THE HINDU
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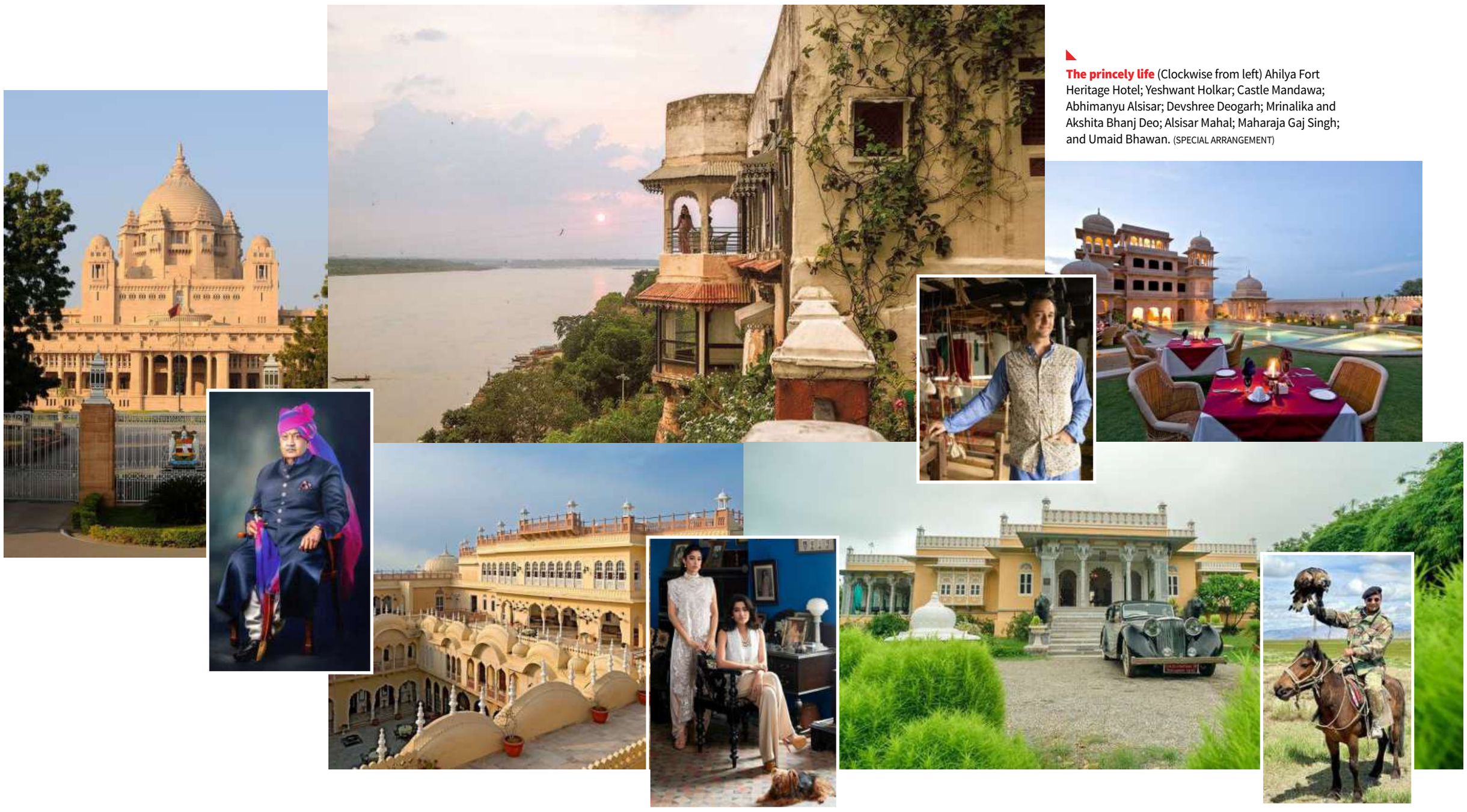

The princely life (Clockwise from left) Ahilya Fort Heritage Hotel; Yeshwant Holkar; Castle Mandawa; Abhimanyu Alsisar; Devshree Deogarh; Mrinalika and Akshita Bhanj Deo; Alsisar Mahal; Maharaja Gaj Singh; and Umaid Bhawan. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

THE GRAND INDIAN ROYAL HOTEL

In a digital-driven tourism landscape, young nobles are turning to short format storytelling, domestic travellers, and IPs such as music festivals to revitalise royal-owned heritage properties

Prasad Ramamurthy

“We really need help.” When the veteran hotelier Thakur Shatrunjai Singh Chundawat says this, he is expressing the challenge that royals in hospitality find themselves facing now. Of attracting the Indian traveller – who accounts for nearly 90% of the country’s tourism revenue post pandemic – to their heritage homes that have now turned into hotels and homestays. Chundawat runs Dev Shree Deogarh, a regal home 130 km from Udaipur. Its architecture draws inspiration from local monuments, including the imposing City Palace.

Prior to the pandemic, royals like him had a steady stream of foreign tourists, predominantly from Europe and the U.S., wandering through *durbar* halls, supping at their tables, booking cultural experiences in their neighbourhoods, and generating revenue – not just to maintain their grand residences but also to finance the public-interest trusts they’ve traditionally run. “Back in the 90s and early 2000s, media like *Conde Nast Traveller* and *Lonely Planet* did a lot of articles. When a reader, Indian or otherwise, would flip through their pages and stumble upon a place like Deogarh, they would call and come stay with us,” says Chundawat, 59. “We would also go to tourism trade fairs such as ILTM [International Luxury Travel Market] in London and PURE in Marrakech, and market our hotel experience to tour operators, who would bring us business.”

Today, with inbound tourism still well below pre-pandemic levels, heritage hoteliers are increasingly looking at domestic tourists interested in hyper-local cultural experiences, to bridge the earnings gap. Especially since Indian travellers – fuelled by an extensive web of highways, increased air connectivity, and the unprecedented independence in booking itineraries and experiences offered by Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) such as MakeMytrip, Booking.com and Airbnb – have begun travelling aggressively within the country. Add to this the Modi government’s Dekho Apna Desh campaign and Swadesh Darshan initiative, which have actively marketed domestic tourism to Indians.

But India’s royal hoteliers, even in states with higher concentrations of regal abodes such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh, haven’t been as aggressive in adapting to digital marketing. “Now travel decisions are Google search-led and unless you know of Deogarh, you won’t find us,” says Chundawat, who has seen average foreign tourist occupancy at his homestay drop by nearly 40% compared to pre-pandemic levels and barely a blip of a rise in domestic tourism. “We have been spending on SEO [optimisation] and Instagram. But it’s been a struggle getting domestic tourists to discover us.”

Heritage check (Clockwise from above) Jaidev Singh; Belgadia Palace; and Kotah Garh. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Look beyond state borders

I met Chundawat in September, on the sidelines of the annual Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA) conference. The event was held in Swamimalai, home to one of South India’s six most venerated Murugan temples. That an organisation dominated by Rajput royals, including Gaj Singh, the titular maharaja of Jodhpur, had come here for their very first conference outside of Rajasthan seemed metaphorically indicative of the need to look beyond state borders for inspiration.

The IHHA has 201 members (141 from Rajasthan), and includes non-royal-owned heritage properties, such as the conference’s venue, the INDeco Hotels Swamimalai. At the meet, its owner Steve Borgia underlined the need for heritage hoteliers to embrace change. “Even five years ago, the travel agent was important because he alone knew the art of presenting our hotels and bringing us tourists,” he said. “Today, with digital portals [booking engines and social media], people are finding us online. We need to re-orient ourselves to this reality.”

Over two days of meetings, speeches, lunches, dinners, and many a steaming *dabara*-tumbler of Kumbakonam degree coffee, those attending spoke passionately of the struggles to stay in business. The impact of GST rates that goes beyond room tariffs, for instance. “If we offer *pav* to our guests, it’s one rate. If it’s sliced bread then it’s another. Rates have to be rationalised,” stated Captain Gaj Singh, 67, head of the Alsisar royal family, in a plea similar to that by a Coimbatore restaurateur recently that allegedly got him into trouble. Then there was the ask for more foreign nationalities to be allowed visa-free entry. Suman Billa, additional secretary, Ministry of Tourism, a special invitee to the conference, responded by saying it’s a “matter being discussed within the government”.

Another hot topic was the need to create satellite destinations and divert tourist traffic away from vacationer magnets such as Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur. To funnel them towards rural attractions, and to improve the infrastructure leading to them. “The experience of living in a fort or a palace is a big draw, but if the road leading to it is full of potholes, then that will spoil, or worse still, dissuade the visitor,” pointed out Jaidev Singh, the 28-year-old crown prince of the royal family of Kotah. While Kota city, in eastern Rajasthan, is known more for its coaching classes, Jaidev is hoping to change that through heritage tourism. He has spent the past year refurbishing the Kotah Garh palace, which houses the Rao Madho Singh Trust museum, and Umed Bhawan, an Indo-Saracenic-style palace hotel. “Each of our suites is dedicated to aspects of local culture and heritage, whether it be Kota miniatures or the Chambal River area, which is home to leopards, bears and crocodiles. We want our hotels to be a platform to showcase the rich legacies of art, history, and culture of the Hadoti region,” which, as I learnt, includes Kota.

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Sylvia Plath in Massachusetts, 1951. (ESTATE OF MARCIA BROWN STERN)

IN CONVERSATION

A WHOLE NEW SYLVIA PLATH

A prose anthology, only the second such collection since the first back in 1977, aims to transform the narrative around the late poet-author's life and work

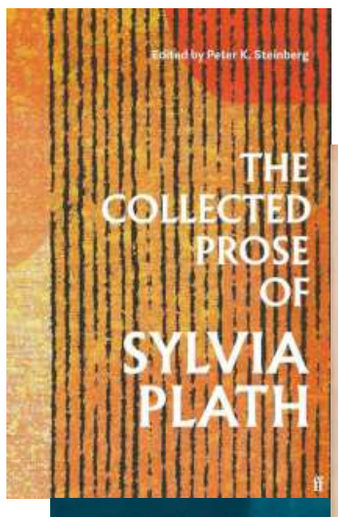
Nandini Bhatia

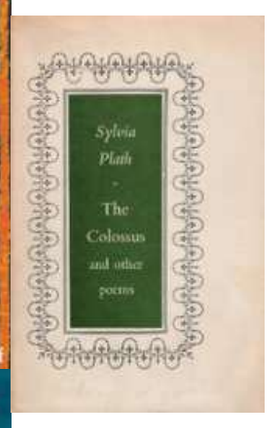
Writer and archivist Peter K. Steinberg has spent 30 years compiling, editing and archiving materials on the life and work of Sylvia Plath, who would have turned 92 today. Often seen in light of her tragedies and not her achievements and skill, Plath remains one of the most misunderstood writers/ poets of 20th century. Steinberg wishes to change this narrative. He has previously co-edited *The Letters of Sylvia Plath* (Vol. I and II), has written at least two dozen essays on Plath as well as a brief biography of the author for high school children.

The latest feather in his cap is the much-awaited publication of *The Collected Prose of Sylvia Plath* (Faber & Faber), which is the second prose anthology in Plath's name after *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* (1977), edited by her husband Ted Hughes. Steinberg speaks freely of Plath's writing and how it should be seen in the modern world. Edited excerpts:

Question: *Plath has written across formats – short fiction, poetry, novel, non-fiction, journals, letters, even a radio play. The context that her journals and letters provide feels invigorating. Even poet and Plath scholar David Trinidad acknowledges them together as capable of creating a 'movie of her life'. What do you feel about the complementary nature of her writing?*
Answer: I think I can only answer [this question] as a reader/ fan/ editor/ lover of literature. I do feel like Plath's writings across styles are complementary and companionable pieces. The letters and journals often record the source experience for one of her creative writings, and it's fascinating to see how she treats them; the act of transforming life into art... each enriches the other in countless ways. Bringing out all of Plath's journals, letters, prose, and eventually poems, will truly allow her readers to see how all the works blend to make a beautiful tapestry of words.

Q: *Plath is known primarily as a poet. How does this new anthology alter this image?*
A: Plath is in an unusual position concerning the genres in which she wrote. She is a poet and she is known primarily as a poet; but, yet, her best-selling work is her novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963). By bringing out these 217 works in *The Collected Prose of Sylvia Plath*, I hope it shows how seriously Plath took prose writing. One may be able to gain a better understanding of her storytelling abilities, her development of characters, and the themes which interested her the most. Also, to see how certain elements are developed over time. [Her] non-fiction [too] has been remarked upon by biographers and scholars but is still massively under-studied.





Q: *Do you see yourself as a writer beyond Plath? How did you come to choose her as your scholarly compass?*
A: I started reading Plath in 1994 and I was very quickly hooked on to her life and writing. One teacher said, "Everyone has a Plath phase." So, it's been a 30-year phase for me! I'm in the process of retiring from all this as I have done everything, and more, that I could ever have wanted to do. I'd like to try writing beyond Plath, yes. But it'll be an interesting period of adjustment as I move away from being so minutely involved. I feel like I have been incredibly lucky and fortunate to help shepherd [her work] into the world. There were challenges, of course, but I just simply wanted as much accurate information about Plath to be made available to as many people as possible.

The interviewer is a books and culture writer. @read.dream.repeat/instagram

Q: *Plath remains one of the most misunderstood writers/poets of the 20th century. It sometimes feels like her works are excessively interpreted in the light of her personal life – the death of her father, her suicide attempts, her depression, relationship with Ted Hughes... narrowing her down to a few popular labels. Do you think Plath has been unduly subjected to scrutiny in this regard?*
A: The ironic thing is that the "popular labels" are generally problematic and insensitive. In fact, I see them as simply a short cut; taking the easy way out with very little thought, feeling, or effort to dig a little deeper and give Plath her due as a human, a woman, a writer, and a mother, [especially] in the cultural context of the era in which she lived. Having access to these full, unabridged editions and to accurate and comprehensive biographies should help turn the tide but it's likely going to take a generation to see attitudes shift in a significant way. I think Plath's life is something we should celebrate, so I do not feel she's been unduly subjected to scrutiny. The scrutiny though can be beneficial. Unfortunately, the period of time between her death in 1963 and, say, the publication of her unabridged *Journals* was such a significant period of time that most of the negative viewpoints are firmly grounded.

Q: *Where do you suggest a reader should begin their tryst with Plath?*
A: There's no wrong place to start reading Plath. If one struggles with poetry, then perhaps the prose (creative or autobiographical) is where one begins. Or, maybe they have an interest in her life: there are so many biographies now, both big and small, that can offer a good introduction. Heather Clark's *Red Comet* (2020) is wonderful and monumental, but for a true novice it might be intimidating. Some biographies have aged well, some not so much. [Even] the Internet could be a good place, so long as the resource(s) are trustworthy.

2024 BOOKER PRIZE-SHORTLISTED

Love in the shadow of the Holocaust

Dutch writer Yael van der Wouden's debut novel about a post-Nazi occupation society tells a rare story of the traumas of World War II

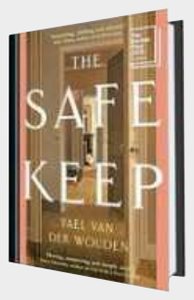
Memories The descendant of a Holocaust survivor looks at a family herloom recently returned to her after it was confiscated by the Nazis, in Texas, U.S. (GETTY IMAGES)

Sharmistha Jha

In *The Safekeep*, shortlisted for the Booker Prize 2024, Dutch writer Yael van der Wouden presents a portrait of a society grappling with the aftermath of World War II and the German occupation of the Netherlands. An unlikely romance buds in the quiet town of Overjissel but as the reader reaches the end of the story, it becomes clear that all this has been taking place in the long shadows of German occupation and concentration camps.

The Safekeep is the story of two families and four individuals: Isabel and her brothers Louis and Hendrik, and Louis's girlfriend Eva. A mysterious stranger, Eva comes into Isabel's home and upends her life. She is Isabel's chance for love, for a life outside the loneliness she has known for a very long time.

Isabel lived with her mother and her brothers in a big family house.



The Safekeep Yael van der Wouden Viking ₹899

First, Louis left. Then Hendrik ran away when their mother could not accept his homosexuality. "He (Hendrik) has been half her life for so long, and then all at once he was gone."

After their mother passes away, Isabel is suddenly all alone in a quiet town where nothing happens. She maintains the house and polishes the crockery that she believes belonged to her mother. She creates an armour around her that nobody is allowed to penetrate until Eva comes to live with her. Louis has to leave for a foreign assignment and he leaves Eva with Isabel in their family house.

Despite a passionate love affair, Isabel cannot give Eva what she desires. She cannot give her the family and stability that only men are entitled to in post-war Netherlands.

History of belonging
Van der Wouden writes about memory; about the history of objects of belonging such as a house and family crockery. What happened to the houses and property of Jews who were interned at concentration camps? Non-Jewish people would often "safekeep" such property. When the Jews returned from the camps, they found strangers living in their houses, using their cutlery and wearing their coats. Hatred, greed and anti-semitism ran deep in Dutch society. When the German occupation ended and Jewish people were returned to their home countries, Dutch Jews were the last to go. Nobody came to get them and many people died in the long wait.

Elegantly written, *The Safekeep*, tells a rare story that reveals a hidden side of World War II.

The independent reviewer and editor is based in New Delhi.

Pause and reset

Neha Bansal's poetry collection reminds us to slow down and savour the moment

Stanley Carvalho

Reading the simple verses and the vivid imagery created by Neha Bansal in her poetry anthology *Six of Cups* is like riding a time machine and sauntering down memory lane.

Aptly titled after a minor arcana card in a traditional tarot deck that is symbolic of nostalgia, Bansal's reminiscences through her 50 poems allows her thoughts and memories to be stimulated, giving a sense of continuity to her remembered life.

Equally, as one immerses oneself in the book, one cannot help but fondly relive memories of the past: childhood, youth, people, friends, food, festivals, feelings, places; memories that helped shape one's identity.

Six of Cups Neha Bansal Hawakal ₹400

Bansal, an IAS officer, waxes lyrical on festivals and food, triggering memories of Diwali, Lohri, Ramlila, Holika Dahan and the flavourful *moong dal halwa* and *nankhatai* to roadside treats such as mango pulp candies and ice golas.

Reliving the past
The poems exude a certain innocence and simplistic charm with a philosophical touch. The vivid metaphors and the short verses make it an easy and compelling read for those who have relatable memories of the past.

Nearly every page has a glossary for culture-specific terms, a welcome addition for those not familiar with Indian culture or languages.

In today's frenetic pace, where everyone's life revolves around smart devices in an ultra-connected world, *Six of Cups* comes as a blast from the past, reminding one to slow down, savour the moment, and find solace in shared memories.

Whether the motive to engage in nostalgic loops was an exercise in mood elevation or to soak in a past that seems better than the present, is something only the author can tell.

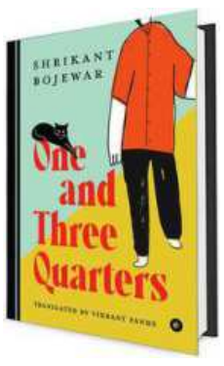
In the end, the words of poet Robert Drake spring to mind: "*Sometimes I feel I want to go back in time... Not to change things, but to feel a couple of things twice*."

The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based independent journalist and writer.

BROWSER

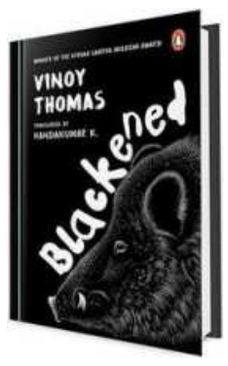
Hell Hath No Fury
Ed. Shinie Antony
Hachette India
₹599
After her revenge saga featuring Lilith, the first woman in Eden, earlier this year, the writer and editor is back with an anthology in a similar vein. Thirteen authors have come together with stories of women out for blood. The characters inhabit the slim grey area between love and hate.

One and Three Quarters
Shrikant Bojewar, trs Vikrant Pande
Eka
₹399
The writer and journalist delivers a social satire on the moral decrepitude of India with this fable-like narrative of a young middleman-turned-politician, Pitambar, and his crony, Latthya, a tomcat.



Into The Storm
Cecelia Ahern
HarperCollins
₹499
The bestselling romance novelist of *P.S. I Love You* fame has had a book (sometimes two or more) nearly every year over the past two decades. In her latest, a doctor in a loveless marriage finally breaks free but peace eludes her. Will she find the missing puzzle of her life?

Blackened
Vinoy Thomas, trs Nandakumar K.
Penguin
₹399
Originally published in Malayalam as *Karikkottakkary* in 2016, this novel by the Sahitya Akademi award-winning writer dwells into the racist and casteist socio-political history of Kerala through the story of a dark-skinned man.



A quiver full of arrows

Malavika Rajkotia tells her father's story through the prism of Partition and other tales that merge into myth and history

A Sufi poet. Image for representation purpose only. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

Geeta Doctor

In tracing the arc of time at the moment of her father Sardar Jitinder Singh or Jindo's death, Malavika Rajkotia unleashes a quiver full of arrows. They fall upon the earth in a blaze of light across the hidden corners of the Indian subcontinent with stories that merge into myth and history.

As Rajkotia tightens her bow, bracing her personal grief against the tide of sorrows that she knows is waiting to drown her vision of what has been called a Punjabiyat, her arrows fall on the dry soil of post-Partition India. Once again, it's a story of betrayal and loss. Her father Jindo's life straddles both sides of the great divide; the past left behind at Gujranwala where the family of wealthy landowners lived in Rajkot, (hence their name), and post 1947, in a greatly diminished piece of land just outside of Karnal which is named in remembrance, Rajkot House.

Mosaic of lives

The arrows illuminate the mosaic of lives of the different people she has known or imagined as part of her ancestry, with the delicacy of an oil lamp floating down a dark river that might be of blood. She quotes the famous Sufi mystics who have brought alive the soil of the Punjab in the *Mitti* poems, where the soil becomes, the earth, dust, mud, churned all too often, with tears and blood. She quotes the verses of several poets and teachers in Punjabi, particularly when it comes to enumerating the deeds of the ten Gurus who are the sentinels of the Sikh faith.

Unpartitioned Time: A Daughter's Story
Malavika Rajkotia
Speaking Tiger
₹599

The reader is reminded of Bulleh Shah, the Punjabi poet who describes the eternal churning of our earth much as the farmer tills the soil, "*The soil is in ferment, O friend/ Behold the diversity/The soil is the horse, as is the rider/The soil chases the soil, and we hear the clanging of the soil.*"

For the most part, the cavalcade of her heroes gallops through the tumultuous history of the Sikhs in all their mystical and heroic grandeur. In different time zones the Sikh contingent are shown as the bulwarks against the marauding hordes sweeping down upon their chosen land watered by the five rivers of the Punjab. Until finally there comes a time during the colonial era when they stand as the loyal soldiers of the Raj.

Rajkotia is able to leaven her tales of valour with an equal ear for mimicry and humour including the 'desi' pronunciation of English terms in brackets. As she writes of the new rich: "The joke of the five Ks of the modern Sikh can be understood then: *kothi*, *kudi*, *kar*, *kash*, *kutta* (house, woman, car, cash, dog)."

A time for healing

If the arrows in the first half of the narrative sing with the cadences of the Gurbani, the recitation of the sacred verses of the Sikh holy book, the second half is more personal. Or as in some cases they bestow a shower of fragrant petals like those of the orange-tinted flowers of the tree, planted in her grandmother's garden that falls every morning on a dew flecked cloth of muslin as her grand-daughter sits on it. Later in life we are told, Rajkotia uses the flower petals to dye these cloths a pale blue.

Or as Rajkotia, who is a lawyer and civil rights activist, observes: "A life that was both rebellion and resignation is how we lived in Rajkot House, Karnal." Her recitation is both a symbol of defiance and healing that she shares with the infinite love that Jindo first bestowed upon her.

The reviewer is a Chennai-based critic.

On a rough road (Clockwise from left) Sakshi Malik during the wrestlers' protest march, in New Delhi; protesting wrestlers in Haridwar; and Sakshi holding all her medals and the Olympic bronze, at her home in Rohtak. (PTI AND GETTY IMAGES)

DEFIANCE TO FARCE

How on May 30, 2023, India's protesting wrestlers were forced to withdraw their decision to immerse medals in the Ganga

Sakshi Malik

While on a protest against the Wresting Federation of India and its then powerful chief Brij Bhushan Saran Singh over alleged sexual harassment and other misdemeanours, Olympic medallist Sakshi Malik and other wrestlers were brutally grabbed by the Delhi Police. In this excerpt from her new book, Witness*, written with Jonathan Selvaraj, Malik recalls what happened when the wrestlers decided to immerse their medals in the Ganga at Haridwar.*

All the wrestlers who had brought their medals went and sat along the ghat even as a crowd surrounded us. While we were sitting there, someone came and took Bajrang Punia away, saying Home Minister Amit Shah wanted to talk to him. The rest of us were instructed to wait until 7 p.m. because there was a 'big' meeting going on between Bajrang and Shah. We sat there on that ghat for half an hour, hoping against hope that Shah would actually call Brij Bhushan and dismiss him.

Simultaneously, we also got word from Naresh Tikait, a senior activist who was known to all of us as one of the leaders of the farm rights agitation from a year ago and whom we respected as an elder of the Jat community we belonged to, to wait until he could speak to us.

I'd always imagined that one day, when I became a mother, my daughter would point to the wall, to my framed Olympic medal, and ask me what it was. And I would open that frame and show it to her. I might be older and out of shape by then and my kids might think I was just a boring mom, but I'd tell them what that medal was. I'd tell them the story of how their mom won it. I'd tell them the story of how she met their dad. How she was something once, a long time ago.

But instead, I was on that ghat, about to throw that medal away, all because I'd tried to fight for a cause I knew was right, hoping against hope for a favour from a politician that might stop that from happening.

That sinking feeling

As the crowd got bigger and bigger and tighter around us as we waited, my heart started to sink. I knew that we were being backed into a corner. And then, suddenly, from the midst of that crowd, Tikait emerged. He unwrapped the safa on his head, walked up to each of us, took our medals and placed them in that cloth. He told us the medals were the pride of the country and he'd make things all right.

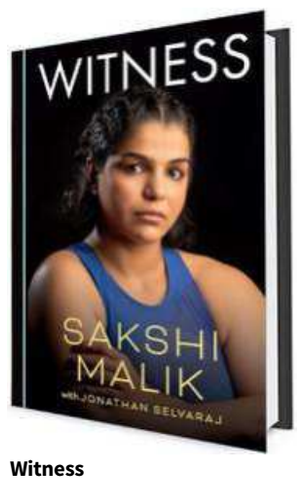
Then he walked away from the ghat, leaving us there by ourselves.

Within a couple of minutes we realised what a tremendous mistake we had made. What was supposed to be a great act of defiance had turned into a complete farce. Not only had we not been able to get Brij Bhushan Singh out of the federation or give up our medals, but we had also broken our word to the people who had supported us.

All of us sat in a car in a state of complete bewilderment. We were crying. Vinesh had started hitting herself. I was just blank. When animals face a predator, they either run or fight. And they say the same applies to us humans. For me it is neither. I just freeze. When I am faced with something traumatic, I just switch off. My mind stops working. I start thinking everything will get better. It's wishful thinking, I know. Of course things don't just get better by themselves.

When we had recovered somewhat, we thought we would go and take back our medals from Tikait and throw them in the Ganga as we had first planned to do. It was too late for that, of course.

Even as we were sitting in our car, some of his supporters had gathered around us. We were told we were to go with them to Tikait's house and sit with him while he addressed a press conference. And just to make us more inclined to agree with them, they mentioned that the police were coming to arrest us.



Witness
Sakshi Malik with Jonathan Selvaraj
Juggernaut
₹899

No comeback

We went to Tikait's house and sat silently next to him while he addressed the media and took credit for being the man who had stopped India's medals from being lost. It was his moment to shine. As for us, we had been completely dishonoured.

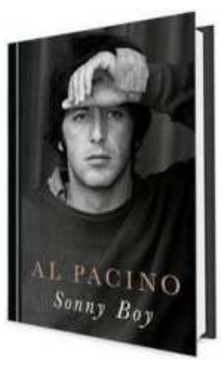
Later, people would tell us that Tikait, for all his image of confronting the government, had a history of selling out movements he had been part of, and he'd done the same to us. I don't know the truth about that, but the fact is that the mistake of actually handing over the medals was made by us. The kindest explanation I can give for myself is I was so swayed by the emotion of the moment that I wasn't thinking clearly at all.

Until then, I had always felt I could turn things around in the protest. That had been how I had wrestled too. I was known as someone who would pull off comebacks from the direst of situations.

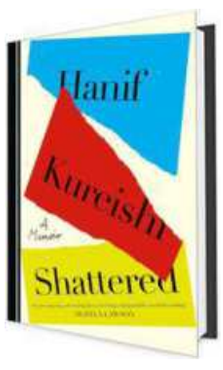
But there was no comeback here. We couldn't have been beaten more thoroughly. There was nothing I could do to turn this around.

Excerpted with permission from Juggernaut.

Sonny Boy: A Memoir
Al Pacino
Century/PRH
₹1,399
By 1975, Al Pacino had already starred in four movies which always make the best films-of-all-time lists: *The Godfather* and *The Godfather Part II*, *Serpico*, and *Dog Day Afternoon*. Raised by a mother with mental health issues, acting was his lifeline, as he writes in his memoir.

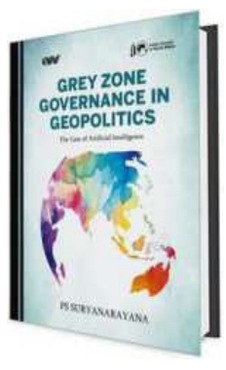


Shattered
Hanif Kureishi
Hamish Hamilton
₹ 999
The author of *The Buddha of Suburbia* has written a memoir about the accident in Rome in 2022 that left him paralysed. While confined to a series of hospital wards, he began to dictate despatches, a diary of a life in pieces. The book chronicles a new life born of pain and loss.



How I Write
Edited by Sonia Faleiro
HarperCollins
₹699
The South Asia Speaks Masterclass series, conceived as a space for writers of South Asian origin to speak about their craft, is now available as a book. It includes talks with Kamila Shamsie, Pankaj Mishra, Vauhini Vara, V.V. Ganeshananthan, Nilanjana Roy, Samanth Subramanian and others.

Grey Zone Governance in Geopolitics: The Case of Artificial Intelligence
P.S. Suryanarayana
KW Publishers
₹960
This monograph, published under the aegis of the Indian Council of World Affairs, pushes for a "fair reform" of the UN Security Council to regulate AI's military applications across the globe. One way would be to use an advisory roadmap from a non-partisan AI model.



CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

Storytelling and seeking solutions

While several of these challenges require government intervention, a more practical approach to spotlight heritage destinations came from Thakur Angad Deo, 41, whose family runs the landmark Castle Mandawa in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan. Deo suggested heritage hotels pool resources and jointly create IPs that will benefit entire regions. "If hotels in rural areas, like ours, can come together and create programming that showcases the art, culture, music and food of our region [Mandawa is part of Rajasthan's Shekhawati region, known for its intricately painted *havelis* and unique cuisine, which showcases produce grown in the Thar], it will go a long way in giving tourists a reason to visit us," he said at IHHA.

It's a suggestion that's already in play in Chettinad, the region in Tamil Nadu dotted with over 10,000 lavish mansions of the Chettiar community. There, led by the formidable Meenakshi Meyyappan, founder of the heritage hotel The Bangla, an annual heritage and cultural festival has been a sell-out ticketed event, three years running. Furthermore, it's resulting in the conversion of mansions into hotels and museums, and driving traffic into newer parts of the region.

But perhaps the most widely-accepted thought came from Maharaja Gaj Singh, who underlined the need for his kinsmen to own their narrative. To use storytelling to reach new audiences, especially tech-savvy Indians. "Cultural exchange is at the core of how we tell our stories," he insisted. His own Umaid Bhawan palace, managed by Taj Hotels, is one of Rajasthan's most popular venues for celebrity weddings, including that of actor Priyanka Chopra and musician Nick Jonas.

It's a point that found resonance with many a young royal at IHHA – a storytelling that's quite distinct from the kind of visibility that Mount Abu's newest opening, The Jaipur House, has received, courtesy the personal brand built around its dashing owner, Padamanabh Singh of Jaipur. "Our families have lived there for generations," says Mahadhriti, the 26-year-old son of Shatrunjai Singh Chundawat of Devshree Deogarh. "We know the culture, the stories, and the people. We have to figure out how to document it in a way that's of interest to my generation. We have to use social media and short form content to push these stories and our histories forward."

Practice makes perfect

Pointers can be had from Yeshwant Holkar, 42, of the Indore royal family, who has effectively used digital media to promote the family-owned Ahilya Fort Heritage Hotel in Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh. "Storytelling is absolutely everything," he says, over phone from the town on the banks of the Narmada, sharing how it has been partly responsible for the rise in domestic bookings, from 40% in 2019 to over 60% in 2024. "We've used storytelling to share the history and culture of Ahilya Fort and of Maheshwar. Not just through our communications channels, but by incorporating it into every experience we curate."

The work the royal family does through its Maheshwari textile foundation REHWA; rituals performed at the fort palace since the days of the venerated 18th-century ruler Ahilyabai Holkar; and contemporary experiences, such as a culinary event, Cooking of the Maharajas, based on recipes from the royal kitchens of Central India – they're all included in the hotel's messaging. Full disclosure: four years ago, I played a part in crafting it. "My father started the Sacred River Festival [where the *ghats*, the temples, and the fort's battlements, make for a unique historic setting] in 2001. We've only now begun actively promoting it on digital media," Holkar adds, referencing the need for heritage hotels to use every arrow in their arsenal to draw eyeballs and convert them into revenue.

The art of that hustle has been perfected by Mrinalika, 33, and Akshita Bhanj Deo, 31, of Odisha's Mayurbhanj royal family. Since the launch of Belgadia Palace in 2019, the sisters have carefully constructed an identity for their chic 11-key, 18th-century property, whose architecture was originally designed to mimic that of Buckingham Palace. Their messaging has ranged from showcasing indigenous tribal artists as the region (and hotel's) ambassadors, and real-world brand extensions, such as a craft-based label, Hasa Atelier, to Wes Anderson-inspired videos and a collaboration with the American company Global Beauty Secrets, which uses the royal family's herbal concoctions in its products.

"We decided we will tell you who we are, where we're from, and why we are a global hospitality destination," says Mrinalika. We spoke while sampling chef Niyati Rao's (of Mumbai restaurant Ekaa) memorable take on the Odiya dish *dalma* at a collaboration that introduced Mayurbhanj cuisine to potential travellers from the Maximum City. "We keep in mind whose story are we telling, how does it include other people in the narrative? Is it a maharaja talking about his grandfather who was knighted by the British? Or is it a man talking about his grandfather's life in the 1950s when it was a completely different India and the world? You don't have to say, 'We have a 200-year-old property'. The reader/viewer will pick up on it."

As she speaks, acronyms such as KOL and DNA tumble out. "Perhaps because we come from the Internet generation, these terms are second nature to us," she replies with a laugh, when I ask what KOL (Key Opinion Leader aka influencer) meant. "We've used things that we know are trending [on social media] and that we are interested in ourselves. Maybe you're not an avid traveller, maybe you haven't heard of Odisha, maybe heritage properties are not of interest to you. But if fashion is of interest to you, if food is of interest to you, if beauty is of interest to you, then you will discover our brand."

Closer home to our Rajput royals, Abhimanyu Alsisar, 39, Captain Gaj Singh's son, has taken a similar interest-led route to establish his native destination on the global tourism map. He took his love for underground music and married it to Rajasthani folk while establishing the Magnetic Fields Festival. Held annually on the lands surrounding the 17th-century Alsisar Mahal, its 10th year lineup varies from electronic musician Nicola Cruz to Manganiyar vocalist Bhanwari Devi. "Today, whatever domestic movement we get is because of the festival," says Abhimanyu, a co-organiser of the festival.

He has also used food, powered by a tie-up with Mumbai's Masque, one of India's top restaurants, to draw attention to another one of their hotels, Nahargarh, in Ranthambore. Here, he and Masque owner Aditi Dugar curate a guest list that both appreciates food (a mash-up of Masque's creative fare produced using local ingredients such as *ker* berries) and generates social media buzz. "These collaborations are new ways of marketing our hotels and our destinations," he adds.

Out-of-the-box thinking

"Things have really changed in India in the last decade," says Sonavi Kaicker, CEO, Neemrana Hotels. The pioneering company has restored and converted 13 heritage structures across India, such as Gwalior's Deo Bagh and Patalia's Baradari Palace, to house tourists. "Earlier, it was really the foreigners who were interested in a cultural show or going out into the villages. Indians were content with a few good meals and the use of a swimming pool. Today, they want to go on historical tours. They want immersive local experiences. And we've had to build newer experiences that they find interesting." Abhimanyu agrees, saying, "At Alsisar Mahal, for example, we offer guided visits to meet artisans, and a jeep safari that culminates with sundowner drinks on the dunes."

The other thing that Kaicker says is imperative for royal-owned heritage hotels is to work on upgrading their own infrastructure. "We've had to face certain facts. For instance, guests would come to Neemrana and say, 'This is a wonderful place. But just because it's a heritage building doesn't mean you have to have a heritage bathroom.' And it was a fact." She has responded to customer feedback and upgraded Neemrana-managed heritage properties. "We've added a heated pool at the 15th-century Neemrana Fort-Palace. We've installed EV charging stations at the 19th-century Tijara Fort-Palace. And we're working on making all our properties pet-friendly," she says.

Meanwhile, on the last afternoon of the conference, as he posed for pictures under a punishing Thanjavur sun, I asked Maharaja Gaj Singh, a strong proponent of ensuring tourism reaches the remotest of heritage sites, what his definitive piece of advice was for his fellow heritage hoteliers.

"When Maharaja of Jaipur, Sawai Man Singh II, turned Rambagh Palace into a hotel in 1957, people asked, 'What's wrong with him?' But Man Singh *ji* knew tourism could help save our heritage. Today, we need that kind visionary, out-of-the-box thinking," he shared. Words to ponder. Words to live by.

The writer is based in Mumbai and reports on travel and culture.

THE GRAND INDIAN ROYAL HOTEL

The challenges

GST: The hospitality industry has been seeking rationalisation of GST rates. Currently, a tariff between ₹1,001 and ₹7,500 is taxed at 12%, while those higher than ₹7,501 are taxed at 18%. GST charged on food and drink at hotels is also based on the room rate and hence higher than the average standalone restaurant. Cancellations are subject to GST, too. Overall, experts say this makes India a less attractive destination compared to countries such as Vietnam and Sri Lanka.

Visa-free entry: This incentivises visitors to make quick plans and has boosted tourism to destinations such as Turkey and Thailand, which offer entry to over 90 nationalities each. India currently grants visa-free access to just four nationalities.

Policy matters: The IHHA wants both Union and state governments to adopt policies to preserve heritage sites and promote heritage tourism. They cite Rajasthan's Heritage Tourism Policy as one that can be emulated by others, such as Puducherry, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

Creating satellite tourism centres: With cities such as Jaipur and Udaipur receiving excess tourism, the demand is to build better roads to, and create tourism infrastructure in, less-visited destinations such as Kota and Bikaner.

Regal retreats (Clockwise from left) Farm visits at Ahilya Fort; a *thali* at Devshree Deogarh; sunset boat ride at the Ahilya; a suite at Belgadia Palace; and Sonavi Kaicker of Neemrana Hotels. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Talking numbers

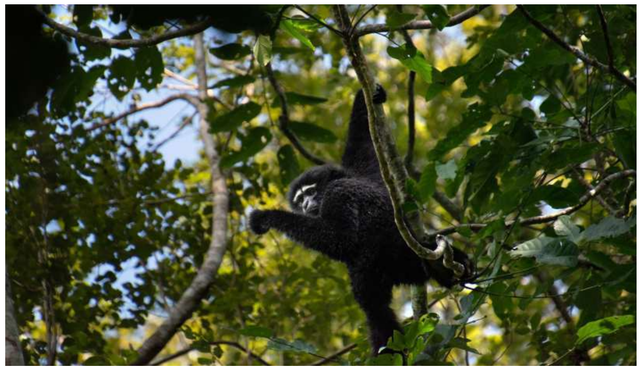
10.93 million: The number of foreign tourist arrivals (not including NRIs) in 2019 — rising from 1.28 million in 1981. As of June 2024, FTA stood at 4.78 million, raising hopes of reaching pre-pandemic levels by year-end.

1.73 billion: The number of trips around the country that domestic tourism accounted for in 2023, according to India government data.

₹14.64 trillion: What Indians spent on domestic travel in 2023, up 15% since 2019, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty



Urban jungle (Clockwise from below) A stone quarry near the Garbhanga Reserve Forest; a streaked spiderhunter; and an infant hoolock gibbon in Garbhanga. (RITU RAJ KONWAR, DIPDYUTI CHOWDHURY & SUNIL RAJAGOPAL)

WILD IN THE CITY

SONG OF THE HOOLOCK GIBBON

Bird calls and gibbon duets are not uncommon in Guwahati, but the mounting challenges of urbanisation are taking a toll on the region's biodiversity

Sunil Rajagopal

Observing birds takes boundless patience and pure luck. Especially in the wet Northeast, in a tangle of green muddled by shallow puddles of sunlight in deep shadows. Today is one of those mornings that stay with you. An Asian fairy bluebird calls, like viscous honey dripping onto a steel plate. Then, one leaf among a thousand grows wings and comes to life as a brilliantly camouflaged golden-fronted leafbird. The woods open into a meadow bursting at the seams with carpenter bees, dragonflies, wildflowers and a gurgling stream. And then suddenly, the tall trees at its edge echo with unexpected gibbon song: a melody rising to a memorable crescendo before lulling to a gentle 'ooooo...'. Pure melancholy.

Not many capital cities, anywhere in the world, can boast of a population of gibbons. Guwahati lives at the knife-edge of development. Its people have almost forgotten what was and often turn a blind eye to what still is. Garbhanga Reserve Forest lies in the city's periphery, accessed from the teeming Lokhra Chariali, not far from traffic heading towards the airport. It is bounded by the city and the besieged Deepor Beel lake, ranges from Meghalaya and the once contiguous Rani forests. At some point, these forests would have been contested by Assam and Meghalaya. Now, a concrete road built by Assam winds up and down the hills.

The western hoolock gibbon, India's only ape, is merely one of the jewels in this stunningly diverse landscape. Garbhanga is home to 254 species of butterflies, 29 species of amphibians, 64 species of reptiles, 321 species of birds and 31 species of mammals – two of them critically endangered and six endangered. A growing culture of birdwatching is opening the forest's wealth, and its growing threats, to a larger audience. Now, there are birders who fly in on the morning flight from Kolkata to glimpse the stunning Oriental dwarf kingfisher and return in the afternoon. Others are more diligent, waiting to listen to the drumming of a pair of odd looking pale-headed woodpeckers "talking" amongst themselves in bamboo groves. But it is not clear how long it will take for this wealth to succumb to the mounting challenges of deliberate and uncontrolled urbanisation. Most of the towering housing apartments and other facilities bordering the Garbhanga landscape have sprouted up only recently.

Elaborate duets and boundary lines

Gibbon song has a haunting quality to humans because they exhibit unmistakable rhythmic qualities found in our own songs. Their songs from the canopy have introductions, repeating holding patterns and spectacular crescendo calls. Male and female gibbons perform elaborate duets with synchronised notes at regular intervals. Songs that perhaps hark back to the evolutionary origins of music itself.

But why do gibbons sing? Male and female gibbons sing duets almost every day to define territory and strengthen social bonds. Sometimes the young ones in their small families join in, too. Most creatures are territorial as adults – a strategy that makes evolutionary sense since it is more efficient to protect a cluster of resources than always seek it out. Social systems of different species have also evolved accordingly, defining how they learn and communicate.

Complex gibbon and birdsong (as delightful as they sound to us) and the howling of wolves are essentially communication of boundaries and ownership, and a show of strength and health. This means that once boundaries are laid out, conflict is usually avoided, and energy is conserved. It also serves as a mode for inter-species communication.

Humans have evolved so much that songs usually no longer serve this purpose. The political structures of nationhood, religion and language help us to draw and preserve boundaries and land, not always without conflict. However, we no longer communicate or heed messages from other citizens across our natural world. We ride roughshod over everything else, acquiring territories at will, be it on land or water, and put every other species at peril.

Ravaged by humans

Considering the bounties it holds, 117 sq.km. of Rani (ravaged by illegal mining and quarrying, among other ills) and Garbhanga Reserve Forests were designated as the Garbhanga Wildlife Sanctuary in April 2022 via a preliminary notification. Despite its protected status, this notification was then set aside in September 2023. Sadly, recent history is rife with such instances. Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary (which has India's largest rhino population) and the critical Deepor Beel (a Ramsar site) were de-notified before the move was stayed by the courts. Several instances of illegal diversion of forest lands have been seen in the Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary. Most recently, oil exploration has been permitted in the ecologically fragile and isolated Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary.

It is no wonder perhaps then that Assam lost 3,240 sq.km. of tree cover during 2001-2023 (as per Global Forest Watch). In a similar period, rainfall in the state has decreased by over 10 mm on an average every year while there have been greater variations in temperature than ever.

***

Not too far from where I heard the gibbons is the small Garbhanga village, with a ragged line of thatched roof shacks and a stream. I have tea from a shop on stilts perched above the river. It is a reminder of how fluid man-made boundaries are. The shop on stilts is in Assam, the population is mostly Karbi. The other side is Khasi, in Meghalaya. On my way back, I am fortunate to spot a pair of circling black bazas. These diminutive raptors, whose annual presence in Thattekkad in Kerala was one of my first draws to birding, are thought to breed here in Garbhanga.

The author is a birder and writer based in Chennai.

The fifth in a series that looks at urban spaces as havens for biodiversity and often overlooked species.

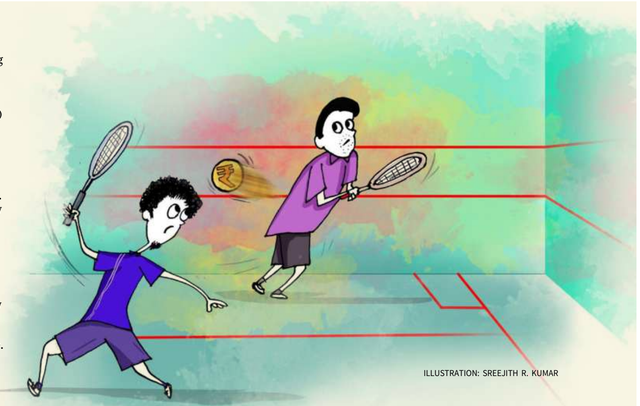


ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

ALLEGEDLY

Limit sports facilities to the rich

'In our country, as per eternal custom, nothing is meant for the general public except bad roads, pollution and propaganda'

One major problem with the national capital – often pointed out by people living in remote places such as Chennai and Mumbai – is that it has too many sports facilities. In fact, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) runs not less than 17 sports complexes. Given that this is India and not a First World country, it would have been okay if these complexes were PR stunts from the outside but dilapidated ruins inside. But no, they are equipped with fully functional infrastructure for all popular sports, including cricket, badminton, tennis, swimming, morning walk, and so on.

It goes without saying that such facilities run the risk of being hijacked by ordinary Indians to play sports and stay fit. The least the DDA could have done was to make them inaccessible to all but the elite. But from the beginning, they were made accessible to all for a modest fee. The worst that could happen did happen: they ended up being overrun by hordes of senior citizens, the middle classes, and even people from lower income groups.

It is as if these facilities, built with tax-payers' money, were meant for the general public, which is absurd, if you consider that in our country, as per eternal custom, nothing is meant for the general public except bad roads, pollution and propaganda. This had to end, and it ended this month when the DDA took the courageous step of hiking membership fees by lakhs of rupees. The move has sparked an outcry from the usual suspects, who are branding it 'elitist' and 'exclusionary'. Can someone please explain: since when did 'elitist' and 'exclusionary' become bad words in India, the cradle of the world renowned caste system?

Anyway, last Friday, I bumped into Mr. K.D. Bose, executive chairman of the DDA's Wreck That Fast committee, which meets twice a year to fix any overlooked facility that might still be benefiting the general public. I snagged a quick interview with him. Excerpts:

Mr. Bose, many are complaining about the fee hike. Your response?

Only two groups are cribbing: middle classes and senior citizens. To the middle classes, I say: get your priorities right. Focus on survival instead of trying to mimic upper class behaviour like jogging and squashing.

You mean, squashing the hopes of those below?

That too, but I was talking about this ridiculous sport where you repeatedly whack a ball inside an airless cage while battling claustrophobia.

What about senior citizens?

I am sorry to say, the quality of our senior citizens has been going down. In the good old days, for instance, when I was a child, they would spend all their time reading holy books and drinking Digene. Today, they want to enter DDA sports complex – what a fall! Senior citizens who care about Indian traditions should be thinking about *vanaprastha*, not volleyball.

If ordinary people are denied access to sports facilities, won't it make them unhealthy?

You bet it will. That's the point! Playing sports on a regular basis is known to improve people's stamina, which is dangerous. We don't want the average Indian to become healthy. Healthy people are unhealthy for democracy.

I don't understand.

Which state produced most medals for India in Paris Olympics? Haryana. Which state has produced the worst protests? Haryana. It is people from Haryana who were behind the anti-farm law protests and the endless protests against that wrestling federation fellow. If ordinary people are kept out of sports, they are less likely to develop the strength for anti-national thoughts and street protests, and the whole nation can then enjoy permanent peace.

Fine, forget sports facilities. What about access to the green spaces in these complexes?

You need to be rich to access well-kept lawns and greenery as a matter of right. If someone is that desperate for greenery, they can always visit the zoo.

If we restrict sports facilities to the rich, wouldn't that end up translating economic inequality into fitness inequality and health inequality?

We, as a society, prize inequality. Our government policies promote economic inequality, and clearly the middle classes approve of it or they wouldn't vote for them. The inevitable consequence of rising inequality is a shrinking middle class, which means that over time, more of the middle classes would slip into the 'poor' category. Turning poor means you can no longer afford what you could afford earlier. Till now, the middle classes enjoyed DDA sports facilities. Hereafter, they must be rich to afford them. This will motivate more Indians to become rich, which, in turn, will do wonders for our economy.

G. Sampath, the author of this satire, is Social Affairs Editor, The Hindu.

PERSON OF INTEREST

SHAHEEN MALIK: FACE OF A SURVIVOR

The 41-year-old is all about helping other women like her reclaim their life after an acid attack, and persuading the government to ban its sale

Shaheen Malik knows her face tells a story. She summarises it in a line when she's invited to speak to students: "I wanted to do something different in life and some people didn't like it." A stranger outside her office, his face partly covered with a handkerchief, threw acid on her in 2009, melting half her face and blinding her right eye. The eye was sealed forever. Acid attacks are all about control, she says, now an expert on the cruel gender-based crime that largely targets a woman's face. She accused her boss and his wife of masterminding the attack. Malik was 26, with a life plan and a freshly-minted MBA, the first graduate in her cloistered Delhi neighbourhood, when she was attacked.

Perpetrators know their crime will mark their victims for life. "It stays on your face forever," says Malik, 41. "Nobody can identify a rape survivor, but acid attack survivors face discrimination continuously."

Now, when someone stares at her or the girls she helps train through her three-year-old non-profit, Brave Souls Foundation, set up to aid survivors of this uniquely Southeast Asian crime, they meet the stare and ask, "Do you want to know anything?" Brave Souls, backed by the Population Foundation of India and Azim Premji Foundation among others, runs two shelter homes. It has helped 400 survivors, assisted in about 200 surgeries and is fighting some 200 court cases across India. "We are doing the government's work, stepping up for their failures since they don't want to listen to us," says Malik. There were 202 acid attacks in 2022 and 71 attempted attacks, according to latest data.

Determined Malik was 26, with a life plan and a freshly-minted MBA, when she was attacked.

Building confidence

People still react badly to acid attack survivors and Malik is a repository of such stories. Like the one about the passengers on a train who didn't allow a survivor from Uttar Pradesh to take a seat, forcing her to sit on the floor. Or the woman on the Delhi Metro who walked up to a survivor and demanded that she cover her face. "Look elsewhere if you don't like my face," the survivor replied. Even as Malik grapples with loneliness, work is her life. She teaches survivors to stop covering their faces and builds their confidence so they can tackle what awaits them outside.

Most importantly, she makes it a point to tell young boys that they shouldn't think a girl rejecting them is the end of their life. And that nothing gives anyone the right to throw acid on another human being. The majority of the world's acid attacks occur in India and the single largest factor behind these attacks is rejection of 'love'.

> **Nobody can identify a** rape survivor, but acid attack survivors face discrimination continuously. It stays on your face forever

"If I remember my childhood now, I feel happy. My life became a struggle later," she says. "I didn't have very big dreams. I wanted to study, work – and have a little freedom." She grew up in a neighbourhood where most girls didn't study beyond school. At some point in her fight to break this norm, she realised that she would never be a doctor. "I had no guidance, my parents were not serious about my studies." Through sheer grit and via correspondence, she got a BA and, in 2007, left home to pursue an MBA in Panipat, Haryana. She worked as a student counsellor to pay the bills. She says her boss became obsessed with her and, after two years of trying to leave, she finally succeeded. She was serving her notice period when the attack happened.

25 surgeries later

The time after that passed in a blur. The law recognising acid attacks came into effect only in 2013. The police showed little interest. Her family was not supportive. She herself was focused on the unending medical emergency that follows an acid attack – 25 surgeries, 10 of them to rescue her left eye which needs lifelong medication. It was only after four years that she got help from a judicial magistrate and recorded her statement again. Fifteen years and some courtroom character assassination later, her case continues in a district court in north west Delhi. "I never saw any regret in my perpetrators' eyes," she says, and that makes her more determined to keep fighting.

Eventually, she connected with fellow acid attack survivor Laxmi, and began meeting more survivors. She then worked with the Human Rights Law Network and ran the Delhi Commission of Women's acid watch cell, feeling relief every time she could get a survivor compensation or access to medical treatment.

Thanks to the efforts of activists, Punjab now offers a pension for survivors and the Jharkhand government bears treatment expenses. But Malik's dream is that acid sales be banned. In 2020, she filed a Public Interest Litigation seeking a ban on over-the-counter sales of acid in retail stores across Delhi. "A total ban could have unintended consequences, affecting sectors where acid is responsibly and safely utilised," the court said. "Therefore, striking a balance between public safety and the legitimate use of acid for industrial and other regulated purposes is crucial."

Malik is not impressed. "There are alternatives to toilet cleaning and blockage," she says. "Demonetisation, which affects so many more people, can happen in one day but we can't ban acid?" She plans to try again.

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

GOREN BRIDGE

Good vision

North-South vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

Today's deal is from a women's event some years ago. South was Sabine Auken, from Germany, one of the world's best players. West's two-diamond pre-empt shows how players will go to extremes to interfere after a strong club opening.

The opening diamond lead went to East's ace. Holding four trumps, East wanted to force declarer to ruff, and East devilishly returned a low diamond. Auken had no reason to do anything but ruff this and cash the ace of spades. The fall of the jack from West made her realize her predicament. She only had 10 black-suit tricks and she needed a heart trick to get to 11. Should she lead the king of hearts now, the defense would win and lead another diamond. After ruffing, she wouldn't have enough trumps left to draw East's trumps.

NORTH
♠ K 7 3
♡ 7 3
◇ J 8 4
♣ Q J 10 9 6

WEST
♠ J
♡ A 10 6 2
◇ 10 7 6 5 3 2
♣ 4 2

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

SOUTH
♠ A Q 10 9 4
♡ K Q 8 4
◇ K
♣ A K 8

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♣*	2◇	Dbl**	3◇
3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
5♠	All pass		

*Strong and artificial
**Values

Opening lead: Five of ◇

She saw a way out of this provided East started with at least three clubs, so she cashed the ace and king of clubs, then led a club to dummy's queen. East followed suit to all three rounds and it was clear sailing from there. She led a heart to the king and West's ace and ruffed the diamond continuation. She was now able to cash the queen of hearts and ruff a heart with dummy's seven of spades. She then had a high cross-ruff for the last three tricks. very nicely played!

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Things named after people!

Berty Ashley

Identify the dish that Ignacio Anaya invented. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

1 Born on October 27, 1858, Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th President of the United States. Once on a hunting trip, some of his attendants cornered a bear, tied it up and asked him to shoot it. Roosevelt refused, saying it was unsportsmanlike. This event led Morris Michtom, a toymaker to create a toy, which was given Roosevelt's nickname. What toy is this?

2 This word represents a ratio of sound pressure levels. It originated in the telephone industry to measure power and transmission loss. The first part of the term comes from the Latin word for 'tenth'. The second part is named after someone, who is considered the father of that industry. What term is this?

3 Livestock branding was a process followed by Texan cowboys who would use a hot iron to leave a scar with a particular shape to mark their cattle. Samuel M. was a lawyer in the 1800s who refused to do this cruel act, and his name started being used to mean 'an independent-minded person'. What was his full name that moviegoers would have come across in the latest *Top Gun* movie?

4 Charles-Joseph __ was appointed to the court of William I of Orange to manufacture musical instruments for the military band. His son Adolphe had a tumultuous childhood, having swallowed acidic water at age 3, fell from a third-floor window, was burnt in a gunpowder explosion, fell onto a frying pan, and escaped poisoning. He did go on to invent a 'valved clarinet,' which he called '__ophone' after his family name. What did he invent, which is now a staple of jazz music?

5 Ignacio Anaya, a Mexican working in a hotel in 1943, could not find the chef when a group of U.S. Army wives entered.Not wanting to disappoint the customers, he picked up some tostados, grated cheese on top, melted it, added some jalapeño, and served it. The dish became popular, and his nickname became associated with it. What dish is this?

6 Earl ___ was an American businessman who, when working with DuPont, had access to some inflexible pieces of polyethylene slag. He purified it and moulded it to create lightweight bowls, for which he designed airtight lids. He founded a company in his name to sell it, which soon was marketed by homemakers. Which company is this that recently declared bankruptcy?

7 PageRank is an algorithm that a popular search engine uses to determine the importance of web pages and rank them in search results. Although it refers to the 'web pages', it is named after the founder of the company. Which search engine is this, and who is it named after?

8 Joseph ___ was a German physical trainer who devised a then revolutionary approach to exercise and body conditioning. His extensive knowledge of Roman and Greek exercises inspired him to create many equipments. What was his name?

9 James ___ was an American physician who produced chocolate from imported beans in 1764. He started a company in his name to produce chocolate for making cakes and beverages. What was his name, which one might mistake for the profession of those who will be using the product and leading to a fitting company name?

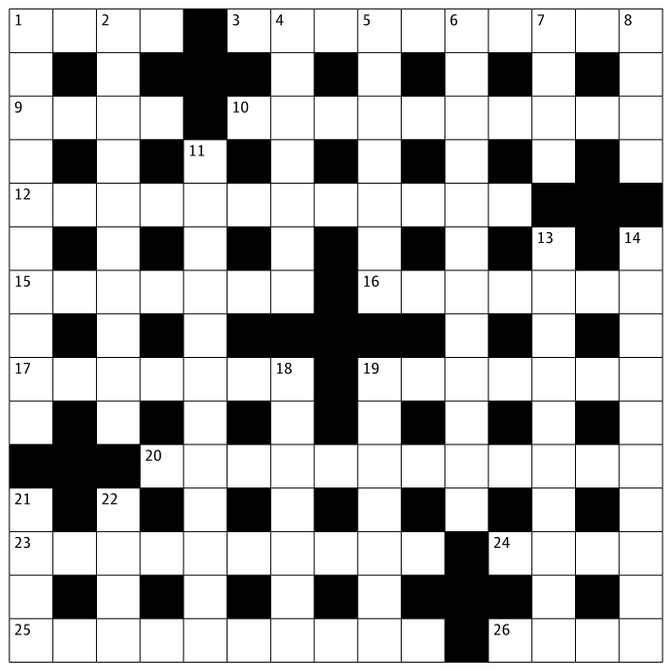
10 English molecular biologist Edwin Southern came up with a method, named after him in popular labs, to detect and quantify DNA in a sample. Consequently, when a technique was devised to detect RNA, they paid tribute to his name. What is the name of this technique?

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. Teddy Bears
2. Decibel
3. Maverick
4. Saxophone
5. Nachos
6. Tupperware
7. Google, Larry Page
8. Pilates
9. James Baker of Baker's Chocolate
10. Northern Blot

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3329



Across

1 Polish admirer, nude (4)
3 Straitened, distressed, but back in office (10)
9 Curses and rants, being heartless (4)
10 Way to wear swimwear in major thoroughfares (5,5)
12 So began my day, unpredictably: it's a toss-up (8,4)
15 Portion of cinnabun, chai: nourishing – and free! (7)
16 Swiss multinational and Dutch cosied up (7)
17 Reckoned was plausible (5,2)
19 Initially Schubert and Liszt's illustrious educator – renowned Italian! (7)
20 Everyman's describing idiot husband – misguided satire – crazy scenes (4,8)
23 Character seen towards end of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*? (10)
24 Irish musician in African country, needing no introduction (4)
25 Actor, waiting where Cluedo weapon concealed? (10)
26 Eats pilaf regularly – here? (4)

Down

1 Scuba – radar deployed – voracious fish! (10)
2 Taking LSD, greasy hippies – in the end, they're in a cell (5,5)
4 Nobleman over there at crack of dawn? (5,2)
5 Buried in Parthenon, a gong, one with straight edges? (7)
6 At, sadly, a place of trade stocking American flipping fishy dish (12)
7 In the auditorium, drew amphibian (4)
8 Do be quiet – lolly? (4)
11 'Ho! Abruptly draw back, draw back!' – one who entered tomb (6,6)
13 Plans suggested by erotic etchings (10)
14 To make greater numbers, is Swedish band touring a capital city? (5,5)
18 Deal – or collapse (4,3)
19 Was hacking, chesty daughter given treatment? (7)
21 Pasta sauce in uniform covered with bit of old cloth (4)
22 While using phone, removed central part of cable (4)

SOLUTION NO. 3328

	D	O	N	E	A	N	D	D	U	S	T	E	D	
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ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

Evolving value systems

Ashok Warrier
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The other day, in one of my reflective moods, a thought from the past struck me. I was reminded of my grandmother lamenting with more than a tinge of visible sadness that value systems had fallen and things such as love, respect, regard, loyalty, sharing and caring were no longer valued or practised.

As it happens, every statement or discussion is contextual and based on one's contemporary perspective. As a young man in those days, I viewed her lamentation as no more than what old people tell younger people out of frustration and cumulative nostalgia. Now that I am in my sixties and a senior, I can better understand the import of what my grandmother had said many years ago.

What are values? Retracing our steps when human beings were living in caves and forests, as food gatherers and hunters, a question could be posed. Did values referred to by my grandmother exist even then? My sense is that values essentially get shaped, even if not exclusively, by one's needs, requirements and advancements of time and society.

It was patriotism that drove and propelled most Indians before Independence. Even industrialists were driven by not just the desire to make money but also to share it for the common good and be a part of the national objectives then.

Sheer survival

After Independence, it became a question of surviving and eking out a living for most Indians. Joint families still formed an integral part of the social fabric, though necessities of migration to urban centres had slowly but steadily started weakening these bonds. The old started getting older even while the young were finding their feet. Geriatric issues, absence and lack of medical care, and loneliness, to mention just a few, contributed to the overall sense of helplessness among the older generation. The natural expectation among them was that the younger lot would chip in and take care of them. This was a "value", perhaps even more than an expectation, to them. Most members of the younger generation, especially those who had migrated in search of jobs to cities such as Delhi and Mumbai, kept grappling with the need to earn their daily bread while staying true to their elders' expectations of taking care of them. The country was devoid of job opportunities, waking up as it was from centuries of colonialism. Salaries were meagre and just about everyone had a frugal lifestyle.

> While there should not be judgments on what is good or bad, time, space and context determine what is acceptable or not

Things started changing slowly as the country saw the rise of a private sector which meant more jobs. In stepped comparison and competition. When the loaf of bread was small and the consumers far too many, comparison and competition rode together. "Success" became the most important goal to chase. Development as we know today saw a rather rapid and drastic dilution if not erosion of traditional value systems some of which I have referred to above. Even relationships started becoming transactional.

Many years ago, I remember going down to Kerala for a 10-day vacation after my high school examinations. The moment I reached my native place, I was "greeted" by a frosty grandma who ticked me off without mincing words. "If you were coming only for 10 days, why did you come at all?" Though I winced at this "greeting", I later realised it was her pure love and affection that made her say that.

The size of the rooms or the sheer number of inhabitants did not matter then. No-one complained about these "trivial" things then, but, of course, in today's times, it is not so. Children may come and spend a few days or a few hours with their parents and even stay with them at their place if time and convenience permitted.

The wise among the elders accept the change in circumstances and make the best of the situation uncomplainingly. This is not to suggest that children are being insensitive, but they too have quietly moved on. Their children observe and experience these and start getting themselves conditioned to the "new normals".

While there can and should not be any value judgments on what is good or bad, it goes without saying that value systems are essentially a factor of time, space and context.

However hailing as we do from the orient, one would always wish and hope that values such as love, affection, regard, respect and an understanding shaped by deeper foundations does not get forgotten and ignored in the hustle and bustle of our times.

Learning it the hard way

A. George Augustian
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We use to call him "*Marathadi* Maharaja" (emperor under the tree) in Tamil. His business was mending footwear and occasionally fixing a handbag. We don't know how long he inhabited that hole but he had made himself pretty comfortable and contented with materials procured for free. His shelter was made of worn-out canvas and the flooring of cinema posters. Except the awl, knife and thread, the other materials he used were recycled from old shoes and worn-out sandals.

I used to go to him when my daughter's school shoes or my footwear needed to be fixed. Whenever I tried to bargain with him, he used to talk high of the quality of the materials he used for the fix. "Sir, I am not like those pretenders, I use quality leather and rubber. See how I have waxed the thread, 10 people cannot break the twine," he would say.

During one of my visits to him to get my recently acquired footwear fixed for a minor issue, he told me after a thorough inspection: "Sir, the top leather is of very high quality; So whenever the sole is worn out, don't throw the upper part, instead give it to me. Within a year and a half, the sole broke. I remembered our emperor's remark but instead of going to him, I went to a bigger shop to get the sole replaced. The footwear came back with a new sole, but they charged me a hefty sum. The new sole lasted a year and then it cracked. Now again I had the dilemma of giving the footwear to the emperor for free or go for resoling. I chose the latter. This time, the shop charged me even more saying that the sole will last me more than two years. Unfortunately, it did not even last a year and when I went back to the big shop, they said their guarantee is only for six months and nothing can be done.

I kicked myself for not handing over the upper to the emperor when the sole wore out the first time. It could have saved me money and effort. The emperor had taught me a valuable lesson that will be hard for me to forget.

Style shift: apparel oft proclaims the times

Sartorial preferences change from generation to generation

Sudha Devi Nayak
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It is often said the way one dresses is the way one is addressed.

When I joined the workforce in a large public sector organisation, there was no strictly spelt out dress code. Men were expected to be "correctly dressed", meaning suited, booted and tied, for formal occasions and wear properly pressed sober shirts and trousers, no flashy checks or stripes, as daily work wear. Of course, the man in the corner room had to be on all occasions the picture of sartorial elegance. The women wore crisp cotton saris, not even salwar-kameez, and on important occasions such as corporate meetings and seminars, well-draped and neatly pleated and pinned silk saris. Often, those with a not so impressive work record could get away with their sartorial elegance. But the dress code was largely muted and nothing loud.

Cut to the present. *Avant garde* fashion is making a statement at the workplace. The suit and tie are relegated to the closet, only to be resurrected on rare occasions. Women wear pant suits and palazzo pants. The sari of old is reserved for official parties and serious boardroom discussions and largely considered a geriatric symbol.

During our college years, there was a breed which wore only kurta-pyjamas with cotton sling bags on their shoulders and a three-day stubble on their chins. They were looked upon with awe and reverence by lesser mortals and considered the intelligentsia of the institution.

Those people lived in "Goblin mode", a word of recent vintage, in an unkempt manner without regard to self-image and in defiance of societal expectation.

Of anecdotal importance is a story of Albert Einstein, who did not have a meticulous dress sense. When his wife suggested that he dress better for his classes at Princeton, he was dismissive. "Oh, everybody knows me here," he said. Some time later, he was to travel to an international conference and his wife repeated her request. Equally dismissive this time too, he said, "Oh, nobody knows me there."

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the icons of civilisation whose statue graces parks and other public spaces in the cities and towns of the world, made one of the most powerful sartorial statements symbolising the poverty and struggle of a nation against foreign domination . So the stature of a woman or man is not diminished or enhanced by a set of clothes. The soul that peeps through is important.

A case for using public transport

Aspirational India flaunts snazzy cars, unmindful of the cost to environment

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GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Every other day, a carmaker launches a brand-new car more beautiful and comfortable than the last. We discard our old car and drive our new car proudly and happily.

My father had a second-hand Ambassador car which lasted him a lifetime. We bought a Premier Padmini, upgraded to a Maruti 800 and eventually to a slightly higher version in about 30 years. The last car we bought is now 10 years old and friends and family have been urging us to upgrade.

The mode of transport I used for the first 30 years of my adult life was bus, train, autorickshaw or carpool. Colleagues and friends would urge me to buy a small car. My reply was that I wanted to choose from all vehicles on the road and would not be restricted to one car. Also that I would not want to add to the congestion on the roads and the pollution.

Many years ago, I was a moderator in a panel discussion about multi-modal transport systems. Most panellists felt that the country needed to encourage use of public transport, to reduce the traffic congestion and pollution, limit road accidents and increase efficiency of use of resources. Unfortunately, the situation today is much more skewed towards personal vehicles than in the past.

We have all these old and new cars rushing around. Carpools seem to be a no-no, as people prefer the flexibility of a personal car.

Aspirational India firmly believes in keeping up with the Joneses, and there is competition among friends and family to drive the newest and best cars. Flowing from this is the perception that anyone using public transport is not successful or ambitious enough. There are other ways to flaunt one's success and wealth, if one wants, without adding to the traffic and pollution.

FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

While recognised Indian companies may have mechanisms in place to ensure their employees' work-life balance ('In good company'; Oct. 20), thousands of others, particularly start-ups, perform poorly in this area, with workers unable to resist exploitation for fear of losing their jobs. Increasing commute time in congested metropolitan areas is another factor exacerbating the situation.
Kamal Laddha

During my tenure in an international bank as a management official, we made it a point to ensure that employees were not retained by their respective managers beyond 6 p.m.. Moreover, if any of the employees wanted to come and work on the weekends, they had to seek permission from the management, quoting the need for such a visit on a holiday. This arrangement gave the employees the required space.
Tharcius S. Fernando

There is an imperative need for emotional support to employees saddled with stressful work assignments. The HR teams should foster a congenial redressal ecosystem that enables their employees to freely discuss their problems with their managers.
G. Ramasubramanyam

Having spent nearly a couple of decades in IT as a software engineer, I can truly relate to this article. Yet, I feel that the whole focus is around the employer defining what wellness is for their employee. It does not say anything about the real issues that took the lives of many like Anna Sebastian Perayil. It is the lack of unionisation of workers that is allowing such exploitation to go unchecked, leading to the loss of physical and mental well-being of the workers in these industries, that of their dependants, and so on.
S. Viveak Balaji

Real politics

Suhasini Haider seems to be frustrated with the latest memoir of Hillary Clinton. ('Guarded storytelling'; Oct. 20) As the Secretary of State to President Obama, Clinton displayed extraordinary skills of diplomacy to avert the breakout of major conflicts in a tension-ridden world. To expect her to reveal the unsanitised version of key events is unrealistic.
M.V. Nagavender Rao

Secular fabric

After the BJP's 2014 win at the Centre and in a few states, the RSS's agenda of 'Hindu Rashtra' has found new space. ('Everyday communalism'; Oct. 20) BJP has forgotten what their tallest leader, Vajpayee, once said: "If India is not secular, then India is not India at all."
B.M. Singh

Roots of culture

The author deserves appreciation for his elaborate and comprehensive book, as his ancestors and himself have been connected with it for centuries. ('Touching god'; Oct. 20) K.K. Gopalakrishnan, by opting to be the head of the South Zone Cultural Centre, and relinquishing a comfortable bank job, is sure to help deserving artists who need support.
M.N. Sarasawathi Devi

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Women and travel
Whether working or not working, daytime or at night, indoors or outdoors, they have the right to life and dignity
Vartika Sharma Lekhak

Navigating public spaces as a woman
When public transport is inadequate or absent, it can heighten risks of violence and restrict access
Ishika Chaudhary

The bookaholic
Worried over why the unread collection is larger than the read ones
Najila T. Yahu

Foreign fascination
Exploring the dream of crossing the borders brought on by inquisitiveness and curiosity
Saurabh Sinha

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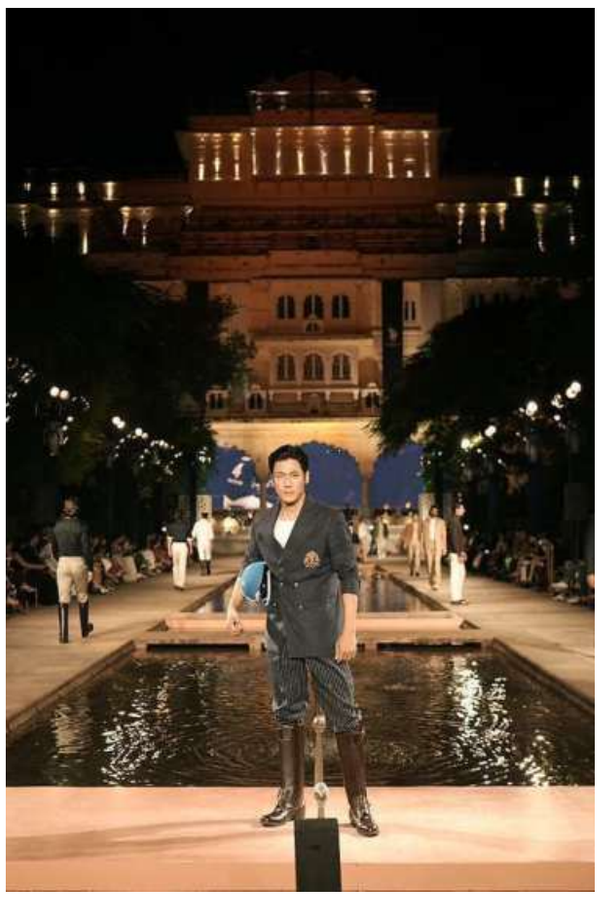

Fresh ideas (Clockwise from left) Sawai Padmanabh Singh; a jacket with the *zardozi* crest from the capsule collection; art specialist Noelle Kadar; and a model at the collection's launch. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

HOW PACHO IS RECASTING JAIPUR

Sawai Padmanabh Singh is on a mission to reclaim his hometown's place in the cultural zeitgeist. A new centre for arts and a revamped museum are a few immediate plans

Praachi Raniwala

Sawai Padmanabh Singh is not an easy man to catch. Yes, the 26-year-old titular maharaja of Jaipur (Pacho to his close friends and half a million followers on Instagram) has been generous in opening his home, the City Palace Jaipur, to creatives from across the country for evenings curated around fashion and culture in recent months. But glamorous soirees are only a small helping on his very full plate. His calendar is bursting with polo tournaments and training sessions, the opening of an upcoming arts centre, and the myriad ceremonial duties attached to his royal title.

We finally manage to catch him on a Tuesday afternoon, after a weekend of Dussehra celebrations. Dressed in a white *mul* shirt (and *juttis* "from a chap in Barmer whose family has always made them"), Singh's face appears on my screen from his office, even though his is "not a typical desk job". There is a din of activity as his team buzzes around him, but that doesn't deter him from directing his full attention to our conversation. He tells me that when not at the office, he's either on the polo field or on site at the various properties his family manages. "I also always spend a bit of time with my grandmother every day. And every now and then, I will socialise in the evenings. September to April is an especially great time to be in Jaipur. There's so much going on."

This last year in particular has seen a retraining of all eyes on Jaipur in many ways. Much of this renewed interest can be credited to the young king who, along with his sister Gauravi Kumari, has been on a mission to revitalise its spirit by opening their home and personal spaces for events with like-minded collaborators. "These are collaborations that highlight the fact that Jaipur is a proactive and contemporary city. And that we very much want to engage in the dialogue around what's hot in the world right now," explains Singh, who was crowned king at 13, following his grandfather's demise.

The most recent was the launch of a capsule collection he designed with U.S. Polo Assn. (USPA), an American brand for which he is a global ambassador. The line not only captures Singh's flair for fashion, but also packs in details such as Jaipur's five-coloured Panchranga flag and a *zardozi* crest that reads 'Pacho Jaipur'. As a professional polo player who also formerly captained the Indian polo team, the collaboration has personal meaning to him. "I enjoyed being a part of it, more so because of all that the brand and its CEO Michael Prince do for the sport across the world," he admits.

An idea with heart

Style savant may be the moniker that has really stuck with Singh – and that is not surprising considering that he has fronted several magazine covers, routinely tops global best-dressed lists, has walked the runway for Dolce & Gabbana when he was 19, and is the ultimate clotheshorse – but his interests go well beyond. In fact, what excites him the most right now is his work in the space of art and the conservation of heritage properties.

Up next is the Jaipur Centre for Art (JCA) that launches next month, for which Singh has joined forces with close friend and city-based art specialist Noelle Kadar. As a graduate in cultural heritage management and art history from Università e Nobil Collegio degli Orefici in Rome, the maharaja has always harboured a deep appreciation for art. When Kadar and he identified the absence of any major initiatives in contemporary art in Jaipur, they took on the responsibility "to create something ourselves".

The upcoming centre will have a 2,600 sq.ft. permanent exhibition space at the City Palace alongside installations at heritage properties across the city, a sculpture park at Jaigarh Fort and a dynamic calendar of monthly events. "Rather than loading it all up in one place in one go, we wanted to scatter it and spread it out," he says. "I don't know if I'm allowed to tell you, but we open with the works of Anish Kapoor, Sean Scully and Hiroshi Sugimoto, some of the biggest names in the world right now."

The centre will also have a residency programme (still under development) with a focus on the meaningful involvement of the local artist community.

Beyond the glamour

Singh embodies a new era of Indian royals who are tethered to their legacy but are inviting more people to partake in culture in modern ways. "I've been trying to think of ways in which to bring people back to Rajasthan for the fourth or fifth time – travellers who are looking for experiences and not just a destination."

He says he is doing it in his "own small ways" through IPs (intellectual property) that encapsulate the music, food, entertainment and performance art of Rajasthan. Such as the Jaigarh Heritage Festival, an annual event that debuts this December in a collaboration with Teamwork Arts, which also produces the Jaipur Literature Festival.

Then there is the overhaul of the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum within the palace grounds, towards which he has been dedicating a majority of his time. "The museum has been around for over 50 years, and houses arguably some of the most important objects of antiquity that we have in our country. However, it was seen more as a monument. So, we've invited some of the best curators and conservators from around the world to help us reorganise the whole museum, which we will present at the end of next year," he says.

Ultimately, Singh is driven by the vision to transform iconic historic spaces into places of participation. "It's a privilege to work with properties and objects that are so significant to our national heritage, and to have some influence over what happens to them for generations to come."

But it's easy to get mystified by the glamour and grandeur of his life (and title) that it can sometimes supersede the work he is doing at the grassroots level. Does that bother him? "I don't worry too much about what people will say or what my perception is. Influencing lives gives me the greatest sense of reward and satisfaction," he insists. One of the most gratifying experiences for him is to encourage those supported by the Princess Diya Kumari Foundation, started by his mother to uplift women through skill development. He ponders over the question some more. "What also gives me satisfaction is when I see a property that was kind of just rotting, being used for something productive. I derive my sense of joy from very different things."

The writer is an award-winning fashion and lifestyle journalist.

ILLUSTRATION: ZAINAB TAMBAWALLA

A LITTLE LIFE

So you don't have a bestie

Lessons in relationships and a bowl of fragrant and spiced apricots with meat

Ever since I can remember, I have struggled to make sense of relationships. All relationships. I feel there ought to be a rule book that one could simply follow. But that is not the case.

When I was a teenager, these 'situations' seemed to arise a lot. I had made some friends and a couple of best friends. But like the balls on a snooker table, life would play a hand and we would all scatter in different directions. The transition from 15 to 18 resulted in a lot of these best friends going away. A girl whom I had decided to call my best friend ended up not liking me very much. It was terribly confusing.

I grew weary and began doubting myself. But before I made any final decisions about my ability to form long-term relationships, I decided to consult Phuphee.

I asked my parents to take me to see her one weekend. We arrived late afternoon. She was sitting on the verandah with my uncle, who enjoyed a session of *jajeer* (hookah) especially after his lunch. Phuphee was also enjoying her cigarettes. You could see the smoke rising from both and disappearing into each other.

'He hates the smell of cigarettes and I hate the smell of *jajeer*. But now we are old and have no strength to fight, so we just both put up with it,' she said, blowing smoke in his direction playfully.

After hugs and kisses, we sat down and had tea. Later when my parents had left, Phuphee asked me if I wanted to help her with making dinner. She was making *tchenen ti maaz* (apricots with meat). She asked me to soak the apricots and wash them thoroughly, while she soaked some tamarind. When she was frying the meat, she asked me what it was that was troubling me. I narrated my story and my fear that I might be destined to roam this planet without a best friend.

'*Yi chu waariyah boad masle* [this is indeed a big problem],' she said, stirring in the spices, saturating the air with the scent of fennel, black and green cardamom, cinnamon, clove, ginger and garlic.

'Smell that,' she said, taking a deep breath. 'I always feel like the smell of spices helps the blood flow back to my brain when it has been flowing to my knees instead.'

'You know, *myoan zuv* [my life], we are all like these dishes we cook. In life, think of these ingredients as people. Every person brings something different to your life. The trick is to appreciate that individual for what they bring instead of expecting them to be everything. Do you understand what I mean?'

'Not really,' I replied, a little sullenly.

'It is usually not possible to have one person who will fulfil every single need in your life,' she continued. 'It is a beautiful thought and large chunks of literature wouldn't exist had it not been for this notion. But in real life you will find one friend who will complete a certain side of you and another friend, another side. It doesn't mean one is more important than the other. It simply means you can cherish both for what they are, rather than having to choose.'

'Look at me, I love your uncle but there are parts of me that he simply doesn't understand. But my friend *maetonji* [the local missionary nurse] does. And there are parts of me *maetonji* doesn't understand, but Khali [an elderly woman in the village] does. Each one fulfils a different need. When I am with each, I do not expect the world, I simply cherish what they bring to my life. Think of me as *tchenen ti maaz*, and your uncle as the meat, *maetonji* as the *tchenen*, Khali as the tamarind, and everybody else as the spices. You cannot make the whole dish with any of the individual things. We are mostly the sum total of all the people we love and cherish, and some of us have more ingredients than others.'

In the evening, we sat down to have the *tchenen ti maaz* with hot rice. Each mouthful was bursting with flavour and I realised exactly what Phuphee had explained to me earlier. The next day I went back home with the feelings of doom and loneliness having mostly dissipated.

Her lesson has served me well so far. In terms of at least friendships, I have never pinned everything on one person. This has allowed each individual friendship to grow at its own pace. I have understood at the ripe age of 40 that instead of a 'best friend' you can have different bests in different friends.

Saba Mahjoor, *a Kashmiri living in England, spends her scant free time contemplating life's vagaries.*