4-3)
5 Nondescript vehicle Everyman will advocate at the outset (7)
7 Nestle with William's feathered friends (10)
8 I see below rose (10)
11 Like attractive accounts when entire thigh's displayed (4-8)
13 A Samaritan adrift in Atlantic ship (5,5)
14 Alluring security measure that keeps paper in place (7,3)
18 Doorman who might give you hell? (2,5)
19 Shabby slate (3-4)
21 Take public transport up to find shopping centre (4)
22 Gemstone? It's love, mate (4)

SOLUTION NO. 3336

C	H	E	R	U	B	■	M	I	N	U	T	E	■	■
■	U	■	A	■	A	■	O	■	A	■	A	■	■	■
■	C	A	N	D	L	E	S	T	I	C	K	■	■	■
H	■	K	■	K	■	L	■	E	■	R	■	E	■	L
I	L	L	N	E	S	S	E	S	■	O	P	I	N	E
G	■	E	■	S	■	I	■	■	B	■	T	■	V	■
H	A	B	I	T	U	E	■	C	H	I	C	O	R	Y
■	■	E	■	■	S	■	O	■	■	N	■	■	■	■
P	E	R	F	E	C	T	■	M	O	N	I	T	O	R
A	■	R	■	N	■	■	E	■	E	■	H	■	O	■
L	A	Y	E	R	■	K	N	O	T	T	I	E	S	T
S	■	F	A	■	R	■	F	■	T	■	C	■	A	■
■	I	N	G	O	O	D	F	A	I	T	H	■	■	■
■	N	■	E	■	N	■	I	■	N	■	I	■	■	■
O	N	E	S	I	E	■	T	A	G	I	N	E	■	■

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Systems and slaves

Bureaucratic and social apparatus integrates humans into its process, turning them into machine

Years ago, when I was in Delhi, a clerk in the Central Government Secretariat, ended his life, leaving a note that he was tired of being a machine. One can sympathise with him, as the success of a mass society in terms of material gains depends upon man being increasingly mechanised. The problem of man's mechanical reaction to the outside world has become one of the bogeymen of this century.

Slawomir Mrozek, one of the most eminent Polish playwrights, has dealt with this subject in the most interesting manner. He makes the bogeyman an institution in his play *On a journey*.

A traveller finds the post-office employees standing erect at certain intervals along a country road, forming a "wireless" telegraph line by shouting telegraphic messages to each other. The puzzled traveller asks his coachman about the efficacy of this system.

He replies: "Sir, this is better than the telegraph with poles and wires. After all, there is a possibility of live men being more intelligent and there is no storm damage to repair and a great saving of timber and timber is in short supply, you know."

Before he could recover from the shocking reply, the traveller finds "the transmitter work".

Heard from a distance, it resembles the cry of birds on a moor, but when the nearest telegraph man receives the cry with his hands cupped to his ear, he passes it with a resonant voice, "Fa..... ther.....dea ....d .....fune ral..... Wed.... nes.... day." Even the message of death takes a sterile, meaninglessness in the mouths of the "transmitting poles" and the coachman's "May his soul rest in peace" sounds grotesquely irrelevant.

There is another play called *A fact*, in which, a young wife confesses to the priest that she has just discovered, purely by accident at the breakfast table, that her husband was artificial, made of plasticine.

The husband, a pillar of bureaucracy, noticing his wife's sudden dismay, asks her about it. She does not tell him about her discovery because of an apprehension that he himself may not know about it and also, if he does but remains oblivious to the situation, she worries how it will affect her. So she decides to reconcile herself to living with a lie for the rest of her life at the side of an artificial man and who is also the artificial father of her children.

At one level, these plays look like fanciful dreams that have little bearing on reality. But at another level, the situations described are the outcome of logical reasoning. What makes the situations unreal is merely the fact that Mrozek has not stopped with his reasoning process at a point at which the sense of reality, or commonsense, would suggest a stop.

Rather, he goes on reasoning, supporting his argument with incontestable evidence, that live men are more intelligent than the poles, they can crouch and protect themselves during a storm, while the pole just stands and remains standing until it breaks. The artificiality of a man's reactions can strike his mate with the suddenness of a revelation. The way of logically pursuing a line of thought at the expense of a real situation, a delightful tendency in the reasoning of children, is Mrozek's strongest device. What he reveals in precisely this way in the two plays is how the bureaucratic and social apparatus of a nation integrates people into its process on the higher (the plasticine men) and lower (telegraph transmitters) levels. The apparatus created by man has changed its nature and it has become the master to give orders. Man creates systems but ultimately he becomes the victim, their slave.

The Nobel winner for Physics this year has also this apprehension that AI may take over, man becoming its tool.

When women built monuments

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Whenever there is a discussion of love, the name of Taj Mahal crops up. Recognised as one of the seven wonders of the world, the monument is known around the globe as a profound "symbol of love".

In such conversations, men often quip: "Has any woman ever constructed a monument of this grandeur in memory of her husband?" Though this may seem like light-hearted banter, this remark spotlights the lack of visibility of the architectural contributions of women in India and around the world. In reality, the tradition of creating monuments in memory of husbands and celebrating their triumphs has prevailed since the 7th century and even before.

For instance, the Virupaksha temple in Pattadakal, Karnataka was constructed by Lokamahadevi to celebrate the victory of her husband Vikramaditya II over the Pallavas of Kanchi in the 7th century. This temple stands as a tribute to her husband's victory and her devotion to the Hindu faith.

Another example is the Rani Ki Vav, an intricately designed step well built by Queen Udayamati in tribute to her husband Bhima-I of the Chalukya Dynasty in the 11th century. This step well has 500-plus principal sculptures, 1,000-plus micro sculptures, geometric designs, and 200-plus pillars depicting scenes from epic dramas and giving us visual poetry. The sculptors left no stone unturned in creating these marvels.

Add to the list the Humayun's Tomb in Delhi, constructed by Biga Begum as a memorial to her husband in the 16th century. This served as an inspiration for the architecture of the Taj Mahal. This tomb incorporates Persian and Mughal architectural styles and is the first monument to be built using red sandstone on a large scale. Around the world, there are numerous examples of monumental tributes by women to their husbands and to contribute to the broader realm of art and culture.

Why are the stories of such monuments brushed away and allowed to fade into history while the male-commissioned monuments and their stories get romanticised and are spread widely? Is it because women choose a low-key approach prioritising selflessness over recognition? Or is it patriarchy that has cloaked the glorious stories, efforts, and perhaps the names of the inspiring women who stood behind these monuments?

Losing is the new winning

Caught in a rat race, a child should know that uneasy lies the head that wears the winner's crown

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GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Losing anything – a game, an argument, a career opportunity, face, the club raffle, a lover's hand – appears to be the end of the world. So gutted are you that you think that you need professional help. Before pundits pontificate on changing your attitude, aptitude, altitude or whatever, I must get a word in: don't. Leave things as they are for you have serendipitously hit upon a profound truth: losing is the new winning.

The reason the world is in such a mess is because people seem to be winning at the expense of living. This obsessive urge to win at all costs starts early with manic moms coaxing their wards to ace the maths scholarship, conquer the STEM challenge, the GK quiz, dramatics... there is virtually no end to the must-win contests. Your child may manage to emerge victorious in some through luck and effort. But it's what happens post winning that hurts.

Medals come with strings attached. Every schoolchild knows that uneasy lies the head that wears the winner's crown. Coming out on top even in inter-house elocution puts an albatross round your neck. Will you be able to keep it up next year, the year after that? It's a burden of expectations under which even seasoned winners have cracked.

Crest and troughs

All things considered, it is better not to win – at least not early in life. While still in his twenties, Orson Wells produced what is widely regarded as the greatest film ever made – *Citizen Kane*. But alas, that was the crest of his career graph. Although he continued to produce films, everything seemed to go steadily downhill. An acerbic critic even called Wells the world's "youngest has-been". That, my friends, is how our world is wired.

Have you noticed that wannabe winners lead their whole lives in the comparative tense, with the Olympic motto providing insidious encouragement. They do not wish to be fast, high or strong but faster, higher and stronger than the next man. And we all know how these eager-beaver aspirants go about preparing themselves. They hit the road when lesser mortals are asleep luxuriating in the extra hour of sleep which is more precious than gold. Their diets are self-torture by deliberate deprivation and they wage epic battles in the gym every day. Life for them is one long race, with an ear perpetually cocked for the starting gun. Phew! Losing is so much more sensible.

It's my considered opinion that losers are better socially adjusted and more readily content with themselves. On the other hand, apprentice heroes are constantly at each other's throats, plotting strategies to go one better than the rest, and if they find that pushing themselves up too burdensome, will not be averse to pulling rivals down.

For some inexplicable reason, if you have a flutter at the race track or lose a card game, it is not taken as a reflection of your capabilities because rummy and races are considered games of chance.

What people fail to realise is that everything in life – examinations, interviews, opportunities – are games of chance in disguise, with life itself being one long-drawn lottery.

Sky-high aspirations

Spotting roaring aeroplanes and dreaming big

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GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Our school was a small, tiled-roof structure, with seven rooms nestled among large trees near the forest's edge. The school's atmosphere made us feel like we were studying in a Gurukul. Though our village was modest in size, its strategic geographical location gave it a school. Having a school was a source of pride for every household.

When corporal punishment was common in schools, ours stood out. Thanks to the founding member's strict rule, our school was a rare exception. It indeed was a joy going to school for us. To emphasise it, I must narrate a peculiar experience that we were exposed to as its pupils.

The moment we heard the hum of a plane overhead, our teachers would let us rush outside to spot it. There were occasions when they let us go during class tests too.

As the classroom doors opened, we spilled out like water rushing from the floodgates of a reservoir. We would run about on the premises to locate its movement in the sky. Our cheers used to be louder than the roar of the plane when we would spot it.

Gazing at the shining grey object with a bright light in its tail flying high in the blue sky was something that we enjoy doing all our lives. Sometimes, when the clouds masked the view, we would wait with bated breath until it re-emerged. We would track it with our eyes until it vanished, so awestruck that we often forgot we had to go back to class.

During free time, we would draw our version of the 'air show'.

Themes of our drawings centered on the course of the flight moving in the cottony clouds. Sometimes we adorned and flushed a simple-looking blue sky and a flying aeroplane in its cradle with many unimaginable things.

We spoke to each other as though we were seasoned pilots with many hours of flying experience, when in reality many of us had not even seen a train, let alone travelled on one.

Looking back, I feel that in those wild chases, we were not just spotting planes – we were chasing dreams.

Perhaps the entire exercise of spotting a roaring aeroplane made us nurture dreams.

FEEDBACK

Letters to the *Magazine* can be e-mailed separately to mag.letters@thehindu.co.in by Tuesday 3 p.m.

Cover story

Technology and modernisation are good. ('The mega Indian railway makeover'; Dec. 15) However, neither is okay if it involves destruction of heritage. An imposing and beautiful structure like the Gwalior railway station replaced by a drab structure in gleaming steel and chrome would not appeal to people who value aesthetics. One nation, one railway station, is a very wrong policy.
A.R. Ramanarayanan

Our railway stations have about them an aura of heritage and grandeur. Modernisation is imperative for the growth of the Railways. But mindless modernisation should not be allowed to obliterate the stations' native ethos, cultural nexus and aesthetics.
N. Sadasivan Pillai

We should't spend enormous amount of ₹24,500 crore on beautifying buildings, rather it should be spent on upgrading safety and providing passenger amenities in trains and at railway stations. Cleanliness should be upgraded to airport-level.
B.M. Singh

Brave artist

The review of Amol Palekar's memoir made for riveting reading. ('Not a rebel by birth'; Dec. 15) The actor was the alternative Everyman to Bachchan's angry young man of the 1970s. Palekar's fight against pre-censorship of films and the impact of social media trolls on what filmmakers can or cannot say embodies his spirit.
Saurabh Sinha

Studying Ambedkar

Each author looks at the life of Dr. Ambedkar from his own perspective. ('The anti-*bhakt*'; Dec. 15) The logic and rationale of the author certainly prejudices the inference of words and deeds of the subject. No one assessment tallies with the other. But this exercise in itself needs to be encouraged to serve as an eye-opener to policy makers.
Venkat M.N.

Food for the soul

The intimacy of cooking food for and sharing it with a loved one is documented in many cultures. ('*Akkara adisil* and young love'; Dec. 15) The preparation of a favourite meal reveals nourishment and affection in action. It is an embodiment of love being shown in deeds, not words.
Anusha Pillay

Reunion season

It's true that school WhatsApp groups are never a substitute for the reunions that take place once a year. ('Those were the days, my friend'; Dec. 15) It doesn't give any pleasure when compared to the joy of meeting old friends face-to-face and sharing their feelings directly.
Jayakumar A.V.

Lost in information

As we move forward in this era of data abundance, ('AI has the potential to enslave or annihilate us'; Dec. 15) it is crucial that we develop strategies for managing the information we consume, lest we compromise our ability to make informed decisions.
Sabin Mathew Sam

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Body as a site for defiance
Woman's body is the most accessible subject for state control, and the slightest deviation is punished
Swati Singh Parmar

Down the Silk Road in Uzbekistan
A visit to a country that was at a crossroads of the ancient trade routes connecting India, China and Europe
Stanley Carvalho

The art of brewing tea
Patience and perseverance is required to achieve the perfect texture
Nivedhika Krishnan

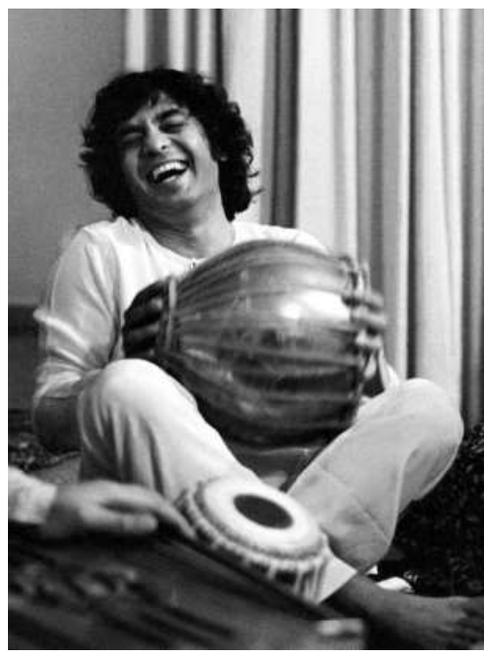
Celebrating teachers
Society should show lasting respect, love, and gratitude for them throughout our lives
Vithya Mari M.

Contributions of up to a length of 700 words may be e-mailed to: openpage@thehindu.co.in Please provide the postal address and a brief background of the writer. The mail must certify that it is original writing, exclusive to this page. The Hindu views plagiarism as a serious offence. Given the large volume of submissions, we regret that we are unable to acknowledge receipt or entertain queries about submissions. If a piece is not published for eight weeks please consider that it is not being used. The publication of a piece on this page is not to be considered an endorsement by The Hindu of the views contained therein.

PHOTO ESSAY

Zakir in his bedroom overlooking the Arabian Sea, at Simla House, Napean Sea Road, Mumbai.

When my guru went to his guru, they both put their hands on the tabla and they were exactly the same. For me, a dream come true.



(L-R) Zakir at the house of his dearest friends Pt. Shivkumar Sharma and Manorama *ji*; when *riyaaz* is in your breath, in each exhale and inhale, then that is true *riyaaz*, Zakir always said.

The musicians' bus was conceived by Pt. Vijay Kichlu (left) director of the Sangeet Research academy. Zakir sharing jokes with him and Pt. V.G. Jog and Pt. Jitender Prasad.

ZAKIR HUSSAIN
1951-2024

'A MIRACLE NEVER DIES'

Dayanita Singh

Dear Guruji,

On Sunday night, as I watched the full moon rise, I thought to myself that the next Guru Purnima I had to spend the day with you and photograph you with all your students. It would have been 45 years since I met you. Just two weeks ago, while I was talking about your influence on my life – showing the audience in the Indian Museum in Kolkata the Zakir Hussain maquette wall – I said, "I will continue to photograph Zakir until I die." I told them how you had said at the release of the maquette, "I play the tabla and she plays the photograph."

And now, all your life lessons that I carry within me, will guide me. You taught me how to learn and to never stop learning. You taught me rigour and that single-minded focus: to learn one's medium like the back of one's hand, you said, and only then attempt to play with it. I did not realise at the time as we rode around India in the musicians' bus, that annual road trip of three weeks, what a privileged world you had led me into. I was the kid on the bus, the young woman with a camera, and because of your introduction everyone adopted and indulged me.

You always said *riyaaz* has to be in your every breath. I was lucky to witness this in your life, even when the tabla was not in front of you and you were still building new *bols* in your head. You made the tabla speak in unimaginable ways. When I first photographed you, the tabla was an accompanying instrument. I watched you turn it into a solo instrument and so much more. And yet when you had to accompany someone, you slipped right into being the accompanist.

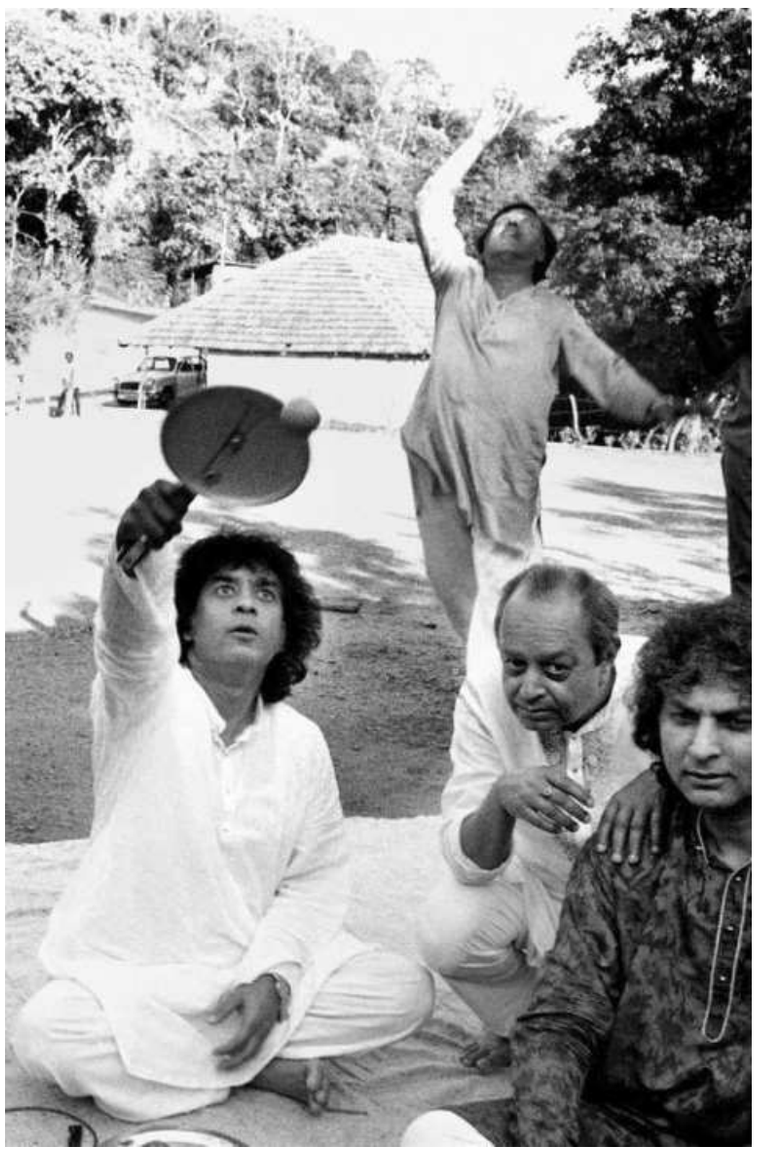
I saw you engage with all kinds of people, making each person feel "seen" and special, from the security guard to the most senior musician. Yet when VIPs would interfere with the performance, you asked them to finish what they had to do and then you would play. You charmed everyone, even those who had not heard your music. Like the *chaat wala* in Delhi's old Bengali Market or the waiter at Karim's who recited the menu in different *talas* for you and *abbaji* (Ustad Allarakha Khan). I wish I had also learned your incredible humility, your ability to just walk away from anything unsavoury, to never make anyone feel small. And equally, how you found humour in every situation.

Your "*kaun hain*" resounds in my ears, as you would greet people in the green room. In a way, you led me into the green room of life – the *tayari*, the preparation that goes into each performance, each work.

I feel completely shattered now but I am sitting at the press and trying to print a catalogue for my Bombay exhibition. This, too, I learned from you – to carry on. The only time I saw you shaken was when *abbaji* passed, and how difficult the first concert after his passing was. I do not know how I will enter the room in Kolkata's Indian Museum, which is filled with your photographs as part of my show at the Bengal Biennale. I had hoped you would visit and that I could thank you in person for the invaluable world you opened to me. What you showed me was the commitment to the life of an artist, the unending enquiry of one's medium.

I am sorry we collectively were unable to manifest the miracle of your survival. But then you are a miracle and a miracle never dies.

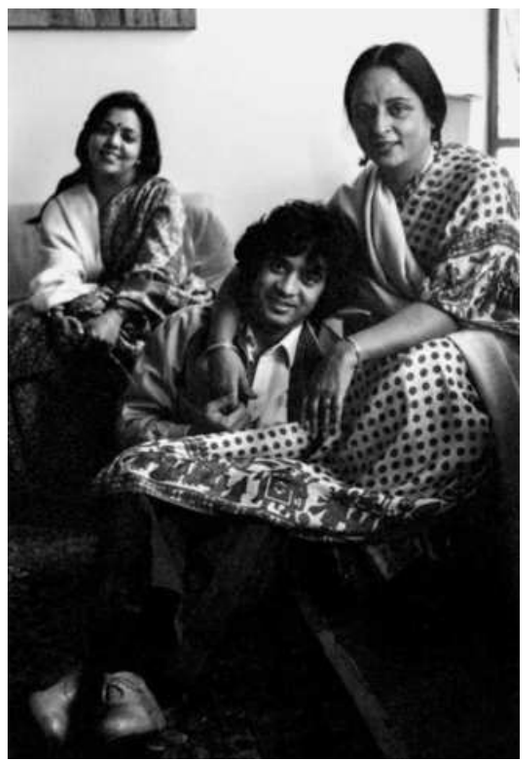
Your unlikely student,
– Dayanita Singh



While travelling on the musicians' bus, we would often stop and have a picnic. Here Zakir is batting with the lid of a pressure cooker. Anand Gopal is fielding and Shivkumar Sharma is sitting to the right.

Zakir loved to play cricket and here he is in Goa, trying to get all the musicians to play with him.

Zakir resting between the 'Wah Taj' film shooting. He had this amazing ability to sleep anywhere.



Zakir loved to come home and meet my mother who, of course, doted on him and made him *makki ki roti* and *saag*. She would attend all his concerts and sit in the first row.

And finally that magical evening at Artisans' gallery in Mumbai, when Zakir launched the Zakir Hussain maquette and we displayed it on the walls.

Dayanita Singh started her career by photographing Zakir Hussain. Her first book was on the tabla virtuoso and published in 1986. She received the prestigious Hasselblad Award in 2022, the same year Zakir Hussain was awarded the Kyoto Prize.