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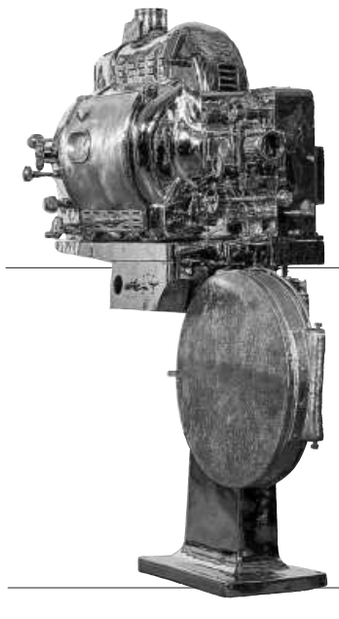

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Flavour and fizz (Clockwise from left) Farmers harvesting orange and pineapple; the *sohiong*; farmer Bording Ioannis Shylla (in white) at his winemaking unit; Asame's blue wine; and Dajied Shabong of Kynjai Wine. (RITU RAJ KONWAR, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

MEGHALAYA

LOOKING BEYOND THE GRAPE

How the state's winemakers are making the shift from traditional home-brewing to commercial production, spurred on by market demand for its fruit wines and an enabling government policy

Rahul Karmakar
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In the last couple of years, te.gism, the "fruit with a dot in its name", has caught the imagination of wine lovers in the Northeast who fancy non-grape elixirs. Also known as the Himalayan cherry (*Prunus jenkinsii*), this fruit that grows in the jungles of Meghalaya's Garo Hills remained virtually unknown until botanists documented it less than a decade ago. Today, it is cultivated by farmers in the region for the state's burgeoning fruit winemaking industry.

Lyang B. Sangma was understandably on edge when his te.gism product was among six exotic fruit wines and meads – alcoholic beverages made by fermenting honey – chosen by the Meghalaya Farmers Empowerment Commission (MFEC) to showcase at the Vinexpo India 2024 in Mumbai this September. "I had my heart in my mouth whenever an expert or connoisseur sipped the te.gisim wine and rolled his or her tongue over it. The reaction from almost all of them was that my product has possibilities beyond my hometown of Tura and other parts of Meghalaya," says the entrepreneur.

Situated on low hills, Tura is the economic and administrative hub of the western part of Meghalaya, dominated by the Garo community, and about 300 km west of state capital Shillong. Most Garo families are used to brewing *bitchi*, a smoky rice beer made from local sticky rice. After observing elders do the fermentation process, Lyang began experimenting with other grains and wild fruits. He concentrated on exotic fruit wines, producing them mostly for consumption among family and friends and for gifting during Christmas and other festivals. Sensing an opportunity, he went commercial with his Dura Wines in 2021, a year before another entrepreneur, Keenan Marak, from the Garo Hills launched 7 United, a canned, carbonated *bitchi*.

17 winemakers go commercial

Lyang's winery, set up with a machinery grant of ₹25 lakh from the Shillong-headquartered North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach, has since been producing wines from seasonal fruits such as gooseberry, pineapple, cherry, silverberry, bayberry, black plum, and jackfruit, apart from the traditional *bitchi* in a bottled avatar. While the bayberry offers a sweet note, the jackfruit wine is pungent and an acquired taste. The demand, however, has been more for the dark red te.gism, almost equalling that for the blood-red te.patang that fellow Tura-based winemaker Pecindha K. Sangma has been churning out under her Asame brand.

Te.patang is the Garo name for the sweet and sour blood fruit (*Haematocarpus validus*). "The popularity of this fruit encouraged me to make wine from it along with other fruit wines like strawberry, peach, plum, pear, jamun, and mulberry. I produce an average of 40 litres of season-based fruit wines a month. What has also caught the imagination of consumers in Meghalaya and elsewhere is the blue wine made from the butterfly pea flower," Pecindha says.

From being an occasional winemaker, Pecindha transitioned to producing wines on a commercial scale from her home in 2023. Villagers collect honey for mead from the forests, much like they do fruits. "People here make a tea-like beverage from the butterfly pea flower. I thought of infusing it with honey wine and through trial and error and with advice from experts, I found the right balance with no added sugar," she says. Many of these entrepreneurs have made the switch following periodic consultations with Priyanka Save of Himachal Nectars, roped in by the MFEC as the official training partner for certification courses.

Today, Meghalaya has about 30 fruit winemakers (mostly in Shillong and Tura), of whom 17 have transitioned to commercial production with modern, scientific equipment. (Traditional rice wine makers are in the thousands.) All but three of the 17 have established wineries and started branding their wines over the last two years; the other three are in the process of scaling up their facilities. The average cost of setting up a winery of 5,000-litre capacity is ₹50 lakh, excluding the land and buildings. About 400 families, including winemakers, farmers, and farm workers, are directly or indirectly employed by the licensed wineries.

Back to the beginning

The shift to commercial winemaking may have happened only in the last two to three years, but the process to streamline the industry has taken two decades. It began with Michael Syiem of the Shillong-based Forever Young Club organising the city's first wine festival in 2004 to showcase an array of wines made from indigenous fruits and vegetables. "The annual event made our people take fruit winemaking seriously. Millennials found the exotic wines cooler than expensive grape wines, which they associated more with the older generations. The push came after our commission, the only one of its kind in the country, was established in 2019 to represent the voices of farmers and formulate policies and programmes for agriculture, food processing, and value chain development," says B.K. Sohliya, chairman of the MFEC.

Unlike grapes, which have wine-grade varieties, Meghalaya's indigenous fruits such as sohiong (*Prunus nepalensis*), sohphie (*Myrica esculenta*), sohshang (*Elaegnus latifolia*), sohphlang (*Flemingia vestita*) and sohphoh khasi (*Docynia indica khasiana*) grow naturally, barring the few introduced species such as strawberry, pineapple and orange that grow in plantations. All are single-variety; what's consumed as fruit is also used for making wine.

Many of these wild fruits are protected in the sacred groves of Mawphlang, a village about 25 km southwest of Shillong. No one is allowed to take anything – not even a fallen leaf – from the groves that became a tourist attraction after a British army officer set up India's first winery in the village in 1947.

Capt. Harold Douglas Hunt, considered the father of wine in Meghalaya, settled down in Mawphlang and obtained a license to make his Mawphlang cherry wine and brandy a household name in the state. He mobilised villagers to collect sohiong and other wild fruits from beyond the sacred groves, and created a well-oiled ecosystem wherein local farmers, producers, and artisans coordinated to sustain the winery until it ceased operation in the 1980s after his death.

Forty years later, Capt. Hunt's house – a deep green cottage barely 2 km from the sacred groves – is abuzz again. Hunt's grandson, Andrew Nongdhar, has overhauled his winery to produce the "old popular wine" in new bottles "as soon as possible". "Many were inspired by my grandfather to brew wines from fruits and vegetables such as ginger, but winemaking remained a small-scale activity until recently. Entrepreneurship, a change in mindset, and a proactive government combined to help the winemakers transition to commercial production. Failing to capitalise on this trend would have been an injustice to the man who started it all," he says.

Government initiative

In September 2020, the Meghalaya Excise Rules (Assam Excise Rules 1945) were amended to legalise home-made wines and provide licences to local winemakers to go commercial. "Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma and a team of officers like our former chairman, K.N. Kumar, played a major role in giving shape to the fruit wine industry in Meghalaya. From five licensed fruit winemakers three years ago, we have 17 today – the second-highest in the country after Himachal Pradesh, which has 22," says Sohliya.

The government also organises 'Beyond the Grape' shows to introduce wine lovers from elsewhere to Meghalaya's fruit wines, while the MFEC has established the North East Fruit Wine Incubation Centre, a pioneering training facility for winemakers with an installed capacity of 1,000 litres per cycle, at the Institute of Hotel Management, Catering Technology and Applied Nutrition on the outskirts of Shillong. Since its establishment in 2023, the institute has trained 137 people, mostly from the Northeast, in the "art of winemaking that is mostly science" as Sohliya says – from fruit to bottled beverage in 90 days.

According to Rajesh Swarnakar, professional wine and spirit taster, the quality of Meghalaya's fruit wines has improved markedly in texture and taste, with a better balance of sugar and alcohol (10% ABV).

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In demand

Sohiong *(Prunus nepalensis)*: **Meghalaya prune**
Commonly found in the higher elevations of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, it is rich in vitamins and minerals and used to make jams, squashes and wines.

Soh Trun *(Ananas comosus)*: **pineapple**
Meghalaya is the hub of the pineapple of the Kew variety, a late-maturing, juicy and fibreless fruit, weighing 2-3 kg, with 0.6-1.2% acid content.

Sohphoh Khasi *(Docynia indica)*: **crab apple**
A variety of wild apple with a bitter or sour taste, this was introduced in the Khasi hills by the British nearly 200 years ago. The tribes of Nagaland believe it has high medicinal value.

IN CONVERSATION

Reclaiming "sissy"

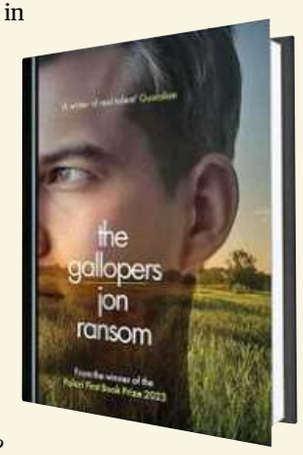
Jon Ransom on exploring the world of a young queer man in love in rural England in his Polari Book Prize-shortlisted novel, *The Gallopers*

Author Jon Ransom

Saurabh Sharma

The winner of the 2023 Polari First Book Prize for his novel *Whale Tattoo*, Jon Ransom grew up in Norfolk, U.K., the setting of his works – both his debut, and his second novel, *The Gallopers* (Muswell Press). What connects these two books is their peculiar circumstance – their queer protagonists are working-class men, and the fundamental, personal freedom of being themselves costs them.

Like a funambulist, Ransom balances his writing voice while sketching an engaging storyline that centralises conversations on politics, queerness, and memory efficiently. *The Gallopers* is on the shortlist for this year's Polari Book Prize, awarded to LGBTQIA+ literature published in the U.K. and Ireland, the winner of which will be announced on November 29. In an email interview, Ransom discusses the themes and conflicts his works wrestle with. Edited excerpts:



Question: *What compelled you to write* The Gallopers*?*
Answer: Landscape is central to my storytelling. I grew up in Norfolk, beneath huge skies that command the restless people who reside there. Their untold stories ebb and flow with a curious rhythm that intrigues me. One such history is of the big North Sea flood of 1953, the aftermath of which became the backbone for *The Gallopers*. The flood took many lives and othered the land in such a way that it became the ideal setting to explore both the exterior and interior world of a young queer man, who is troubled by his sissy-sounding voice.

Q: *Could you take us through the world-building of this book?*
A: Eli Stone lives with his Aunt Dreama alongside a cursed field where the townies have turned against them. Mourning the loss of his mother, who was washed away in the flood, Eli struggles to navigate a world he doesn't understand, while caught in a complicated relationship with an older man. Then, the showman Jimmy Smart appears, absent from his own life, turning the gallopers, and untroubled by the sound of Eli's voice. As Eli learns where words really come from, and Jimmy unravels his own queerness, the men find themselves propelled by a desire without a name.

Q: *Besides finding oneself placeless,* The Gallopers *is also a story of grief and loss. Your thoughts?*
A: *The Gallopers* is very much about grief and loss. Underlying this is a sense of illusion, what is real and imagined. What happens to the disappeared? Eli and Jimmy share much more than their desire; they are both othered by differing circumstances – Eli with his inherent queerness, and Jimmy by his inability to reconcile with the showman's life, where traditions are unmovable. Their placelessness unites them in unexpected ways.

Q: *Could you discuss the nuanced usage of "sissy" in your books?*
A: 'Sissy' is an expression Eli both inherited as a young queer man living in 1950s Norfolk and a word he specifically reclaims to describe the sound of his voice, which for a time he sees as the centre of his queerness. He never questions his desire for other men. In both *The Whale Tattoo* and *The Gallopers*, the protagonists live in a rural landscape dominated by hypermasculinity – fathers, brothers, and men with rules they don't understand. If Eli struggles with his voice, Joe (*The Whale Tattoo*) battles with grief and mental illness, yet neither young man ever really questions his sexuality itself; just the choices and limitations decided by the world around them.

The reviewer is a Delhi-based queer writer and freelance journalist. Instagram/X: @writerly_life

A near-deserted road in Mumbai after a state-wide strike was declared to protest the Bhima-Koregaon violence in January 2018. (SHASHI ASHIWAL)

SHORTLISTED FOR THE 2024 JCB PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

BREAKING FREE

There are no heroes in Sharankumar Limbale's *Sanatan*, but in giving voice to a long-silenced history, the novel performs an act of bravery

Sumana Mukherjee

A story such as this needs to be a bumpy ride, warns Paromita Sengupta in her introductory note to the English translation of *Sanatan*. It could well be the understatement of the year.

Sharankumar Limbale's Marathi novel *Sanatan,* translated here from the Hindi, moves, shakes, jolts the reader by adding a revolutionary dimension to Indian history – not through fake propaganda as-read-on-WhatsApp, or by rewriting accepted versions, but by peeling back long-undisturbed layers and turning the onion inside out, as it were. The result is an incandescent epic of systemic invisibilisation that is both incendiary and explanatory in the current context of the country.

Sanatan is on the shortlist for this year's JCB Prize for Literature, the winner of which will be announced on November 23.

The novel may be called *Sanatan* (as Sengupta says, there's no English equivalent that adequately sums up the implications of the Sanskrit word; hence the decision to retain the original title) but in its form and structure, it is anything but conventional. Divided into six sections, the novel spirals out in its ambit, slicing larger and larger swathes through time and place to emphasise that power structures universally are maintained through discrimination and subjugation. Amid a plethora of characters, two, perhaps, can be described as protagonists, but *Sanatan* is not just their unique story; they could almost be playing parts in a parable.

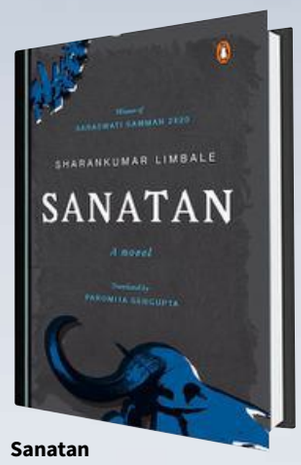
As the novel opens – the timeline is deliberately vague, but subsequent events date it to somewhere in the early to mid-19th century – Sidnak and Bhimnak are young men, friends, leaders in their community of Maharwada. But their caste identity is all that matters to the outside world: They are Mahars, so low down in the Hindu caste ladder that other 'untouchables' consider them untouchable. The village of Sonai, on whose fringes they live, would come to a standstill if the Mahars did not do their assigned jobs – enforcing, patrolling, farming, cleaning, handling dead animals – but their lives are so wretched, so dispossessed, even symbols of their dehumanisation are worn with pride.

Less than human

Reminiscent in some ways of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, this first section is the terribly hard reading Sengupta warned about, not just because of the unspeakable cruelties the villagers of Sonai inflict on the Mahars or the cynicism that accompanies their cruelty ("Beating up the Mahars would make him a hero in front of the villagers and prove how great he was") but also because of the Mahars' unquestioning acceptance of the cruelties. How do you instil a sense of personhood in a people, Limbale seems to be asking, if they have internalised being less than human for millennia? How can they begin to ask who their destitution serves if their very shadow is deemed impure?

But change comes to the subcontinent: the East India Company is looking for soldiers and they couldn't care less for caste. The army offers the Mahars – and the novel – a way out from the suffocating stagnation of Maharwada. Sidnak and Bhimnak are next seen toting guns, and the Brahmins of Devgadh, led by preacher Govind Bhatt, are aghast. "Guns to Mahars! Shiv-Shiv! This is against the Hindu religion," he cries. Alongside, there's the terror of the unknown: the Christian church begins making inroads among the untouchables and Adivasis.

How do you instil a sense of personhood in a people, Limbale seems to be asking, if they have internalised being less than human for millennia? How can they begin to ask who their destitution serves if their very shadow is deemed impure?



Sanatan
Sharankumar Limbale, trs
Paromita Sengupta
Vintage
₹599

Wish-fulfilment, however, has no place in Limbale's world, even as his narrative embraces the Mahar triumph at Bhima-Koregaon and the educational reforms of Jyotiba Phule. Conversion changes religions, not identities. White Christians have nothing to do with brown Christians; upper class converts have nothing to do with Mahars. Bhimnak is packed off to England as a coolie once the army ceases to have use for him; here his skin colour and facial features are enough to mark him out for the same ill-treatment he received at home.

But, in this foreign land, he finds a semblance of happiness, marrying another indentured labourer of Caribbean origin and fathering children. His grandson retraces his steps back to Sonai but, in the meantime, Govind Bhatt's grandson, too, has grown up. In what seems to be a foreshadowing to present-day India, the skirmish between them can only end in one way.

Rewriting history

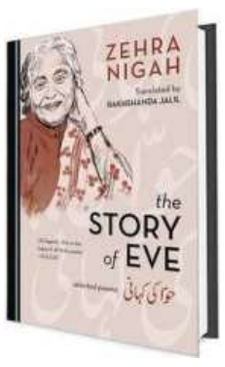
There may be no heroes in *Sanatan*, but there is certainly a villain: a social order based on an interpretation of a religion to serve those at its very top. Where does it end, this bigotry and intolerance, the inequity and prejudice, this inhuman subjugation of one man by another? Limbale offers no easy answers through his furious narrative. But, towards the end of the novel, Saraswati, a minor character who receives the full *sanatan* Hindu treatment as a widow, says, "Until and unless the untouchables write their own story, they will have to sing the glory of the Brahmins. But the untouchables will write. Today, or tomorrow."

The untouchable has written: be it quasi-fiction or polemic, in giving voice to a long-silenced history, *Sanatan* commits an act of bravery. Will the upper castes listen?

The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based writer and editor.

BROWSER

The Story of Eve
Zehra Nigah, trs Rakhshanda Jalil
Speaking Tiger
₹499
With Urdu poems on themes like repressive Shariah laws, female infanticide, love and family, this collection has some of the best-known nazms and ghazals by the pioneering Urdu woman poet. Fondly called Zehra Apa, the Pakistani writer portrays "big" issues in a conversational manner.



I'll Have It Here
Jeet Thayil
Fourth Estate
₹599
After a hiatus of 16 years, the Sahitya Akademi winner is back with a collection of poems that surveys contemporary history and culture in the company of the likes of Spiderman, Emily Dickinson, St. Gregory, Ibn Battuta and Gandhi reincarnated as a house gecko.

The City and Its Uncertain Walls
Haruki Murakami, trs Philip Gabriel
Harvill Secker
₹1,399
From the bestselling Japanese author comes this parable centred on a couple whose love story is divided by a mysterious wall. A re-visiting of a novella he first wrote in 1980, Murakami said if he were to live 40 more years, he'd rewrite this again.

The Grudges of Gajanan Godbole
Salil Desai
Hachette India
₹599
This post-pandemic tale from the author of the Inspector Saralkar detective series explores the homicidal side to a man's personality. Desai is known to choose themes that hold up a mirror to society whilst also exploring the human condition.

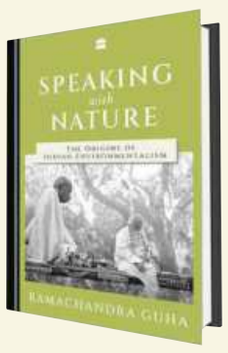
Under the banyan tree

Ramachandra Guha profiles 10 people whom he credits with laying the foundation of environmentalism in India

Neha Sinha

Environmentalism isn't just an idea; it's also a verb. In his latest book, *Speaking With Nature*, historian Ramachandra Guha draws portraits of ten people who he credits with laying the foundation of environmentalism in India.

One would expect a list of tribal leaders, hunters-turned-conservationists, ('repentant butchers' as the author remarks in one section of the book), those who have spearheaded environmental movements, or professional conservationists and administrators. Guha though presents us with an unexpected selection of people – writer Rabindranath Tagore, sociologist



Speaking With Nature
Ramachandra Guha
Fourth Estate
₹799

Radhakamal Mukherjee, Hindutva thinker K.M. Munshi, the naturalist M. Krishnan, Gandhi follower Mira Behn, anthropologist Verrier Elwin and more.

Links with social thought

Guha continues the questions he has asked in previous writings, in that he descries 'full-stomach environmentalism' – the Western idea that environmental consciousness can only come out of prosperity (suggesting that Indian thought cannot be environmental). The people he picks in this book, eight men and two women from all over the world, linked nature to broader social and political thought with reference to India. Another thing they had in common is that they wrote about their ideas, and were scholars. Refreshingly, the book leans on a variety of sources to piece together the ideas Guha puts forward. Readers may remember Jairam Ramesh's tome on Indira Gandhi as an environmentalist (*A Life in Nature*); this book too uses letters, talks and papers as sources.

I read with great interest the chapter on Mira Behn, the sole woman in this book (the other lady is one-half of a married couple who advocated for ecological agriculture, Albert and Gabrielle Howard). Mira's writings are especially interesting for two reasons. One is their relevance even today – one of her concerns was on the intrusion of pine trees in Himalayan oak forests, a problem which still persists (and is exacerbated by human-induced disturbance and fire); another was the disappearance of the Haldu tree, which still doesn't get the ecological importance it deserves. The other is her enquiry into an unthinking forest department. In many passages, the book is not just an appraisal of the problems of India a century ago, but becomes a reflection of issues we face today.

Guha writes of Tagore describing cities as parasites, of anthropologist Elwin describing the Gond understanding of nature as both beautiful and savage, which is increasingly true under climate change.

On Tagore and Mukherjee, Guha recalls their fondness for a tree with "coils", the banyan tree. Guha writes that Krishnan does not like Indian animals being called Western epithets (for example, the Gaur is wrongly known as the bison). Playfully though, Guha calls Krishnan India's John Muir. Krishnan was a naturalist who wrote about all animals, whether big, small, endangered or common; and like Muir he too advocated for a view of untrammelled nature, Guha argues.

Skilful framing

In its skilful framing of environmentalism not as an abstract or aesthetic concept but as something deeply linked to economics, agriculture and other fields of public interest, the book might be seen as a prophecy waiting to be fulfilled. We still require a much more ecological path to development, not crumbs off the table of industrial growth.

Guha's skill is his deep questioning and questing into a wide variety of sources for creating richly detailed accounts which might be described as interdisciplinary; this is a book that is likely to surprise you. As a conservation biologist, I would be interested to read Guha's writing on present environmental ferment on the non-human. Such as the burgeoning Rights of Nature movement; and on the tree he refers to so many times – a political and environmental history of the banyan.

The reviewer is a conservation biologist and author of Wild and Wilful: Tales of 15 Iconic Indian Species. *She tweets at nehaa_sinha*

Watch/read **Ramachandra Guha's interview** here. Scan the QR code.

Changing times (Clockwise from left) Protesters at a rally in Michigan voicing their opposition against China being granted 'the most favoured nation status'; Kishore Mahbubani; and a scenic view of Gateway of India, Mumbai. (GETTY IMAGES, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

FROM THE WORLD'S HIGH TABLES

Kishore Mahbubani, who served as president of the UN Security Council, on power politics, the advent of China and India's growth story

Kishore Mahbubani

In exclusive extracts from his new memoir Living the Asian Century, veteran Singaporean diplomat, author and thinker Kishore Mahbubani, who served as president of the UN Security Council in stints in 2001 and 2002 and later as the founding dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, reflects on his learnings on great power politics from his days at the UN. The memoir traces both his life's journey and Singapore's transformation to an Asian power. An edited excerpt:

The seven years I spent in the United States in the 1980s proved to be an intense learning experience for me. One big lesson was the ambivalent relationship between the U.S. government (especially the Reagan administration) and the UN. In theory, the U.S. government was committed to stronger multilateral institutions. In practice, it was always trying to weaken them, especially by starving them of funding.

The opposing views of Singapore and the U.S. on the UN aren't surprising. As a small state, Singapore is protected by multilateral rules and institutions. As a great power, the U.S. is constrained by them. Hence, while Singapore wants to strengthen the UN, the U.S. wants to weaken it. Yet despite these opposing positions, Lee Kuan Yew always found ways and means to win political dividends from the U.S., as he believed strongly that Singapore should have stronger ties with the U.S. than its neighbours, especially Malaysia and Indonesia, did.

China in the WTO

An encounter with American groupthink in the buildup to the illegal American invasion of Iraq in March 2003 continues to trouble me greatly twenty years after the event. I see a similar groupthink emerging when it comes to dealing with China in 2023. Groupthink has captured the world's most educated intelligentsia twice in my lifetime.

As the George Bush administration, and the American elites in general, were focussed on the aftermath of 9/11 and the Iraq war, none of them paid careful attention to an event of even greater significance than 9/11 that took place in 2001: China's admission to the World Trade Organization.

Yet it changed world history far more significantly than the Iraq war did. In 2001, when China joined the WTO, the GDP of the U.S. was U.S.$10.6 trillion, while that of China was only U.S.$1.3 trillion. In short, the U.S. economy was eight times larger than the Chinese economy. By 2022, the U.S. GDP of U.S.$25.5 trillion was only 1.4 times larger than the Chinese GDP of U.S.$17.9 trillion. When future historians reflect on the first two decades of the 21st century, they will surely note that the strategic minds of the American establishment were focused on short-term issues, like the Iraq war, while the strategic minds of the Chinese establishment were focused on long-term trends, like China's admission into WTO.

'Idealist tendencies'

Even though I inherited the "realist" geopolitical lens of Singapore's founding fathers, I also never lost my "idealist" tendencies.

As the George Bush administration was focussed on the aftermath of 9/11 in 2001, it did not pay attention to an event of even greater significance: China's admission to the World Trade Organization

I continued to believe that the world could be a better place if enough goodwill was applied. Balancing these realist and idealist tendencies in my mind remained a constant challenge. Having served in the UN for over a decade, I was shocked by the massive misunderstanding of this critical global organisation in the Anglo-Saxon media. Since I have been very critical of the Anglo-Saxon media, I should explain that this is a result of the great expectations that the world has of them. They claim to be fair, honest, objective, dispassionate, and accurate in their descriptions of the state of the world. This may have been true a few decades ago, but it is far from true today. Thus, the disillusionment that many other Asians and I feel towards the Anglo-Saxon media is a result of the great expectations they unleashed.

The explosion of cultural self-confidence among many Asian societies has been a transformative and joyous event to see and participate in. When I first visited Mumbai (then called Bombay) in 1969, it was a typical Third World city teeming with poor people. Dodging beggars became an art. Few in India believed then that their country had a great future, as two decades of independence had brought relatively few improvements in living standards. In my most recent visit to Mumbai in November 2023, I felt that I was entering a different universe. The fifty or sixty young entrepreneurs whom I spoke to (each of whom had a net worth of over U.S.$250 million) at the Young President's Organisation were among the most dynamic and optimistic young entrepreneurs I had met in my life. In 1990, there were probably fewer than five million cell phones among the one billion people of India. Now there are over six hundred million smartphone users. If my mother could see this, she would be astonished by this new India, brimming with new hope.

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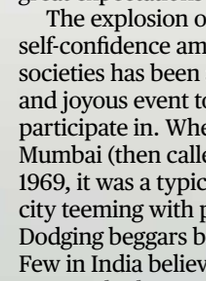


Living the Asian Century: An Undiplomatic Memoir
Kishore Mahbubani
Public Affairs/ Hachette India
₹1,670

IQRA HASAN:

Shaking up a boy's club

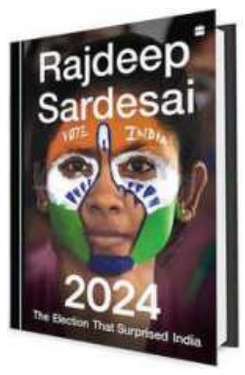
Earlier this year, Hasan won over Muslim and Hindu communities at Kairana in western U.P. to enter Parliament as one of the only three women Muslim MPs in the 18th Lok Sabha

Rajdeep Sardesai

An edited excerpt from 2024: The Election That Surprised India, *chronicling a young woman's journey to Parliament.*

A young woman in her mid-twenties in London dreams of doing a PhD in political science at the prestigious School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), only to find herself navigating the sprawling sugar cane fields of Kairana in western Uttar Pradesh and seeking election to the Lok Sabha a few years later. The story of 30-year-old Iqra Hasan is unusual: inspiring and disconcerting at the same time. Having completed her Master's at SOAS, the academically inclined Hasan was planning on undertaking further studies, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to return home in the summer of 2021. Her concerns didn't end there. Just a few months later, ahead of the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, her brother, Nahid Hasan, a three-time Samajwadi Party MLA from Kairana, was arrested under the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 1986. "It was like my whole world fell apart overnight. My father had passed away much earlier, my mother was unwell, my brother was in jail only because he had challenged the Yogi Adityanath government, our bank accounts were frozen, our properties placed under litigation. Forget about academics, I just had to stay focused to hold the family together," said Hasan.

Power woman Samajwadi Party MP Iqra Hasan. (PTI)



2024: The Election That Surprised India
Rajdeep Sardesai
HarperCollins
₹799

Her first challenge was to handle her brother's 2022 campaign. Her diligent efforts paid off: Nahid was elected to the State Assembly even while in jail. Soon after, when she was offered the chance to contest the Kairana Lok Sabha seat in 2024, she decided to take the plunge. She knew that to win the election she would need support from either side of the communal divide. "From day one, I centred my campaign on issues cutting across 'biradaris' (fraternities) that had nothing to do with religion."

Hasan won the Kairana seat by over 69,000 votes while polling more than 5.28 lakh votes. 'Kairana ki behen' was now an MP. Her base was not just a solid Muslim vote but also many Hindu caste groups, whose trust she had managed to gain.

Read the excerpt in full online.

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

MEGHALAYA
LOOKING BEYOND THE GRAPE

New taste (Clockwise from above) A restaurant that offers wine for tasting in Shillong; Lyang B. Sangma's Dura Wine; and Pecindha K. Sangma at Vinexpo India 2024. (RITU RAJ KONWAR, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Checking farm waste

The winemaking 'renaissance' in Meghalaya has also entailed taking homemakers, farmers and entrepreneurs on exposure trips to the winemaking hubs of Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh. One such farmer, Bording Ioannis Shylla, has set up the state's largest winemaking unit (10,000-litre capacity) at Mawkyrwat, about 75 km southwest of Shillong, to produce and market his brand, Damad, with his winemaker wife, Meldorah Wanniang. The couple has acquired 60 acres of land for farming, and they also coordinate with nearby villages for bulk supply of fresh fruits.

Says Sohliya: "One of the factors behind the stress on winemaking was to check the wastage of fruits and vegetables. Meghalaya's terrain does not allow large-scale farming, and farmers here invariably cannot sell all they grow or collect from the jungles. Their fruits of labour often rot; the rate of wastage is similar to India's average of 40% for fruits and vegetables throughout the supply chain."

He adds, "Wastage has come down substantially with winemakers booking farms or trees a year in advance as a winemaker needs a tonne of fruit to produce 200 litres of wine. A farmer who earned ₹3,000 per sohiong tree now makes ₹15,000 a season, while kiwi, plum, peach, pineapple, orange, and jackfruit farmers have upped their income from ₹30,000 to more than ₹3 lakh per season. There has also been a shift from gathering fruits from the jungle to farming them."

The Meghalaya government imposes no VAT on fruit wines compared to 4%-53% VAT in other Indian states. The only levies are an ad valorem of ₹100 per case (12 bottles) and a retailer's lifting fee of ₹10 per case.

Agreements with farmers are fuelling urban wine startups such as Shillong's Kynjai Wine launched by Dajied Shabong. "From procuring fruits from farmers and bottles from Mumbai to the final packaging, winemaking is a complex process, but rewarding for the soul. Our wines are on par with those produced elsewhere in India, if not the world. Things are moving fast in Meghalaya and we hope to upgrade from selling from home to supplying to stores in the Northeast soon," says Shabong.

For Michael Syiem, acknowledged as the man who sparked the winemaking movement in recent history, the industry in Meghalaya is heading in the right direction. "The enabling atmosphere and the entrepreneurial drive of a few are making it possible," he says.

Rooted in tradition (Clockwise from left) Tsüipu' peach and passion fruit mead; Keenan Marak of 7 United; Mayukh Hazarika; Cherrapunji Eastern Craft Gin; wild *amla*; and Lovi Tsüipu (centre) with her team. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

SOMETHING'S BREWING IN THE NORTHEAST

With government support and a post-pandemic boost, the Seven Sisters' alcobev industry hopes to be a much-needed disruptor, with everything from mead and rice beer to corn whiskey

Raul Dias

Though separated by geography and chronology, the ancient Celtics and the Sümi Naga tribe of Nagaland have something deliciously in common. Mead. Brewed by fermenting honey mixed with water and overripe fruit, the amber-hued drink is said to be the oldest known form of an alcoholic beverage – dating back 6,000 years. It's even older than wine.

Growing up in the Tsüipu clan in Nagaland's Zunheboto district, tribesperson Lovi Tsüipu, like the Celts, lived most of her life by the moon calendar. Every year, in July, when the full moon is closest to the summer solstice – known as the 'Mead Moon' – she'd watch her clanspeople prepare vats of mead. But with a local twist.

"To make our mead, we gather fruits and berries – especially, the local stronger flavoured *amla* [gooseberries] – and steep them in fresh spring water and black honey. The honey, which can only be found inside tree trunks or in hives built underground, is more robustly flavoured," explains the 35-year-old, who, a decade ago, parleyed these ancient techniques and indigenous ingredients into building her own meadery, Tsüipu Heritage Beverages.

She has been running the small-scale business independently out of a modest production unit in Dimapur. Here, at any given time, you can find at least 18 wooden casks filled with a variety of fruit-flavoured meads. These include the signature gooseberry, along with experimental iterations featuring peach, passion fruit, strawberry and dragon fruit. All fermented (for a minimum of 12 months), filtered and bottled on site.

Mead to order

Making mead is traditionally a man's purview among the Sümi Naga, and breaking this patriarchal trope was challenging. "Acceptance took a while," she says. "But, as a business, I faced several challenges, including lack of enthusiasm to buy my mead, as it wasn't something new for us. I barely managed to sell 200 bottles annually in the first few years. It was the encouraging response from outside the state that egged me to not give up. Today, we produce between 15,000-20,000 bottles a year." Post-pandemic, her mead – with an ABV (alcohol by volume) range of 6% to 16% – is finding patronage in places as far away as New Delhi and Bengaluru, besides other Northeastern states. All on direct order (from ₹200-₹1,000), for now.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises has been giving her brand a boost by taking its mead to various exhibitions and showcases around India, to help promote the drink from Nagaland.

"Ours is the only meadery that we know of in the region," says Tsüipu, who graduated in Food Processing from SRM University, Chennai, and returned with a clear vision to promote mead as a disruptor to the otherwise fruit wine and beer-dominated alcobev space in the Northeast. "We rely heavily on the use of both local ingredients such as wild basil and the blue prickly-skinned *noni* fruit, and ancient honey harvesting techniques that not only provide a livelihood to the skilled harvesters, but also preserve their way of life."

Rice and shine

Across the border in Meghalaya, Keenan Marak, 25, a member of the Garo tribe, has been attempting to pay homage to the "gastro-cultural treasures" of not just his state, but also its six sister states. Ergo, 7 United, the rice beer brewery he founded in 2022 in his town of Tura in the West Garo Hills.

An infusion of curiosity

The years post-pandemic have been pivotal for distillers in the Northeast. Not only did they bring a sense of enterprise among budding entrepreneurs such as Marak — who returned to his village during the lockdown to dig into tribal recipes and alcohol-producing techniques — but also stirred up curiosity among consumers who wanted a taste of something unique. This is seen with emerging brands in the space of fruit wines, meads, and canned versions of *mahua* and rice beer.

"Most of the Northeastern states have their own version of indigenous beer – be it rice beers like *zutho* and *thuthse* of Nagaland, or *zu* from Mizoram," says Marak, who has been making the Garo tribe's iteration, the Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged *bitchi*. "My ultimate goal is to bring rice beer to the fore, and make it as ubiquitous as regular beer across India." To this end, he recently met Chief Minister Conrad Sangma to ask that *bitchi* be given a classification of its own as a rice beer and not be tagged under the wines category. "This makes it an uneven playing field, as we're competing against established wine companies like Sula. The CM has promised to look into this."

Starting out by selling his beer in recycled PET bottles at local events such as Shillong's Cherry Blossom Festival and smaller musical festivals, today 7 United is available across the state with as many as 20,000 cans being sold every month at the peak of *bitchi* season, in winter. In the new year, he plans to look southwards, towards states such as Karnataka and Goa – which have a strong beer drinking culture.

Marak's version of the 7% ABV beer is a slight riff on the traditional still *bitchi* made with sticky rice and yeast. The light golden beer is carbonated for a longer shelf life (of six months) and dispensed out of sleek black and white aluminium cans (₹110). "But that's the only innovation. We make our beer the traditional way, using local sticky rice sourced from farmers. It is brewed with water in clay pots that are blackened over a fire for a smoky-sweet flavour profile. Even the yeast that we use is a tribal preparation called *wanti*, which imparts an earthy hum of flavour." He plans to release a slightly stronger version early next year with a higher ABV.

Another tribal favourite, this time of the Dimasa tribe of Assam, *judima* rice beer was in the news for procuring a GI tag in 2021. Traditionally prepared by women, this custom is carried out to this day by the Judima Traditional Brewers' Industrial Co-operative Society in Dima Hasao district. It is available across wine shops and handicraft shops in the state.

Royal challenges

Interestingly, this reliance on local ingredients and traditional techniques in alcohol production is not just being seen through the prism of indigenous drinks any more. It is also wetting the whistle of a few Northeast-based IMFL (Indian Made Foreign Liquor) distilleries.

Billing itself as a 'wet' style gin, Cherrapunji Eastern Craft Gin was founded last year by Mayukh Hazarika, 43. With sustainability in manufacturing as a key driver, the gin is made with native botanicals such as Meghalayan forest peppers and the GI-tagged Khasi mandarin's peel. "It was an article in *The New York Times* about water scarcity in the rainiest place on Earth, Cherrapunji, that was the tipping point for me. As someone who hails from the place, I was deeply disturbed by the irony," says Hazarika, who uses rainwater harvesting tanks from Australia, and packs his gin (that's available in Meghalaya and Assam for ₹2,500 and ₹2,800, respectively) in reusable stainless steel bottles printed with depictions of local art.

But why haven't these alcohols found their way to more places in India? Vicky Chand, CEO of Radiant Manufacturers – which has been making 100% corn whiskey in Assam since 2013 – says: "India's liquor market is highly fragmented, with each state having its own pricing, manufacturing, and distribution policies. This makes it challenging to operate across multiple states."

For Hazarika, with the Northeast not known traditionally as a manufacturing hub, "building a supply chain system in a fairly modest manufacturing ecosystem was challenging. Also, there was no precedence of international exports in the region".

Smaller producers such as Tsüipu and Marak also feel that the obstacles come from important aspects such as market penetration and competition. "At the moment, it's almost impossible for small businesses like mine to invest heavily in marketing and brand-building to distinguish ourselves," rues Tsüipu, who is also working hard to petition government regulatory bodies to give mead its own classification apart from 'wines'.

While, social media and e-commerce portals have helped bring her products to the mainstream, especially post-pandemic, she says they are now tapping into another calling card of the Northeast, events like the Hornbill Festival, "to not just drum up buzz around our products, but to give visitors a taste, so that they might go back and talk about us. Every little bit of help is crucial".

The Mumbai-based writer is passionate about food, travel and luxury, not necessarily in that order.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

BOTS, ADS AND BROKEN TRUST

Will the web once again prioritise real human connections over clicks and engagement?

Rita McGrath and M. Muneer

In the early days of the Internet, the excitement was palpable. The digital world promised boundless communication, reconnecting with old friends, voicing frustrations about customer service, and even achieving viral fame. Information that once felt unreachable was now accessible with a few clicks, and best of all, it was free. It was a utopia of ideas and connection. Fast forward to today, and that early magic has all but evaporated. Algorithms, AI-generated content, and an insatiable thirst for advertising revenue have replaced it.

A recent study by Amazon Web Services captures the evolving Internet, emphasising the rise of low-cost AI tools. The study reveals that 57% of online content has been translated into multiple languages through machine learning. While this should promote global communication, the reality is troubling. Especially in regions such as Africa and the Global South, poor translations often distort valuable information into misleading clickbait, driven by the desire for ad revenue.

Countries with fewer linguistic data points for training AI are disproportionately affected. Users in these regions frequently encounter inaccurate or deceptive content. What was meant to democratise information is now a distorted reflection of reality, skewed by commercial motives.

In response to these shifts, the 'dead Internet' theory has emerged. This concept posits that most online interactions today are between AI-powered bots rather than actual people. These bots generate everything from fake social media profiles to politically charged narratives. At its most extreme, the theory suggests that governments exploit these bots to control public discourse.

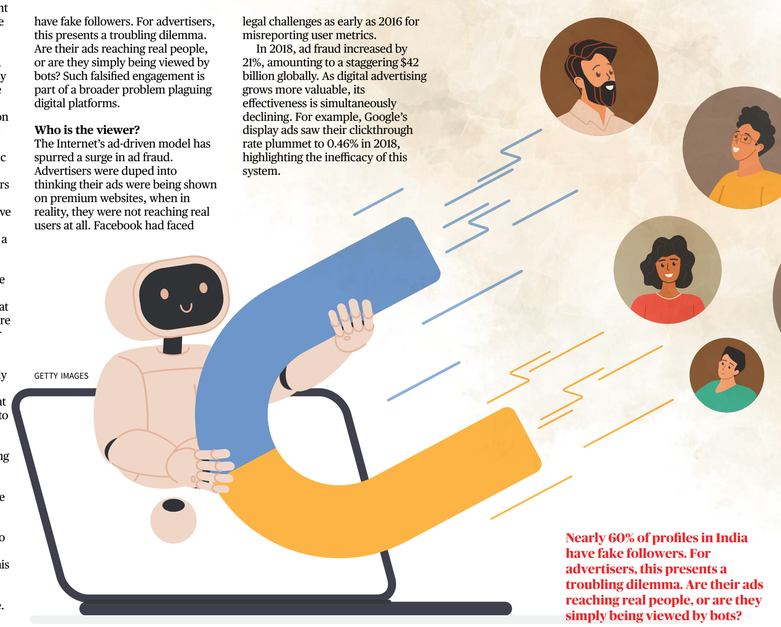
While this might sound like conspiracy theory, the underlying issue is real: bad actors are gaming the Internet for profit or influence. Back in 2013, YouTube uncovered that users were artificially inflating likes and views, tricking the algorithm into interpreting bot activity as genuine human engagement. This practice persists across major platforms today.

Instagram is a prime example. Nearly 60% of profiles in India have fake followers. For advertisers, this presents a troubling dilemma. Are their ads reaching real people, or are they simply being viewed by bots? Such falsified engagement is part of a broader problem plaguing digital platforms.

Who is the viewer?

The Internet's ad-driven model has spurred a surge in ad fraud. Advertisers were duped into thinking their ads were being shown on premium websites, when in reality, they were not reaching real users at all. Facebook had faced legal challenges as early as 2016 for misreporting user metrics.

In 2018, ad fraud increased by 21%, amounting to a staggering $42 billion globally. As digital advertising grows more valuable, its effectiveness is simultaneously declining. For example, Google's display ads saw their clickthrough rate plummet to 0.46% in 2018, highlighting the inefficacy of this system.



GETTY IMAGES

Nearly 60% of profiles in India have fake followers. For advertisers, this presents a troubling dilemma. Are their ads reaching real people, or are they simply being viewed by bots?

This broken digital advertising ecosystem has had far-reaching consequences, particularly for media companies. Giants in the industry, such as Vice, once valued at $6 billion, have filed for bankruptcy. BuzzFeed News, once a pioneer of viral journalism, has shut down. The changing algorithms of platforms such as Facebook and Google have decimated the audiences of these media companies.

Cory Doctorow, science fiction author and privacy advocate, coined the term "enshittification" to capture the progressive decline of online platforms. As Doctorow puts it, "We're all living through a great enshittening, in which the services that matter to us, that we rely on, are turning into giant piles of shit."

It's not just the companies that are affected. Younger audiences, who once eagerly consumed edgy, free content, are now unwilling to pay for it. Advertisers, meanwhile, are growing sceptical of the returns they get from digital ads, further destabilising the digital economy.

As ad-supported models weaken, trust in the Internet itself is deteriorating. Bots, fake content, and the growing scarcity of reliable information are forcing users to seek out more niche, trustworthy communities. Platforms such as Reddit provide some refuge, where human interaction feels more genuine, but even here, authenticity is not always guaranteed. Much of the Internet's most valuable content is now hidden behind paywalls, with platforms shifting to subscription models to sustain themselves.

Internet as a public utility

Advertisers are also re-evaluating their strategies. Some are turning to omni-channel marketing, which blends digital and real-world experiences to maintain engagement. Others are abandoning ad-supported platforms altogether, favouring subscription-based models or platforms that promise genuine user engagement. The European Union has made strides in this direction with the Digital Services Act, which mandates greater transparency in online advertising. However, tech giants are resisting these regulations, reluctant to relinquish their control over ad revenues and user data.

Amid these concerns, some experts are proposing that the Internet should be treated as a public utility, similar to water or electricity. A Consumer Reports study found that 80% of respondents already view broadband as essential as electricity.

Looking forward, the Internet may not adhere to a single model. Instead, it could evolve into a hybrid of paid services, government regulation, and trust-based, community-driven platforms. The era of a chaotic, unregulated Internet appears to be drawing to a close, making way for a more curated and accountable online experience.

In some ways, this shift represents a return to the Internet's original vision. As we move towards a more controlled and trustworthy digital experience, the web may once again prioritise real human connections over clicks and bot-driven engagement. The Internet, at its best, was always about nurturing genuine interactions, communities, and trust. Perhaps in the future, we'll find ourselves back at that starting point, where what truly matters is not who clicks, but who cares.

McGrath is professor at Columbia Business School and founder of Valize, and Muneer is a Fortune-500 advisor, start-up investor and co-founder of the non-profit, Medici Institute for Innovation.

Standing together A demonstration in support of author Salman Rushdie in New York, August 2022. (AP)

POP-A-RAZZI

When paper tigers roar

The ban order on Rushdie's book might have gone missing, but its implications live on, eating away at the cultural fabric of society

Rushdie, prescient writer that he is, seems to have imagined that scene in fiction long before it transpired in reality. He wrote about the dull and ordinary Chupwalas, in "zipped lips cloaks and hoods" running around attending to "mindless, routine jobs". Yet, his character Haroun reminds himself that what these "snivelling clerical types were actually up to was nothing less than the destruction of the Ocean of the Streams of Story itself".

More powerful than freedom of speech

It makes perfect sense that in the end the denouement proved to be as mundane and ordinary as my misplaced house keys. Even Sandipan Khan's lawyer admitted to *The New York Times* that this was not any glorious "freedom of expression judgement" but rather one about the "bureaucracy's inefficiency". It's an ending more comical than happy.

Of course, as everyone knows this is not necessarily the end of the story. Rushdie is not yet at Victory City. He had already warned us long ago that if happy endings "happen in the middle of a story, or an adventure, or the like, all they do is cheer up things for a while".

The paper order might have gone missing but the ban lives on larger than life in our minds. The book's import was banned but no one ever published the book locally either. Its literary merit was never really judged. As that ban's legitimate progeny proliferated and spread far and wide eating holes in society's cultural fabric, we have realised that the ban button can feel more powerful than freedom of speech itself. The Kingdom of Chup can overpower the Kingdom of Gup.

And then it's over. Khattam-Shud: the end.

Sandip Roy, *the author of* Don't Let Him Know, *likes to let everyone know about his opinions whether asked or not.*

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

TRICKTIONARY EPISODE 2

DON'T RUIN MY FOOD

What do you call those fanatics who sit next to you when you are eating and pass judgement after judgement?

Dear readers, welcome to further innovation in the English lexicon. Our commitment is unwavering.

Friends, do you remember the golden days of years past when people were allowed to enjoy the consumption of food items? When you could wake up in the morning and think: "Today I feel like having chilli idli. Let me make some chilli idli."

And then you could go on the Internet or YouTube and search for chilli idli recipe? And then you would find some nice lady from Mumbai who is originally from Erode who will show you step by step instructions to make chilli idli?

And then you go to your kitchen and make chilli idli, and just 45 minutes later, after setting fire to your fridge, and extinguishing above-mentioned fire, you go to your local Sino-Tamil restaurant for chilli idli?

Those were simple times. Those days are gone forever.

Today if you go and look for chilli idli recipe, you will only find nonsense like 'High Protein Idli', 'Are Idlis Silent Killer like Auto Shankar?', 'Idlis: A Colonial Conspiracy?'

Everywhere you look it is protein and carbohydrate and Omega 3 and gut microbe. Absolute shenanigans. In 1985, if you asked my grandfather, what the five main food groups were, he would say: fruits, vegetables, jackfruit, banana chips, mutton biryani.

But at least these things you can ignore. If the Internet is irritating you, you can just switch it off.

But can you switch off human beings? Usually not.

This week, I wish to address one of the most irritating things some people do when food items are involved. The type of person I am referring to is a particularly nefarious variant of health fanatic.

Now there are many different flavours of health fanatic. There are people who run marathons. There are other people who go to the gymnasium. Then there are the unbearable individuals who have the same solution for every problem: yoga.

"Machaan, *what happened? You looked very upset during the meeting.*"

"*Oh my tooth is hurting like anything.*"

"*You should have told me. I know one special yoga for toothache. You put your hand here, and then you put your head like this. Ok now you touch the ceiling with your right ear, very good, and gently push against the photocopy machine. Now the pain will vanish. How is it?*"

"*Thanks bro. Please call an ambulance urgently, my pancreas has come out.*"

But the absolute worst health fanatic is the person who will sit next to you when you are trying to eat something, and then behave like one Chandrachud, passing judgement after judgement.

"*What are you eating bro?*"

"*This? It is masala omelette.*"

"*Oh no, my condolences to wife and children.*"

"*What happened?*"

"*Egg is like cyanide for the body. Please write will paper immediately.*"

Dear reader, it does not matter what you are trying to consume. These rascals will find problems with everything.

"*Are you having milk? Say good bye to your digestion because Indians are lactose intolerant.*"

"*Oh my god you are eating chicken? Why not save time and inject cholesterol directly into the heart.*"

"*Did you just eat fruit salad? Fruit is pure sugar, it is like drinking one cup of gulab jamun water?*"

"*Cappuccino at 4 p.m.? Now your sleep cycle is disturbed, brain damage has already started. What is the square root of 16?*"

"*How dare you offer me idli with coconut chutney? Are you trying to desecrate my body temple with carbohydrates, and the transatlantic fats in the coconut?*"

"*I could not help but notice the soya bean in the salad. You fool don't you know that soya bean can destroy the hormones and it will turn man into woman, and woman into giraffe?*"

Friends, these culinary criminals will do this drama sitting right next to you at the table.

After waiting for 20 minutes, finally the food has arrived. And you are now transporting fried rice and vegetable manchurian from the bowl to the mouth with the spoon, when suddenly they will read the Wikipedia page of ajinomoto.

Why are these people like this?

But more importantly, why is there no word to describe these killjoys? Which is why I propose the following word to describe those who are permanently discontent about cuisine: the 'dishcontents'.

Dishcontents are all around us. Beware.

Example sentence:

"Oh no, Dishcontent Dinesh has entered the staff canteen. Quickly put the Chicken 65 inside the laptop bag before he sees it!"

Dishcontent
/dɪʃ.kənˌtɛnt/
noun
Definition:

1. A person who habitually finds fault with or expresses dissatisfaction toward the food choices of others.

2. An attitude characterised by negativity or disapproval regarding culinary options, leading to a discouraging dining experience for others.

Related forms:
Dishcontented (adjective): describing a person or attitude that is consistently critical of food choices.
Dishcontentment (noun): the state of being dissatisfied with food or meal options.

Sidin Vadukut *is head of talent at Clarisights. He lives in London and is currently working on a new novel.*

GOREN BRIDGE

Timing is everything

Both vulnerable, East deals

Bob Jones

Many would have bid three spades with the West hand. West's decision to pass allows us to show another feature of the popular Lebensohl convention. North's two no trump bid might have been based on a very weak hand, but the three-spade continuation showed a game-forcing hand with four hearts and a spade stopper. That's a lot of mileage from one convention. Small wonder it is so popular.

South ruffed the opening spade lead and had to play carefully. Should he draw trumps right away, there was a danger that West could win the ace of diamonds and continue with the nine of spades, leading to three spade losers plus the diamond ace for down one. Instead,

NORTH
♠ K 7 6 5
♡ A K 9 8
◇ K 10 7
♣ 5 3

WEST
♠ 10 9 2
♡ 7 2
◇ A 8 5 3
♣ K J 8 4

EAST
♠ A Q J 8 4 3
♡ 6 5 3
◇ 2
♣ 10 9 7

SOUTH
♠ Void
♡ Q J 10 4
◇ Q J 9 6 4
♣ A Q 6 2

The bidding:

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
2♠	Dbl	Pass	2NT*
Pass	3♣	Pass	3♠
Pass	4♡	All pass	

*Forces 3♣ from South

Opening lead: 10 of ♠

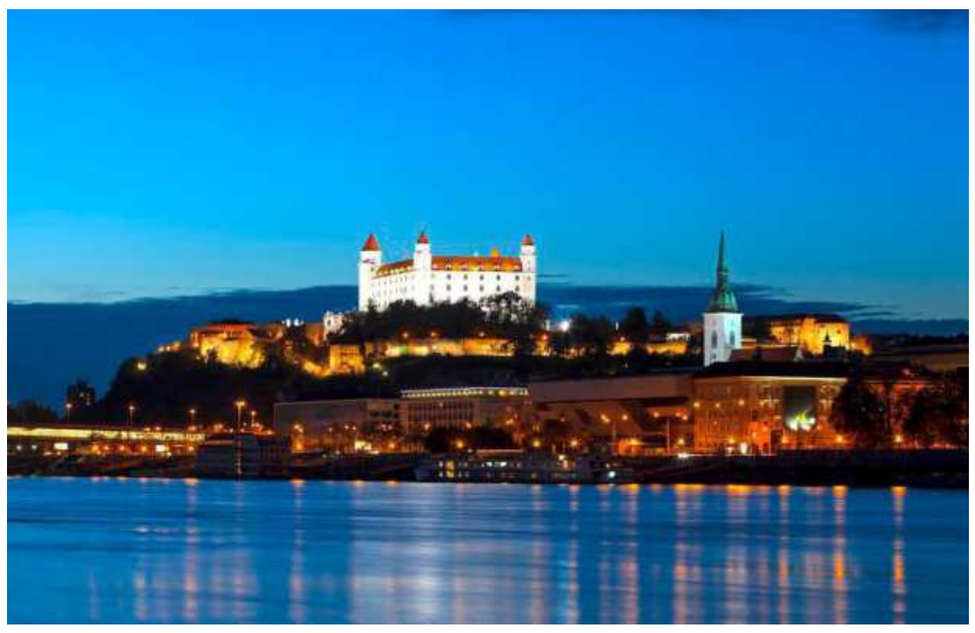
South led a diamond to dummy's king at trick two. A diamond ruff by the defence would not have hurt him. When the king held, he ruffed another spade in hand. Three rounds of trumps drew all the trumps and he continued with the 10 of diamonds from dummy. West won with the ace and continued spades. There were now only two spade winners available to the defence before dummy was out of spades and declarer could claim the balance.

Very nicely played! Had West bid three spades, North would probably have bid four hearts, reaching the same contract but with East on lead. Only an unlikely low spade lead by East would have challenged declarer.

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

The best way to know a city is to walk it: Simone De Beauvoir



A view of Bratislava Castle on river Danube that houses the Slovak parliament. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

Berty Ashley

1 On November 17, 1873, two cities put aside their rivalry to become the administrative capital of the country. The city on the western bank of river Danube was named after Buda, the brother of Attila the Hun. The city on the eastern bank was originally called 'Pesth'. What did these two come together as, and which country's capital is this?

2 The only capital city that is completely within another capital city also has the world's smallest land area and population. Which 'city' is this, and which other city is it found within?

3 This city is the lowest-lying national capital in the world. Being 28 metres below sea level, it is also the largest city below sea level. Lying on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, this city is the sole metropolis of the country of Azerbaijan. Known for its picturesque skyline and the eventful F1 races, which city is this?

4 Naypyidaw is an entirely planned capital city that replaced Yangon in 2005. Meaning 'abode of the king', it is a huge city with a minuscule population. With just 160 people per sq.km., which country's capital is this?

5 In 1993, Bratislava regained its status as the capital of the newly formed independent Slovak Republic. Situated on the Danube, it is the only national capital in the world to share borders with two other countries. With which two countries does the Slovak capital share borders?

6 Situated 2800 metres above sea level, Quito is the highest official capital of a country. Located at just 00°15'S, it is also the closest to the Equator. Which country that is named after this fact is Quito the capital of?

7 Located at 64°08'N, this city is the northernmost capital in the world. Lying just 530 km below the Arctic Circle, its name means 'smoky bay'. Ironically, it is one of the greenest cities in the world with excellent air quality. Which city and which country is this?

8 For 11 centuries, this city, whose name means 'capital city', was the seat of the imperial court of this country and emperors ruled out of it. Since 1868, another city whose name means 'Eastern capital', has been the capital. Both names have the same five letters, just in different order. What are these two cities that are anagrams of each other?

9 Usually, the capital city of the country is the largest in the country or within the top three. Here, the country's largest city in terms of area, population, and density is four times larger than the capital city. Though small, which city is this that is considered the most powerful capital city in the world?

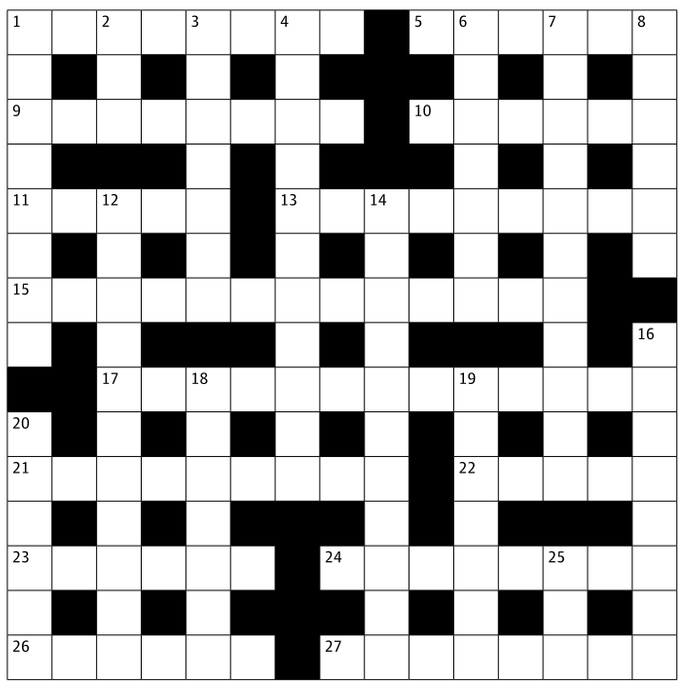
10 New Caledonia is a group of islands in the southwest Pacific Ocean. Since 1853, they were legally administered under the constitution of a country. It holds the record for distance between a capital and the farthest territorial area. With a massive 16,760 km between them, which city is their capital?

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. Budapest, Hungary
2. Vatican City, Rome
3. Baku
4. Myanmar
5. Austria and Hungary
6. Ecuador
7. Reykjavik, Iceland
8. Kyoto and Tokyo
9. Washington DC, USA
10. Paris, France

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3332



Across

1 Suit as may be worn by wealthy (8)
5 Walk – gosh – flipping healthy (4,2)
9 That's a nit I see – just a bit – get clean! (8)
10 Where a waltz started in '80s pop hit (6)
11 It spins forward – and backward? (5)
13 Studying again, finally, Oscar Wilde: where was his *Gaol*? (9)
15 Climbing down, band pick legal high (4-9)
17 Top politicians, decadent Frenchborn set (5-8)
21 Where lands steepen, in shelters, the writer's going to sleep (at first) (9)
22 In favour of second ad (5)
23 That man is smothered by rightwing presumption (6)
24 Getting to Italy, *M. le Président* will eat a kind of pasta (8)
26 Primarily, man espousing strange 'magnetism' – especially restoratively? (6)
27 Bridled, noise of downpour heard (6,2)

Down

1 Paint picture of Claude's crib, expertly ignoring parts (8)
2 Live-in childminder saving skin …her name? (3)
3 Rock, *passé*, cut … (7)
4 … record by Queen censored having fallen from favour (11)
6 Not fashionable, friendless originally: is Everyman folding? (7)
7 Evidence of shark; men doing badly in fishy film (7,4)
8 A little faint, wan gynaecologist with nasal tone (6)
12 Flatus scent – moved: discretion (11)
14 After components switched, Wills's missus's posh car is fun way to get about (6,5)
16 Public schoolboy sheltering second old Soviet (8)
18 With ceremony, keep watch (7)
19 Naval officer, a little indolent, put in ill-considered catnap (7)
20 Time to go with the Blues? (6)
25 Peculiar to regularly ignore 'Howdydo?' (3)

SOLUTION NO. 3331

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

The street turned playground

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A few days ago, on a dusky evening, my cousin and I were riding towards the badminton court. *En route*, we saw a few boys playing cricket on the streets. As my cousin slowly rode the motorbike, our eyes were glued to the game till it went out of sight. As we reached the badminton court, to our surprise, we found ourselves to be a bit earlier to the court. We sat on the steps and started to reminisce about our childhood. Our minds were filled with nostalgia.

Decades ago, whenever our summer vacations were announced by our school, we would be on cloud nine. During school days, even alarms and nudging by my parents could not wake me up from the cosy bed, but on the annual vacation, I would wake up early in the morning even without an alarm. After brushing the teeth and drinking a cup of milk, I would take the bat and leave home. Another herculean task was to gather the players. Once the requisite number of people are gathered, we would place the stumps made by us from coconut fronds. Bricks and sand provide us with the necessary support for the stumps. The broken pieces of the bricks would aid us in drawing the crease at the striker as well as the non-striker ends. Our street was our stadium. Our game would continue till any of our parents came up to take us to breakfast. After a short break for food, the game would resume.

Since it is a street with plenty of houses, any mishit would lead the ball into the houses.

There are a few who take it in the lighter sense. And there are a few who are reluctant to give back the ball. Despite all these ordeals, our game would continue. Even the scorching sun in the middle of the day could not stop it.

As the sun receded and dusk set in, we would switch to other games. In the twilight, we would be playing seven stones, kabaddi, football and so on.

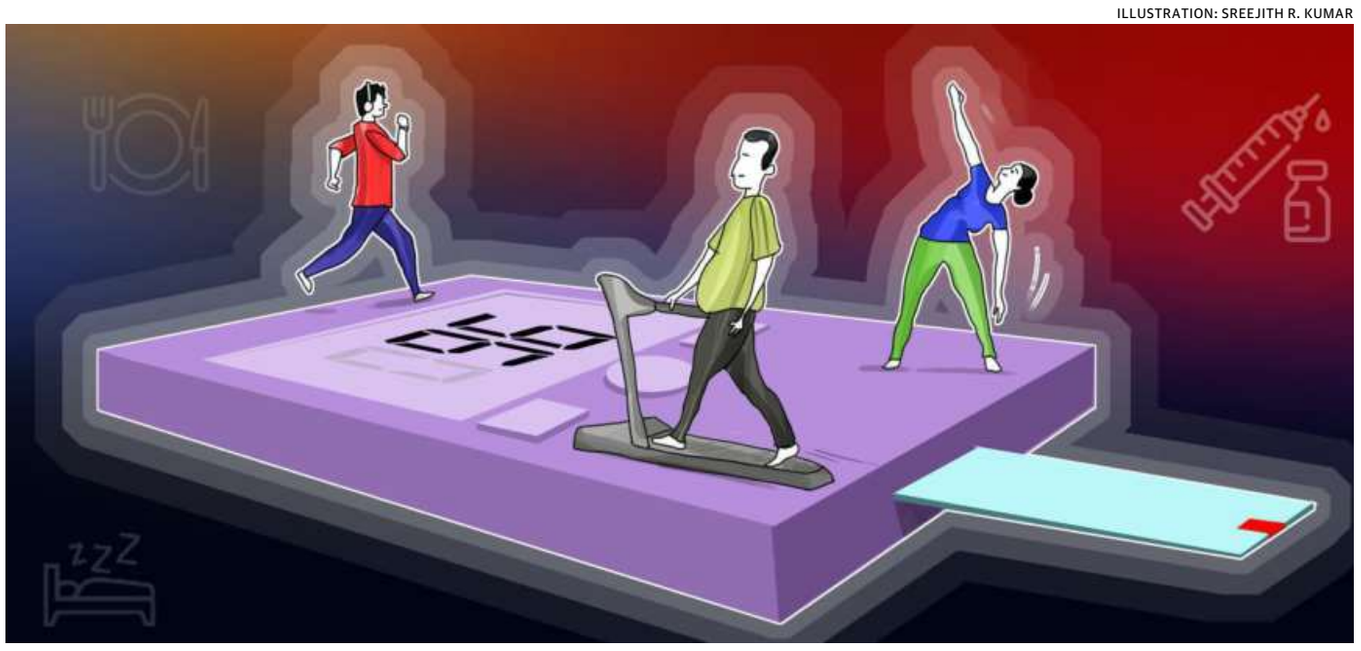
After finishing dinner, again we would hit the streets, playing hide and seek in the dark.

As we reminisced about all these golden moments, my cousin and I understood that the present generation is missing many joys of childhood.

Mobile phones have single-handedly curtailed the process of socialisation and playing outside the home. It has led to a waning cognitive ability and a dearth of physical fitness.

Years later, we realised that playing outside the home has not only provided us with memories to cherish and a way to pass the time, but it has also provided us with exposure to many people, helping us to empathise with mates and accept failures.

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR



Tackling the diabetes epidemic

An India free of diabetes-related complications is eminently possible, if lifestyle changes are made

Dr. V. Mohan
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Till the 1970s, diabetes was a relatively rare condition in India. An Indian Council of Medical Research study published in 1972 showed that 2% of Indians in cities and 1% in rural areas had diabetes. Two significant events in India's history that improved the economy and living standards paradoxically propelled the obesity and Type 2 diabetes epidemic in India.

Till the 1960s, India was dependent on food from abroad through schemes such as PL 480 of the U.S. After the Green Revolution, India became self-sufficient in food. Second, in 1991, when the economy opened up, foreign investments poured in and the economy accelerated. But with the rising income levels, consumption of high-calorie foods rich in carbohydrates, sugar, fat and salt, but deficient in protein and fibre, coupled with physical inactivity, became the norm. Obesity rates and prevalence of Type 2 diabetes soared. Today in the major cities in India, over 25% of adults above 20 years of age and almost half of all adults by the age of 50 have Type 2 diabetes. Rural areas are not far behind.

Excess fat

So what fuelled the diabetes epidemic? There is evidence that excess fat deposition inside the abdomen, especially in the liver, is linked to diabetes. Our studies at the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation (MDRF) showed that excess calories in the form of refined carbohydrates such as white rice or refined wheat is a major driver of the epidemic. The excess carbohydrate gets converted into fat, which then gets stored in the intra-abdominal compartment and soon the liver gets filled up with fat, leading to insulin resistance. Fat accumulates in the pancreas, leading to decreased insulin secretion.

Meanwhile, newer aetiological factors have also begun to emerge. A CARRS Study carried out in New Delhi and Chennai showed that air pollution is an important cause of Type 2 diabetes. Air pollution acts as an endocrine disruptor, affecting both the pancreas and the liver, leading to diabetes.

Are there unique genetic factors which makes us more predisposed to diabetes?

There is new evidence that genes which are responsible for insulin deficiency are more prominent in Indians than in White Europeans. Epigenetic factors may also contribute. During pregnancy, malnutrition, with deficiency of vitamin B12 and perhaps excess of folate in the blood, may trigger intrauterine programming of the foetus to develop diabetes in the future. Studies done in Pune have shown that even at the time of birth, babies born in India, though much smaller in size, have more fat. This is referred to as the "thin fat Indian" paradox. Recent studies from the U.K. have thrown new light on why South Asians accumulate more intra-abdominal fat.

When South Asians and Europeans were overfed as part of an experimental study, Europeans gained both fat and muscle. On the other hand, South Asians mostly gained fat. South Asians have reduced small adipocytes in comparison with those of Europeans. When excess food was consumed, Europeans increased their fat deposits in the abdominal wall rather than inside the abdomen. In South Asians, due to the deficiency of the small adipocytes, these superficial fat cells get filled up very quickly and thus "overflow" of the fat occurs, which enters inside the abdomen and then on to the liver. This explains why Indians have such high rates of Type 2 diabetes.

What can be done to prevent the diabetes epidemic in India?

We have to obviously start early. Even before marriage, women should shed excess weight, exercise regularly and thereby reduce the risk of gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy). During pregnancy, a nutritious diet with enough protein and fibre, less carbohydrate and providing sufficient vitamin B12 can reduce the risk of the child becoming programmed to develop diabetes. Next, from a young age, children should be taught to be physically active and eat healthy diets. This can help prevent childhood obesity. Other factors such as increasing physical activity, ensuring adequate sleep and preventing air pollution can slow down the epidemic.

Once Type 2 diabetes sets in, it is still possible to reverse it in some individuals. Indeed, if it is identified at the stage of pre-diabetes, remission becomes even more feasible. Even in those for whom remission is difficult, good control of the ABCD factors – A1c, blood pressure and cholesterol, along with discipline (diet, exercise, proper sleep and regular check-ups with diabetologists), can help prevent the dreaded complications of diabetes.

To mark World Diabetes Day, which was celebrated on November 14, let us strive to have a "Diabetes Complications Free India". This is possible, if we all work together.

The author is the Chairman of Dr. Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, Chennai.

Entrepreneurial spirit and a commitment to innovation

T.P.G. Nambiar had been a colossus in the world of consumer electronics in India, and he will always be an inspiration to thousands whose life he had touched

M.K. Narayanan
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How does one describe a many-sided genius like T.P.G. Nambiar? Was he the forerunner of the "Make in India" revolution in consumer electronics or a humble individual who had a vision that he set out to fulfil in ample measure?

From being a young visionary from the backwoods of Kerala, Gopalan Nambiar, over time, strode like a colossus across the world of consumer electronics in India, and blazed a trail that mystified most people who never realised the genius of the boy-next-door.

Not enough has been said, or written, about T.P.G. Nambiar, who was relatively unknown till the late 1960s or the early 1970s, when BPL started making significant strides in the Indian consumer electronics sector. Few recognised that one of his most important attainments was a commitment to innovation and quality at one level, and his entrepreneurial spirit and his strong relationship with employees, customers and suppliers at the other.

Reams can be written about the innovations that he introduced and his vision, but it is unlikely that these would capture the spirit and determination of a person

T.P.G. Nambiar

who set goals that marked him out to be a genius, intent on revolutionising the world of consumer electronics in India.

Breaking the mould

I got to know T.P.G. Nambiar personally only in the late 1980s, though already by then, his reputation had preceded him. I was aware that by then, TPG had broken the mould that in a controlled economy, smaller entities should bow down to the Birlas and Tatas to flourish. Nothing in his demeanour gave the impression of being a colossus, which he indeed was, as he still maintained the common touch, according the same treatment to the high and low in industry.

Heart of gold

I still remember the day when a middle-level employee of BPL, who knew that my daughter was betrothed to Mr. Nambiar's son, mentioned to me that I must have done something good in my previous life to have my daughter marry into the Nambiar household. I did not realise at the time how true this was.

Mr. Nambiar had a gruff exterior, but a heart of gold. He was generous to a fault, though admittedly he did not suffer fools easily. He had an all-encompassing vision, but never lost the common touch.

To me and some others who knew him, he was an Indian version of Edwards Deming, who had taught the Japanese the essence of team work and developed the principles of quality control. Nambiar treated his workers and associates not as subordinates, but instead inspired them to work well. He, however, treated me with condescension, as a person with little understanding of the ways of the world having spent an entire lifetime within the cloistered precincts of a government office.

I owe him a great deal for not only being a father, rather than a father-in-law, to my daughter but also as a person who taught me the rudiments of survival outside the structured world of the civil service and bestowed on me a fully equipped office in which to work in the years after I left government. Above all, he was an inspiration, to me as to thousands of others, on how virtue was its own reward, how to inspire by example, how to move mountains provided one had the right perspective, and above all to be true to oneself.

T.P.G. Nambiar was, and will, always be an inspiration to thousands of people, but above all, will exemplify the oft-repeated "Here is a man".

Au revoir, TPG. Your name and fame will continue to inspire many many more persons, and your light will continue to shine and will never dim.

The writer is a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, former National Security Adviser, and former Governor of West Bengal.

FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

Nidhi Chawla gave a useful general questionnaire for all to ensure safety. ('Parenting your parent on holiday'; Nov. 10) Each family should evolve their own additional questionnaire as a part of the plan for enjoying their holiday trips surmounting all challenges.
Sri Vrinda N.

Taking old parents on holiday to different tourist destinations is a wonderful idea and one that will take care of the emotional needs of senior citizens. Many lower-middle-class individuals may however find it difficult to pool money for this worthy concept. Our governments should therefore come out with cheaper fares for different modes of travel for senior citizens.
M.N. Saraswathi Devi

While the wealthy can make vacations more comfortable for their elderly parents, others, particularly those travelling domestically have several logistical obstacles, leaving them with a bitter experience when holidaying. Fortunately, superbly produced travel videos chronicling practically all of the world are now widely available on YouTube, allowing seniors to explore them from the comfort of their own homes.
Kamal Laddha

Bookworms

Suresh Menon is brutally frank and ruthless in his task of reviewing Malcom Gladwell's book. ('A rehashing'; Nov. 10) When an author raises the expectations of readers with his earlier books, it is not an easy task to scale new heights every single time.
Satvik V.M.

Coping with nature

'To walk the talk' should be the basic objective of COP-29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. ('Green Humour'; Nov. 10) Thanks to Rohan Chakravarty for drawing our attention to this vital flaw in international deliberations.
Prajeet Dev Boinapally

Carrying guidance

"So, what's your plan?" is the one question every youth of India faces from his relatives and community. ('Uncle wants to know'; Nov. 10) They are trying their best to accomplish their duties without throwing away their dreams and desires. Hearing such questions is rarely encouraging, and this culture should change as the Malayalam movie *Vazha* depicts.
Sinan T.K.

Fashion legacies

Shefalee Vasudev has done an excellent job in paying tributes to Rohit Gudda Bal. ('Rohit Bal: flamboyance and heart'; Nov. 10) The snapshots of her conversations with the designer bring out his unique and extraordinary personality.
M.V. Nagavender Rao

The handsome tribute paid to the late fashion designer Rohit Bal was richly deserved. He could weave magic with threads and what really set him apart was his originality that inevitably stole the limelight in fashion shows held both at home and abroad.
C.V. Aravind

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Empowering rural women
They have always been the backbone of handloom and small-scale industries, and are stepping into the spotlight
Insiya Kagalwala, Jais Merlin P. Augustine, Krishnapriya T.K.

Adopting happiness
Adoption is a lengthy process, but it rewards you with unbridled joy
Rajesh M. Rajagopalan

Thumbs down to online shopping
Shopping cannot just be a chore; it has to be an experience, with human interaction
Sharada Sivaram

The bond of taste
The associations brought forth by a delectable dish
Ashok Balakrishna

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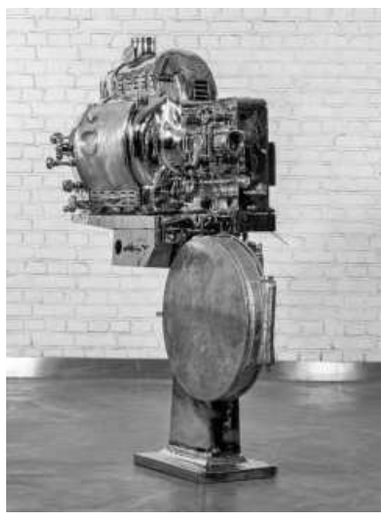
Sunday, November 17, 2024

Steel and nostalgia (Clockwise from left) Subodh Gupta; installations *There Is Always Cinema (I)*; *Gehri Neend*; *Guccha*; and *Door*. (LE BON MARCHÉ, RAM RAHMAN, MARTIN ARGYROGLO, AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



SUBODH GUPTA MAKES HIS WAY HOME

The multidisciplinary artist is showcasing his pots, pans and large skulls in Bihar for the first time

Georgina Maddox

He is known as the king of cow dung, curry pots and a very hungry god. Contemporary artist Subodh Gupta's work is well-known for tapping into the Indian middle-class psyche, employing the humble *bartan* (metal utensil) to create a variety of works – from the minimal to the maximal.

Now, with his show, *The Way Home*, opening at the Bihar Museum, Gupta is busy once again. And I say once again because, even with shows such as *Inner Garden*, the recent showcase in South Korea, he has kept a low profile ever since sexual harassment allegations were levelled against him in 2018 by Instagram account @herdsceneand, and he won the defamation case in 2020.

I remember the one-on-one conversations at the National Gallery of Modern Art when his installation-sculpture, *Dada*, was installed in 2012. We talked about how his work is inspired by his mother's kitchen, where he played, studied, and even created early prototypes of his installations with her *bartans*. Today, the once jovial and accessible Gupta only responds over email, and declines to come on our group chat as I take a virtual tour of the exhibition.

The Way Home is almost like a journey and a recap. It takes us through his important works – from the large installation of *Thalis* to *Guccha*, which mimics a bouquet of flowers in a vase but is a collection of *bartans*. Anjani Kumar Singh, the director general of the museum who has long been a visitor at Gupta's studio, curated the show.

"We've had ongoing discussions about my work, and together we carefully selected the pieces for this show," says Gupta, who is displaying 20 sculptures and a selection of paintings created between 1999 and 2024 in his home state. "The curation and display are deeply intentional and meaningful. I wanted to provide art lovers with a comprehensive look at my artistic practice." The exhibition includes paintings, sculptures, video works, and installations.

Of personal significance

Gupta says he's never stopped working. "Through challenging times and otherwise, I've continued to work consistently. Just in the past few years, post-COVID, I've had a number of exhibitions, including my solo in Mumbai at Nature Morte and a project at Le Bon Marché," he says. "This particular exhibition, however, holds a unique place. After graduating from the Patna Art School, it's my first exhibition in my hometown in 30 years. So, it feels like a return home in many ways."

The *Door* installation (brass, 2007) is an eye-catcher, as is *Gehri Neend* (2014), depicting a large skull made of stainless steel *bartans* and brass vessels lying on its side. As he shared in an earlier interview with a newspaper, "Doors are continuously opening and closing. They signify possibilities, dreams and also endings. This is a central work in the show for me because it says so much."

I remember seeing the first iteration of *The Way Home I*, in 2000. He had assembled stainless steel kitchen utensils inside a circle of silver adhesive film, and scattered country-made pistols, cast in bronze and chrome-plated, to blend in with the domestic objects. Sitting to one side of the circle was a life-size white cow, at odds with the gleaming array of silver. As Peter Nagy, co-director of Nature Morte, shared back then, "With this work,

Subodh is always making new works, and he has the facility to make very experimental works and see if they are successful or not. He tries many new things all the time, knowing that even if a work is not successful, he has learned something by making it. For this reason, I know he will continue to surprise us with what he makes in the future

PETER NAGY
Co-director of Nature Morte

Subodh catalysed his use of objects as potent symbols of the changing political and economic landscapes of India in the early 21st century, as well as creating an opulent and seductive sculptural ensemble from a group of diverse elements." A revised version of this – the cow and guns replaced by *thalis* and books to symbolise Bihar's growing literacy – is exhibited prominently at the museum.

Rebuilding what is lost

While things have been troubled in the art fraternity – Gupta's primary gallery Nature Morte, for instance, decided not to feature his work in the public forum till the case and its ramifications died down (in 2020, the Delhi High Court decreed in Gupta's favour), and the media has not given him much publicity – he is determined to find his footing.

"Subodh the artist, the husband and the father, is relentless. He is curious, and constantly persevering. He goes to work every day regardless of whatever is happening around him," says Aparajita Jain, co-director of Nature Morte. The gallery launched their Mumbai outfit earlier this year featuring Gupta's work titled, *A small village, around the corner, up in the mountain*, where viewers were encouraged to interact with his sculptures that spoke of his small-town realities. "He is dedicated to his art and getting better and opening his mind."

Meanwhile, Gupta is already anticipating a busy 2025. He will be participating in the Uzbekistan Biennale next year, and has a project lined up in Paris.

The Way Home is on till February 15, 2025, at the Bihar Museum.

The writer is a critic-curator by day, and a visual artist by night.

FROM CULT TO CULTURE

Shiva's sexuality and Buddha's celibacy

Why Tantrik Shaiva ideology had a lasting impression on Buddhism

The *Ocean Sutra* is a 1,500-year-old Mahayana Buddhist manuscript that shows a strong influence of Tantrik Shaiva ideology. It was composed in Central Asia at a time when Buddhism, which rose 2,500 years ago and had overshadowed Vedic ritual practices, began facing pushback from the rise of temples dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu.

While Buddha had promoted monasticism and celibacy, Shiva's story celebrated sexuality. Vishnu balanced the two extreme views.

This pushback can be traced to the epic *Mahabharata*, compiled around 100 BCE, which first narrates the tale of Shiva destroying Daksha's *yagna* (a ritual in front of a sacred fire). By 500 CE, in *Agni Purana*, Buddha was presented as a form of Vishnu – taken to trick demons into giving up Veda, to follow the monastic path instead. This enabled Shiva to raise his bow and destroy the demons' three flying cities with a single arrow. Thus, Shiva and Buddha were seen as doing anti-Vedic activities, for different reasons: Shiva, to be included in the newly emerging Hindu pantheon, and (Vishnu as an imposter) Buddha, to help the gods defeat demons. The supremacy of Veda was endorsed by these stories popularised by Brahmins.

Forever in contrast and conflict

Buddha shuns marriage; Shiva is wooed into marriage first by Sati, the priest's daughter, and then Parvati, the mountain princess. Buddha covered himself with robes; Shiva wandered naked with matted hair, smeared with ash. Buddhism emerged in Bihar, 2,500 years ago; Shaivism probably emerged in Mauryan times in the pine wood forests of the Uttarakhand region. We can state this because, as per the *Mahabharata*, Daksha's *yagna* takes place at Gangadwara, identified as modern Haridwar. Also the earliest Shiva temples, built in central India during the Gupta times, map the Uttarakhand terrain, with the roof representing the Himalayas, and the gateway flanked by the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna.

A new form Carved relief of Yamāntaka in Chongqing, China; and (below) the 'destroyer of death' riding a water buffalo. (WIKICOMMONS)

Buddha was once a prince named Siddhartha. His celibacy was a code for avoiding the trap of pleasure. Shiva is worshipped as Siddheshwar, the lord of Siddha – his magical powers obtained by celibacy combined with Tantrik practices. The Buddhist way spoke of restraint. But Shiva worshippers, the Tantrikas known as Pashupata, popularised the idea of *yogis* who can wander naked on snowy mountains, who can make childless women pregnant, who can bring rain to barren lands, and kill enemies with the glance of an eye. In other words, sexuality became about power, not renunciation.

Buddhist scholars have noted that in the early days, many people mocked Buddha's celibacy and questioned his masculinity. This may have been amplified by the worship of Shiva's phallic symbol. This led to the compilation of tales of Buddha's marriage and fathering of children, and even his prowess as a lover and the impact he made on women, a trope later found in the stories of Krishna.

Among the 32 marks on the Buddha's body – his long ears, his webbed hands, and the like – is the perfect male genitalia, indicated by a bump on the robes. This explicitness reveals the anxiety of monks in a world where Tantra visualised the world as the outcome of mystical sexual union.

Venerated as Yamāntaka

Under the influence of Tantra, Buddhism transformed. New forms of Buddha-to-be (Bodhisattva) appeared as Mahakala Bhairava, the guardian of the Buddhist way, who, ironically, was visualised as being as violent and erotic as Rudra-Shiva. Both Buddha and Shiva were venerated as Yamāntaka, killer of the god of death, liberator from the wheel of rebirth.

Ocean Sutra is amongst the first texts to reveal the influence of Tantrik sexuality and magic on Buddhism. It tells the story of courtesans accusing Buddha of not having genitalia, and thus of not being man enough for his wife. To counter this accusation, Buddha presents himself nude. The description that follows is rather colourful – a vision of elephants and horses and lotus flowers. The courtesans are humbled and they become Buddhist nuns.

In another story, an abusive courtesan is visited by a handsome man who challenges her to satisfy him. They make love over days. By the third day, she is satisfied and wants him to leave, but he is not content and so continues, until he dies. Even in death, his corpse clings to her body, refusing to let go, until it rots. She is forced to pray to Buddha and ask for his help. He liberates her and she becomes Buddhist.

Ocean Sutra is known today through its Chinese translations. It may have played a key role in reshaping Chinese politics by challenging the misogyny and patriarchy of the Confucian court with a new Buddhist notion of kingship, and enabling the meteoric rise of Lady Wu of the Tang dynasty, in the 8th century. She was the first and only lady to be declared Emperor of China. She also imagined the Buddha and the Bodhisattva as women, acknowledging the role of sexuality in the world of celibacy.

***Devdutt Pattanaik** is the author of 50 books on mythology, art and culture.*