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Satarupa Paul

At Miami Pâtisserie in Delhi, chef-founder Bani Nanda deftly glazes a Belgian chocolate cake. Her skill is impeccable, yet her distress is apparent – and the sweltering heat outside has little to do with it. Around 60% of the pâtisserie’s menu is chocolate-based; they get close to 60 chocolate cake orders on average a day, and their other chocolate desserts are perennial bestsellers. Even during mango or strawberry season, roughly 12-15 kg of chocolate go into their creations daily, and much of that is sourced from imported brands such as Callebaut. “The soaring cocoa prices globally have meant a massive hike, 110% to 200% in some cases, in the prices of our primary ingredient – chocolate,” Nanda says. “We’ve already increased the prices of all our chocolate items by 5%-7%, from cakes down to a macaron. We’re trying to hike it slowly so as to not shock the customer, but our focus now is to start experimenting with more non-chocolate flavours.”

The price of cacao beans, the primary raw material for chocolate, skyrocketed to a record \$12,000 a tonne in April, owing to extreme crop shortages and dangerously low liquidity on the commodities market. A combination of factors are at play. In Ghana and the Ivory Coast, the West African nations that produce the major share of the world’s cocoa beans, a bad harvest season has been brought on by El Niño weather conditions, black pod disease and ageing cacao trees. Additionally, historically inequitable market practices with big chocolate corporations pocketing the bulk of the profit, have left farmers with critically low incomes to replant new trees or implement disease prevention measures. In fact, the global chocolate crisis is such that top trader Pierre Andurand has forecast cocoa futures to climb as high as \$20,000 this year, while a UN Trade & Development report states that the International Cocoa Organization is expecting a global shortfall of 3,74,000 tonnes for 2023-24 as compared to 74,000 tonnes last season.

A heavy blow
In India, importers and suppliers of cocoa and chocolate brands such as Valrhona, Callebaut, Van Houten and others are also facing the fallout of the war raging in West Asia. “We import cargo by sea and with the crisis in the Red Sea, all cargo prices have shot up by 20%-30%. On top of that, the rupee has weakened by 10%-12% in the last six months, which has also made an impact since we buy in euros and dollars,” says Dhruv Sanghvi, senior manager at Delta Nutritives Pvt. Ltd., the prime suppliers of Callebaut and Cacao Barry in the country. According to



him, the prices of these products have already shot up by 50% and are expected to increase to 100% plus by October. “There’s a lot of volatility in the cocoa price index, and even if the prices go down today, it’ll take five to six months for that to reflect in India.”
For the time being, suppliers like Delta have enough stock to last

another six to eight months, so there may not be an apparent shortage of chocolate in the market yet. But for professionals like Nanda, who deal with cocoa and chocolate daily at higher price points, the price surge is dealing a heavy blow already. Home baker Ipsa Sambhi was excited to embark on a new journey with her brand La Croute. The

WHY COCOA PRICES ARE DRIVING PEOPLE NUTS

As failed cacao crops and production shortfall push prices globally, it could mean shrinking chocolate bars and more non-chocolate flavours. Meanwhile, can quality craft chocolate from India step up to meet the demand?



Meltdown (Clockwise from left) Lavonne’s pastries; a cake from Miami Pâtisserie; Bani Nanda; Chaitanya Muppala of Manam; cacao fruit; Karthikeyan Jagannathan of Ricky’s Cookies; and Vinesh Johny of Lavonne. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

brand. Almost 80% of their menu features chocolate in some form, including cocoa powder, cocoa nibs and cocoa butter, sourced from the likes of Valrhona and Callebaut, and Indian craft chocolate brands such as Paul and Mike, Mason & Co and Rakkaudella. “The prices of all these ingredients have gone up significantly. In fact, chocolate contains sugar and other ingredients, so the price hike isn’t as much in comparison as it is for cocoa powder or nibs that contain pure cocoa,” says chef Karthikeyan Jagannathan, who’s worked at renowned establishments like Alain Passard’s L’Arpège in Paris, as well as Avartana and Prego in India.

For the time being, they’re bearing the losses themselves by reducing profit margins. “Our customers have come to expect a certain standard and specific flavour profiles in our cookies. Which is why we cannot reduce the chocolate content nor substitute a higher priced cocoa ingredient for another. We will not disturb the recipes of our signatures and bestsellers, come what may,” Jagannathan says.

His sentiments are echoed across the board by peers, including chef-founder Vinesh Johny of the reputed Lavonne Academy of Baking Science and Pastry Arts. The Bengaluru-based institute and cafe recently launched their Delhi outpost to packed houses, with enthusiasts queuing up for their breakfast viennoiseries and indulgent desserts. “India loves its chocolate; six of our 13 desserts are chocolate-based and those are our bestsellers,” Johny says. “We’re absorbing a lot of the costs at the moment and hoping that the prices correct soon. But if it becomes unsustainable or if there’s another big jump in prices, then we’ll have to rethink the entire operation.”

Bigger brands such as Theobroma, which is present in over 200 locations across 18-plus cities and massively popular for its brownies and cakes, are already in crunch mode. “A recent conversation with them revealed that they are planning to reduce their chocolate options to only one or two going forward. They intend to shift to either fruits or other seasonal produce,” says Sanghvi of Delta. “For suppliers like us, the demand for chocolates from such businesses has already gone down dramatically.”

Shrinkflation, skimpflation and other compromises
Chocolate producers are also resorting to covert tactics such as shrinkflation (reducing pack sizes) and incorporating more fruits and nuts. Nestlé reportedly confirmed that the size of their ‘fun size’ Kit Kat bars had reduced from 17 to 14 grams, as per a Yahoo Finance report, while Mars reduced the size of its large milk chocolate Easter egg from 252 to 201 grams, according to the *Financial Times*. Chaitanya Muppala, founder of the Hyderabad-based craft chocolate brand Manam Chocolate, is of the opinion that certain industrial players may also resort to skimpflation, wherein they change their recipes or substitute with cheaper ingredients.

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PRICES ON A ROLLER COASTER

Mason & Co: Bulk pricing was ₹1,248 per kg (including tax) for 55% dark chocolate in the beginning of 2024. Now it is ₹1,793

Rakkaudella: Last year, 63% dark chocolate cost ₹861. Now, it is ₹1,770

Callebaut: 2024 started with 55% dark chocolate at ₹1,239. Last month, it increased to ₹2,124, and now it is at ₹1,994.

Morde: Last year, 45% chocolate per kg was ₹400. Now it has more than doubled, to ₹1,240

Van Houten: Has hiked prices by 100%

Valrhona: Expected to hike prices by 50%-100% (suppliers Euro Foods refused to comment)

* Prices approximate and as on June 3



self-taught baker who has been delivering homemade pies since the lockdown, is slated to open her first café in leafy South Delhi soon. Her happiness though is mired with concern now. “I not only make five to six desserts with chocolate, but also use it in savoury sauces. Every day, I use around 2-5 kg of white, milk and dark chocolate, and the price hike is impacting my cost of production,” says Sambhi. “I do not intend to remove chocolate from my menu entirely, but I definitely have to keep it to just a couple of signature items for now. Once the cafe launches, I may have to increase the prices of my chocolate items, reduce portion sizes, and negotiate with suppliers for better deals.”

Bitter cost of indulgence
In Chennai, Ricky’s Cookies has made quite a name for itself in the past five years as an artisanal cookie

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK



COW ECONOMICS

Neel Mukherjee’s ‘darkly comic and sharply intelligent’ novel about the financial luxury of choice feels like a performance at times

Anil Menon

Neel Mukherjee’s *Choice* is a collection of three novellas, loosely linked in terms of characters and events, but much more connected by themes. It contains a sharply intelligent critique of the literary-industrial complex, as bitter as the gooseberry and just as darkly comic. But the critique itself is a familiar one, and the novel’s unfazed publisher makes full use of the very system (glowing recommendations, carefully placed reviews, hardcover versions, and so on) that the author criticises. Like Queen Dido in Virgil’s ‘Aeneid’, the industry has always been able to nourish any amount of poison in its veins.

I found the novel thoughtful and carefully written, but it failed to hold my interest throughout. There are of course many novels about choice, but Mukherjee’s is about economic choice, which is quite a different matter. Choice and preference are really the same thing in economics. On the other hand, much of literature is possible precisely because humans choose to do things very much against their preferences. Worse, we have the capacity to be unhappy even when we get exactly what we had moved towards.

This is the situation Ayush faces in the first (and strongest) novella. Ayush is a commissioning editor at a reputed publishing company, he’s considered to be very good at his job, he has a loving and understanding partner, Luke, a nice house in the London suburbs, two adopted children, an adorable dog, the money to indulge his vegan fetishes, and the societal freedoms to exercise his conscience. Naturally, he is miserable. In the striking opening scene, Ayush chooses to show his children an activist video about what goes on in an abattoir; the kids are traumatised. The rest of the story helps us understand the

kind of mind that can see such a choice as necessary, perhaps even desirable.

The idea novel

Unfortunately, characterisation and the idea-novel have long been an unhappily-married couple. There’s no fixing their marriage, and this novel fails at the task as well. No opportunity for didacticism is wasted. Ayush argues with Luke, an academic economist, over the capitalist Weltanschauung in information-packed dialogues. The children can’t look at a flower without getting a lecture on ecology or pricing mechanisms. Ayush has a friend, Ritika Santosh, a developmental



Choice
Neel Mukherjee
Penguin
₹499

economist. Naturally, they argue over economics; specifically, economic interventions; Ritika claims that the gift of a cow can move most Indian villagers out of generational poverty. Ayush seizes on the word “most”; in his scheme of things, having hope is a sign of corruption.

The family dog doesn’t speak English, and so escapes with food scraps from the dinner table; the reader is less lucky. The overall result is that Luke, Ritika, and the children become unreal; they are just walls on which Ayush can shadow-display his inner compulsions.

The second novella is the weakest of the lot; a smaller version of it seems to have been published earlier. It could’ve been excised (doubtless, only over the author’s dead body) with no loss to the novel.

The third novella links to the first by introducing Sabita, mother of two, who lives in the village of Nonapani, bordering the border village of Dhopabari in West Bengal. Sabita works as a house help – for her employers, she’s a maid – and does a great many other things. Everything is happily miserable, until the family receives the gift of a cow from nameless do-gooders.

Whose voice is it, anyway? The story is told with sincerity and finesse, but it still felt like a performance in the orchards of the unreal. This is the “shown” version of the “told” complaints of Ayush about the perils of “economics thinking”. The story appears to empathise with Sabita and her family, but it presents villagers not as villagers but as villagers-seen-by-urban writers. It’s not a matter of appropriation – a concept that has no place in literary criticism, in my view – but rather, the inability to find a voice that works for the story.

I dare not criticise the actual writing. In the first novella, the author bullet-proofs his novel against criticism. There are sneering comments about sentence fetishists who point out “infelicities in the prose”; about reviewers who complain about story-length; and about vapid phrases like “darkly comic and sharply intelligent”. An overly fussy eater must often go hungry, until one day the hunger itself becomes one of those choices that never feels like it ever was a preference. This is as true for critics as it is for writers. In any case, the writing is such that I came to respect the writer, even though the work itself left me underwhelmed.

The reviewer is an author, most recently of The Coincidence Plot.

2024 WOMEN’S PRIZE FOR FICTION-SHORTLISTED

Sisterhood in Ghana

With twin narratives that throw light on Ghanaian society and the world at large, author Peace Adzo Medie chronicles the life and journeys of two cousins

Geeta Doctor

Peace Adzo Medie is a scholar and a writer out of Ghana who has pounded the lives of two cousin sisters of a joint family and served them up like *fufu*, the spongy cassava or plantain ball that is a West African staple. Just as *fufu* has bounced into the plates of health-obsessed netizens, Medie’s intergenerational family saga nestled in the crook of the fabled gold coast of Western Africa has thrust Ghana into the literary limelight.

Medie has traversed many time zones in her own life. While she was born in Liberia, her fictional world is set firmly in Ghana. After her initial schooling in Ho, a town in the interior of Ghana, her family moved to Accra, the capital. She obtained a Ph.D in public and international affairs from the University of Pittsburgh, and is currently an Associate Professor of gender politics at the University of Bristol.

In her latest novel *Nightbloom*, shortlisted for the Women’s Prize for Fiction 2024, Medie has a somewhat bipolar vision in creating parallel lives for her characters, Akorfa and Selasi. They are cousins born on the same day in 1985, one in the rural city of Ho, the other in the capital of Accra. She draws the reader so smoothly into the life of Akorfa, the only child of her upwardly mobile parents, that we get seduced into seeing Selasi as the poor cousin. Selasi is orphaned by the death of her once-vibrantly-alive mother who passed away giving birth to her brother, and is later abandoned by her father.



Nightbloom
Peace Adzo Medie
Oneworld
₹499

Being in the shadows

While the first plays with Barbie dolls, the other has to make do with a plastic molded doll from the local market. In anglicised terms, Akorfa is the one born with a silver spoon, Selasi, the wooden one. Perhaps you need a wooden spoon to stir the *fufu*, for Selasi does become a hugely successful restaurant owner later in life, with a good husband and two children of her own. In spite of these

disadvantages, the girls love each other. Akorfa repeatedly tells us how much she longs for Selasi’s company whenever she’s invited for night-spends and later on to when they are together at their convent-run boarding school. Akorfa’s fashionable mother Lucy is the one who insists on Selasi being there. Later, we discover that she has her own reasons for inviting Selasi to be shadow sister to Akorfa.

It’s only when we are halfway into the hugely successful life trajectory of Akorfa’s career, who races through school and boarding school to earn a seat in an American University, propelled by her mother’s dream that she should become a doctor, that the novel takes a sharp turn. Selasi upends the narrative in her own voice. Hers is a much more

Writer and academic Peace Adzo Medie. (GETTY IMAGES)

lyrical retelling that centres around the clan network that Lucy despised. After her mother died, Selasi was adopted by her paternal grandmother who nurtured her amidst her other offspring. The grandmother comes through as one of those matriarchs who weave together the strands of the family fabric, knots and all, into a shining web of memories.

United in shame

The two parallel tracks converge as Medie’s gender-activist side reveals itself in a series of brutal episodes. Rape and its consequences within close family circles, even in the so-called liberated West, or more flagrantly in patriarchal societies where it is condoned or sanctified as a right of a privileged male, unite Akorfa and Selasi in a sisterhood of shame.

Medie refers only once to ‘Ubuntu’, the epigrammatic term that Nelson Mandela used to explain his philosophy of inclusiveness, or the oneness of humanity. “I am because of who we all are.”

Towards the end, Akorfa reflects: “While being in America had cracked open the cage, it had not freed me from the prison of Ghanaian expectations... I was I, but I was also them.”

Or as the much-loved Indian poet Nissim Ezekiel wrote: “My backward place is where I am.” Ubuntu lives.

The reviewer is a Chennai-based critic and cultural commentator.

Century of the refugee

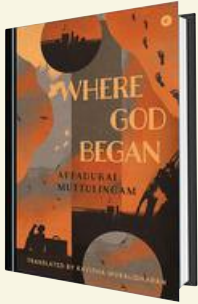
Like the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*, author Appadurai Muttulingam gives us half-told tales and anecdotes from the lives of immigrants

Latha Anantharaman

Refugees come in waves and invasions, according to alarmist politicians and the “natives” watching and judging from the safety of their own perches. But every refugee’s story is different, and this seems to be the century in which we will hear – in which we must hear – as many of their stories as possible.

In Sri Lankan author Appadurai Muttulingam’s novel *Where God Began*, translated from Tamil by Kavitha Muralidharan, a young man is packed off by his family to get him safely out of reach of the rising freedom movement in the island nation. His

mother sells land and pays an agent to take him out of the country. The idea is to reach Canada, eventually, and Nishant gets there by way of Colombo, Moscow, Ukraine, Slovakia, and Germany, being passed around from one agent to another. Having got there, it takes him years to gain honest employment. Whether it is worth spending nearly a decade taking one step forward and two steps back is a question every refugee must answer for himself. Nishant’s case for leaving his home and family looks flimsy, and if the reality had been explained to them in the beginning, his family may have taken the risk of keeping him home. But reality is not what agents deal in. And



Where God Began
Appadurai Muttulingam, trs Kavitha Muralidharan
Eka
₹499

Muttulingam’s style of writing does not aim at novelistic realism, but builds in a chance to tell half-told tales and anecdotes, as the pilgrims do in *The Canterbury Tales*. Nishant is housed at first with seven other refugees, and his housemates change and

change again. They make repeated attempts to cross borders, sometimes being caught, beaten, jailed, only to start over. Many of the pilgrims in this novel make little progress, to our eyes, leaving family and country to wash dishes in an eatery halfway around the world. But, occasionally, a person miraculously breaks through. The scattered storytelling takes away from what might have been a deeper understanding of the protagonist, who emerges as an unformed character who still has a long journey ahead of him.

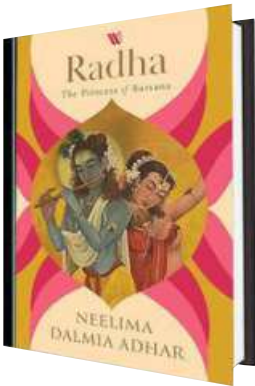
The reviewer is the author of Three Seasons: Notes from a Country Year.

BROWSER

Radha: The Princess of Barsana

Neelima Dalmia Adhar
Westland
₹699

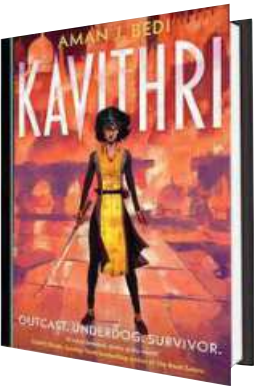
Living in the memories of her childhood, Radha is unhappily married to the head of the Gopa clan. This love story of Radha and Krishna faces a twist when the panchayat accuses her having a scandalous affair with a man 13 years her junior.



Kavithri

Aman J. Bedi
Gollancz
₹499

An outcast and survivor, Kavithri is determined to get into the secretive mage academy, face the Jinn, and gain the power to save her people. This South Asian epic fantasy tells the story of a fearless heroine and her journey of guts and glory.



How the World Was Born

Lopamudra Maitra
Aleph
₹999

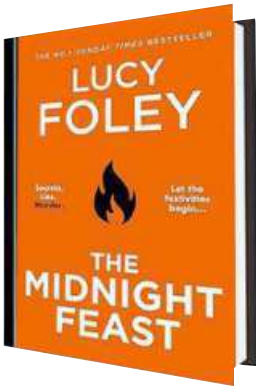
More than a hundred glorious tales from around the country, about how this natural world of ours came to be. With stories about the origins of the sun, moon and all the seasons, the book promises to be a page-turner for all ages.



The Midnight Feast

Lucy Foley
HarperCollins
₹499

The Manor, a new countryside retreat, has opened in the shadows of an ancient wood, bringing together a group of guests, including old friends and enemies. As the evening unfolds and candles are lit for a solstice supper, darkness stirs and a body is found.





Attacking shot
Salim Durani hitting
a boundary in a
match between
India and England
at Brabourne
Stadium, Bombay,
on January 21,
1964. (THE HINDU
PHOTO ARCHIVES)

Lord of flair

A biography, long overdue, sheds light on Salim Durani, one of India’s most colourful and talented players

Suresh Menon

Sometimes an anecdote says more about a player than averages or strike rates. There’s a story here about cricketer Salim Durani hiding behind a newspaper in the team hotel to avoid meeting the chairman of selectors, Datta Ray. Relieved Ray had walked past, he then stretches his legs. And sends the official sprawling.

Durani missed two Tests of the home series and the tours of England, Australia and New Zealand that followed as Ray accused him of deliberately tripping him. This says something about the player, the selector and the state of Indian cricket in the 1960s. The official was king and the players mere pawns.

‘Destiny’s child’

In Ezekiel’s book, *Salim Durani: The Prince of Indian Cricket*, Durani was a man things happened to. When these were good things, he lived up to the author’s portrayal as ‘Destiny’s Child.’ Like all larger-than-life figures, Durani attracted stories around him that balanced on the verge of the possible. For years it was believed that he was born in Afghanistan. “I was born under the open skies in a caravan camp in the Khyber pass...” Durani clarified. If this were a book of fiction, would he be the unreliable narrator?

But this is a biography, and an overdue one at that, of one of India’s most colourful and talented players. Ezekiel has chosen his colours well to give us a portrait of a man with movie star looks who filled stadiums, but was easily misunderstood and often dismissed as wayward or temperamental. Tiger Pataudi, who led him in 15 of his 29 Tests once told me his biggest regret was not making full use of Durani’s talent.

But even his critics considered him a genius who won matches with his left arm spin or batting alone. Durani played an important role in India’s first series win against England (home), and 10 years later, hastened India’s first win against the West Indies (away).

Ezekiel follows Durani’s career with a scrupulousness and attention to detail that places the runs scored and wickets taken in the context of the bigger picture of Indian cricket.

It is difficult not to be a fan of a player who hit sixes effortlessly and bowled out the good and great consistently. Or paid for a bunch of friends to travel to Sharjah for his benefit match and then ran out of money because he bought them all expensive gifts.

Durani was unique, and Ezekiel tells you why.

The reviewer’s latest book is Why Don’t You Write Something I Might Read?.

IN PUBLIC INTEREST

For India to realise its full potential, economist Karthik Muralidharan pushes for investment in good institutions which can restrain politicians

Prashanth Perumal

prashanthperumal.j@thehindu.co.in

India must invest in building the capacity of its government to deliver services in order to reach its full economic potential, argues Karthik Muralidharan, Tata Chancellor’s professor of economics at the University of California San Diego and the author of *Accelerating India’s Development: A State-led Roadmap for Effective Governance*, in an interview. Edited excerpts:

Question: What is the core argument you make in your book?
Answer: Across education, healthcare, welfare etc., the common issue we face is weakness in governance. When we say state capacity we broadly mean the capacity of the state to achieve tasks and goals assigned to it through the political process.

We have a lot of discussions in India about policy priorities. We want the government to do everything, but what we don’t ask is does it have the capacity to do it? And why is the translation of budget into outcomes so weak?

The biggest obstacle to meeting challenges in education, health, child development, police, courts, welfare, jobs etc. is the effectiveness of the government machinery itself. Until you invest in strengthening the capacity of the Indian state, we will not reach our full potential as a country.

Q: You say it’s not in the self-interest of politicians to invest in building state capacity, particularly under a



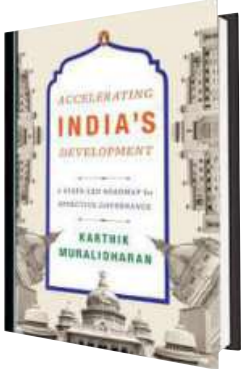
first-past-the-post electoral system. Why?

A: The problem with political incentives is that the payoff to building state capacity usually comes in the long term. So politicians typically don’t invest in state capacity unless there’s a crisis. Further, since India has been a universal democracy from day one, the Indian state has faced pressure to offer welfare at a much lower level of both fiscal and administrative capacity compared with high income countries that built welfare states only in the 1930s at a relatively much higher GDP per capita than India.

Because the Indian state is trying to do much more than it has the fiscal capacity for, the nature of politics has become such that politicians direct the resources of the state towards their vote banks as opposed to creating broad-based public services.

Q: You argue good institutions can help align the self-interest of politicians with that of the general public. How? And why doesn’t India have such good institutions?
A: The main thing institutions do is, by being independent of the government, they are able to better focus on long-term national interests and goals. So, an example of an institution that protects the long-term interest of the public is an independent central bank that preserves the integrity of the currency.

India used to have a world-leading statistical system that was among the best at collecting data. And we created the UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) which protects the integrity of recruitment into the government. Similarly, the CAG



Accelerating India’s Development: A State-led Roadmap for Effective Governance
Karthik Muralidharan
Penguin
₹1,299

(Comptroller and Auditor General of India) is an outstanding institution that audits public finances. So we do have some good institutions, but we have not renewed our investment in institutions.

Q: But who has the personal incentive to build good institutions? We see it is in the interest of politicians to break down good institutions. How do we address this?
A: Politicians typically do not have the incentives to build good institutions because institutions constrain politicians. In most countries at the time of independence, you have a sense of idealism of a set of people who are a bit more willing to look beyond their narrow short-term self-interest. But historically, if you look at how institutions come about, they come about through some combination of the ideas of intellectuals, academics, and think tanks feeding the ideas ecosystem by saying these are the kind of institutions we need. They

Beyond self-interest Union Public Service Commission aspirants hold a protest against the Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT), demanding reduction in the cut-off for the CSAT exam, in New Delhi; (below) Karthik Muralidharan. (GETTY IMAGES AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

may also come about often through public outrage like in the case of the recent Pune hit-and-run case.

Q: You say Indian philanthropists should focus beyond the traditional philanthropic model of building hospitals or schools and focus on improving governance. Why?
A: The government spends about ₹7.5 lakh crore a year on education. Now, philanthropic spending on education is probably ₹15,000 crore, which is about 2% of that budget (₹7.5 lakh crore). Now, if that ₹15,000 crore is spent on building more schools and universities, that is additive philanthropy because it takes the budget of ₹7.5 lakh crore and adds ₹15,000 crore to increase it by 2%.

But if I spend ₹1,000 crore on interventions that can improve the effectiveness of government spending by even 1%, then that could yield an annual return on investment of ₹7,500 crore per year. And if that investment’s return shows up in perpetuity, then you can deliver a return of ₹75,000 crore, which is orders of magnitude higher.

Scan the QR code to listen to a podcast with Karthik Muralidharan.



Maaz Bin Bilal

SherAli Tareen’s new book *Perilous Intimacies* is a work of deep scholarship on the debates around the possibilities of Hindu-Muslim friendship. However, the framing of the book and its arguments appear to be stilted, its sample studies are greatly limited, and there is a sleight of hand executed in its title and endorsements by the author/editors/publisher that needs to be highlighted to concede the limits and flaws of the book. The subtitle of the book ‘Debating Hindu-Muslim Friendship After Empire’ is the main culprit and source of (intentional?) ambiguity and confusion that led to a sense of betrayal of expectations for this reader.

At first appearance, the subtitle of the book seems to suggest that this may be a book that would investigate a comprehensive and diverse set of debates and opinions coming from different stakeholders. This impression is added to by one of the key endorsements by the esteemed professor Talal Asad, renowned scholar of the anthropology of secularism, religion and particularly Islam,



There is little of the lived experience of Hindu and Muslim theologies, or even the political realities of their relationship

who claims Tareen’s book is ‘a learned and thought-provoking contribution to the question of whether there can be a friendship between Hindu and Muslim communities in South Asia.’

In complete contrast, Tareen opens his book by stating ‘this book explores the question of how South Asian

Muslim scholars, especially traditionally educated Muslim scholars known as the ulama, imagined and contested the boundaries of Islam from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. It examines critical intra-Muslim debates over the limits of Hindu-Muslim relations and friendship.’ This stated aim

should have resulted in the attachment of ‘Muslims’ at the beginning of the subtitle of the book, since it only examines Muslims debating friendships.

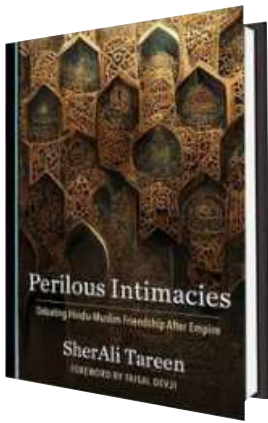
A lacuna
This sample itself continues to baffle, as it has a major lacuna in excluding all Shia ulama or scholars and their theological

Inner truth ‘Traditionally educated Muslim scholars known as the ulama, imagined and contested the boundaries of Islam.’ (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

views as well as the strong political ties Shias have had in South Asia with other religious communities across the political spectrum. Moreover, the very fact that Tareen’s protagonists whose debates he gives us are limited to clerics elides the fact and so contravenes Asad’s stated endorsement of this book in that it does not actually examine the real possibility of Hindu-Muslim friendship in India but only its limited scholarly debates. Lived Islam (or Hinduism) cannot be ignored in the practice of friendship. For example, just before his lynching on accusations of consuming beef, the Muslim, Mohammad Akhlaq, called his childhood Hindu friend Manoj Sisodia to save his life when he was attacked by a mob, and Sisodia did his best to call the police and bring them to the site of the attack. Neither Akhlaq nor Sisodia would have consulted any ulama before these practical and ontological acts

of friendship towards each other. Similarly, few lived friendships are performed or contested simply by scripture.

Rifts within
Tareen later adds and admits: ‘the ultimate objective of this book is to showcase and detail the depth and complexity as well as the fissures and contestations of Muslim scholarly traditions in South Asia.’ One wonders why only the case study of the book makes it to the title and not the



Perilous Intimacies: Debating Hindu-Muslim Friendship After Empire
SherAli Tareen
Permanent Black
₹795

actual motive. Many of the chapters simply work with readings of Muslim writers on their views of Hinduism, and actual chapters engaging with friendship are few. The book’s analysis of Muslim ulama’s self-fashioning since colonial intervention as Muslim through an excessive stress on the place of Islamic ritual to compensate their loss of political sovereignty may well be correct.

Yet, this makes the book’s objective to understand Muslim self-conception largely from the Sunni clerical perspective, alongside the views of Maulana Azad (politician), Mirza Jan-i-Janan (Sufi), and Sir Sayyid (Westernised-reformist), eliding both Shia and other less-privileged lived-Islam views which make the bulk of South Asian Muslims. There is no examination of the lived experience, comprehensive Hindu and Muslim theologies, or even the political realities of friendship between Hindus and Muslims from a truly representative set of positions.

The reviewer holds a Ph.D in the politics of friendship in E.M. Forster’s work. He teaches at Jindal Global University.

CONTINUED FROM
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“In India, we’ve been fed compound chocolate [made of cheaper fats like vegetable, coconut or palm oil] instead of couverture [made of cocoa butter and cocoa mass] by most FMCG chocolate brands,” he says. “The ones who didn’t do it before will start replacing cocoa butter with cheaper oils now. A lot of ‘speciality or premium’ chocolate brands too will play on this, assuming that consumers will not know the difference if they freely interchange the ingredients.”

As for popular chocolate brands in India and how they’re tackling the crisis, a spokesperson for Cadbury said that it was too early to comment, whereas no response was received from Amul at the time of writing this article.

Quality over all else
However, for most specialised professionals in India working with chocolate or cocoa products, cutting corners in terms of quality is unthinkable. When asked if he’d consider using compound chocolate instead of couverture, Johnny of Lavonne is quick to respond, “I’d much rather not have chocolate desserts in my menu at all.”

Chef Nanda agrees that switching to cheaper compound chocolate is not an option for a pastry chef like herself. The way to circumnavigate the crisis is to educate the customer as to what is happening in the world of chocolate, gradually increase the prices of chocolate products, start sourcing more ingredients from Indian craft chocolate brands, and concurrently experiment with newer non-chocolate flavours.

Pivoting to non-chocolate creations seems to be the course of action for bigger players too, even those who may not be outrightly concerned about the price hike presently. At Taj Mahal Delhi, for



instance, 10-15 kg of chocolate is used daily for their themed amenities, cakes and desserts at dining establishments such as Machan and House of Ming, as well as at the pastry counter at Emperor Lounge and for afternoon tea at the Taj Club Lounge. “We have a robust procurement system and our stock and supplies are managed accordingly,” says Salem Lepcha, the executive sous chef. “Seasonality plays a key role in our menu engineering; currently mango is taking centrestage.”

Bean to bar: the way forward?
Historically, India has been a consumer of cheap, mass-produced chocolate. However, in the mid-2000s, inspired by a similar trend in the U.S., a bean-to-bar movement was born in the country, pioneered by brands such as Mason & Co and Earth Loaf (now Naviluna). The emphasis was on complete control over the chocolate-making process, from sourcing or even growing their own cacao to crafting the final bar. The global price hike hasn’t spared such homegrown artisanal chocolate makers either. While they use cocoa sourced from

WHY COCOA PRICES ARE DRIVING PEOPLE NUTS

organic farms in the cacao-growing states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, they supplement this with cocoa from international markets. Moreover, as prices soared globally, cocoa from India too touched a record high of ₹1,000 per kilo in April. But it’s not all cloudy on the horizon for craft chocolate makers in India. Manam Chocolate is barely a year old, but it has already created ripples internationally by bagging the prestigious International Chocolate Award. And Muppala believes the rise in cocoa prices could, in fact, be a boon in

disguise for craft chocolate makers. “More and more people are making decisions based on the quality of what they consume. As the price of industrial chocolate increases, people who have not yet made the switch to craft chocolate may do so now.” He’s also of the opinion that this may be an opportunity for India to produce fine quality

cocoa beans, which so far has been a novelty, as most of the cacao here is produced and fermented poorly, leading to a highly acidic and acrid flavour profile. Currently, Manam’s sister brand, Distinct Origins, is working actively towards enhancing the quality of cacao grown in the country. They have onboarded over 150 farmers in the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh and are using proprietary technology to improve the fermentation, drying and other post-harvest processes, while also mapping the qualities of cacao from various farms.

“The problem that we’re trying to solve is to transform the industrial genetics into fine flavour. We are planning to expand to other cacao growing regions in India,” says Muppala, adding that the recalibration of the market has also seen farmers planting more cacao trees. “What used to be written off as a tedious crop because the price was suppressed for so long has suddenly become lucrative. The new plants will take three to four years to bear fruit, so [in the future] you can safely



The rise in cocoa prices globally has benefited cacao farmers in Andhra Pradesh. Some of us are focused on growing fine flavour cocoa beans, and wish to let the world know that India can also grow top quality cacao. We want to do business with those who give us equitable prices and support us with better farming practices. It’s no longer about high prices for us; it’s about pride in our land and what we can contribute to

BOYAPATI VENKATESWARA RAO
Cacao farmer, West Godavari District

expect a gross oversupply of cacao from India.” Professionals like Nanda and Jagannathan already use Indian craft chocolate brands such as All Things Chocolate from Jaipur, Mason & Co from Tamil Nadu and Rakkaudella from Kerala, and more are willing to explore the market at home. “We are gauging the Indian craft chocolate market for B2B options that can take care of our bulk requirements and also perhaps collaborate on flavour profiles,” adds Johnny. The price of cocoa globally will take a while (up to two years, according to experts) to correct and stabilise, the production is expected to be at least 20% lower this year, and the demand is only increasing by the day given the world’s love for all things chocolate. In such a scenario, quality craft chocolate and fine flavour cocoa from India may be the way forward for not just professionals and consumers in the country, but it may also make the world sit up and look east, finally.

The writer is an independent journalist and photographer who covers travel, food, culture and sustainability.



Dark and expensive
(Clockwise from right) A chocolate pastry from Lavonne; home baker Ipsa Sambhi; and chocolaterier at Manam. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

THE AMAZON FORESTS OF BRAZIL AFTER A 66% DROP IN DEFORESTATION



MEANWHILE, INDIA'S FORESTS WITH ANOTHER 5 YEARS OF DILUTED ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS AHEAD



A date with history (Clockwise from below) Charlotte Carty (fifth from left) with her family and veterans of the Assam Regiment at the end of the walk; the Kohima War Cemetery; military historian Robert Lyman; a photo of Carty’s grandfather Lt. Col. W.F. ‘Bruno’ Brown; and Carty at the headstone of a soldier from the Assam Regiment. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



39 HOURS (AND 80 YEARS) LATER

When Charlotte Carty from the U.K. replicated the journey of her grandfather and his men who fought in the Battle of Kohima during World War II

Deepa Alexander
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In Kohima, once an outpost of the British Raj, the air is often swollen with rain. When the clouds lift, they unveil a blue-green baize of hills with forests of bamboo and clusters of orchid. Kohima War Cemetery, often revered, mostly forgotten, stands tucked away on the gentle rise of Garrison Hill – a place of both revulsion and courage.

It was here, separated only by the few yards’ span of a tennis court, that the British, Indians and Japanese fought in a World War II battle so savage and heroic that it was voted Britain’s greatest ever. Row upon row of headstones – inscribed in English, and some in Devanagari and Arabic – mark the final resting place of 1,420 men of the Allied Forces. Under the burnt stubble of grass lie thousands of

Japanese in mass graves, as birds sing from a cherry tree once used by snipers.

Among the fascinating stories to emerge is the immutable link Kohima has with Charlotte Carty, a 54-year-old lawyer-turned-English tutor who lives thousands of miles away near Sherborne in the U.K. Since childhood, Carty had been drawn to a book by her mother’s bedside that outlined the early history of the Assam Regiment, one of the few that held back Japanese forces at the epic defence of Kohima when Japan spearheaded into Southeast Asia, Singapore, Malaya and Burma between 1942 and 1944.

“The book was about how the Assam Regiment was raised in 1941 by Colonel Ross Howman in Shillong, and in December that year, my maternal grandfather, Lieutenant Colonel W.F. ‘Bruno’ Brown, 44, took over as Commanding Officer. My mother, Mary, was Brown’s younger



daughter, and she was still very young when he withdrew with his troops from Jessami, fought at Kohima, and was killed by a Japanese sniper later in the war in Zigon, Burma,” says Carty, speaking from the Nagaland

capital on the afternoon of April 4, after walking from Jessami in Manipur, 80 years to the hour since the first shots of the Battle of Kohima were fired. “As the Internet grew, I looked more closely for information and there

wasn’t much I could find about the Assam Regiment,” she adds.

Remembering the veterans
1st Assam Battalion spent the first couple of years patrolling the jungles of undivided Assam and on garrison duty at the Digboi oil fields. By 1943, the Japanese 15th Army was waiting to cross the Chindwin, about a hundred kilometres from Kohima. Brown and his men first left for Kohima in early February 1944, establishing defences at the villages of Jessami and Kharasom. In March, patrols brought news of Japanese invaders heading their way.

While the battles of Imphal, Jessami and Kohima are well-documented, the ultra-challenge that Brown and his men took to withdraw from Jessami to Kohima, scatter across the dense hills, then regroup and dig trenches with bare hands to fight at Kohima in a matter of 39



hours with the Japanese at their heels, is the stuff of legend.

“It wasn’t dinner table conversation at home; but this story remained with me. I thought the 80th anniversary was a good time to remember this incredible march, and given that we are losing our World War veterans – a 102-year-old Indian veteran who had fought with my grandfather at Jessami died on March 31 this year – there is an urgency to commemorate it. Those who fought in the Far East theatre did not receive the attention that those who fought in European campaigns received. I like to beat the drum about it because it has a personal connection,” says Carty.

She chanced upon Robert Lyman, a retired British infantry officer, military historian of World War II and author of many books, who in 2012 won the case for Kohima/Imphal to be named Britain’s Greatest Battle at a National Army Museum (NAM) debate. “Lyman thought this was a wonderful

venture because he believed that the history of these regiments stayed in India post-Independence and we don’t have as much information as we should have on the Indian stories of World War II,” says Carty.

Beyond the white man’s perspective
Lyman, 61, also headed the Kohima Educational Trust set up by the Battle of Kohima veterans to fundraise projects for the Nagas who were of tremendous support to the Allied forces. “The war has been largely written from the white man’s perspective on white men fighting the war and it’s a travesty because they were from over 20 countries. This is an important battle for India as well, with an overwhelming number of Field Marshal Slim’s 14th Army being Indians,” says Lyman, joining the conversation.

Both Lyman and Carty had been to the Northeast earlier, and for this walk, roped in 18 people, mostly drawn from the families of those who fought in Kohima, among them Viscount Slim’s grandson and great-grandsons. “Battlefield tourism is now popular among the young in Britain,” says Lyman.

The group left Jessami on the night of April 1 to walk 124 kilometres and arrived in Kohima, 35 hours later. “We didn’t have the enemy at our heels, or run into ambushes, though we have our feet now in a variety of blister packs,” laughs Carty, adding that the Nagas joined them along the way, while others had come from Guwahati. “It was physically challenging but personally fulfilling. I went through several boxes of tissues! Brown died in 1945 just 200 yards from handing over his command and returning home. He was 45, he loved his men and they clearly loved him,” says Carty.

In a countryside too pretty for war, the walk ended with a wreath-laying ceremony at the War Cemetery where Carty wore her grandfather’s regimental cap badge – a rhino. “His medals are at the NAM. This is what I have left of him,” she says.

This, and the words engraved on the Kohima Epitaph that insist to all passing by: ‘When you go home, tell them of us and say, For your tomorrow, we gave our today.’



Scan the QR code to watch Charlotte Carty and Co. on their walk to Kohima, on magazine, thehindu.com



Full bloom (Clockwise from left) Dahlias in the Mughal garden, Amrit Udyan; a message by the 14th Dalai Lama engraved on a rock at Buddha Jayanti Park; Shalimar Bagh; and at Sunder Nursery (Azim Bagh).



BAGHS OF PAST AND PRESENT

A new book by Swapna and Madhulika Liddle and Prabhas Roy shares an intimate portrait of Delhi through its many gardens

knew that there was a need for greenery but more recently, there has been a greed for more and more development... resulting in an almost unlivable city,” adds Swapna, expanding on why they were keen on writing this book. While Delhi’s authorities have worked hard to preserve some of the gardens in the capital, Madhulika points out that they also brought in foreign species while building these green spaces. “The authorities are attempting to

replace those foreign species now with plants that are more local,” Madhulika says, explaining how history and horticulture intersect in these gardens.

Women to remember
While Mughal landmarks such as Safdarjung Tomb and Humayun’s Tomb are very often spoken about, their gardens are not. And it is often forgotten that many of these gardens were built by women “especially

Mughal women”, according to Swapna. Jahanara Bagh is one of them. Built by the daughter of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, it has ceased to exist as a garden in the bustling market of Chandni Chowk. What was once home to fountains and red stone pillars was renamed Queen’s Garden in 1857, and what is left of the grounds is now called Gandhi Park.

Many other gardens built by Mughal women have been at the



centre of redevelopment, in busy corners of Delhi. There have been efforts by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to preserve the Roshanara Bagh. Situated near the North Campus of Delhi University, it is the resting place of Roshanara Begum, Shah Jahan’s third daughter. Built near a canal, which has since fallen into disrepair, one of the rather unusual species seen here is the Bistendu tree. Despite being native to Delhi, it is rarely found in its public

gardens. Another garden with a story among the 14 featured is the Qudsia Bagh. Once the palace garden of a Mughal queen, it originally stood beside a stream which is now a polluted drain. The Bagh served the people of Delhi through floods and revolts, becoming a refuge to villagers affected in the floods of 1852. It was also where the British kept their troops and turned into a battleground between Indians and Britishers in 1857.

BINGE WATCH

1984 with Netflix-era dialogue

With an all-star cast, Audible’s new adaptation of George Orwell’s dystopian novel is a great starting point for beginners

cinematic and it takes considerable liberties with Orwell’s text. For example, Big Brother watching all of his citizens courtesy omnipresent TV screens is described as “surveillance” (a decidedly contemporary word) throughout by Garfield’s Winston. Generally speaking, the text is condensed in a way that minimises ‘third-party’ lines such as portions of police files, newspaper clippings, extracts from fictional texts and so on. The reason this works so well for this adaptation is because of the first point I mentioned: its intensely cinematic nature, thanks to Bellamy and Eshkeri’s superb original score. In almost every chapter, the score begins on an ambient, orchestral note and it keeps the sense of urgency rising with every minute, until the last one-third of every chapter

signals paranoia and despair with every note of the music.

Erivo and Garfield shine
But really, this 1984 depends largely on the star power and stellar work put in by its A-list cast. Erivo, especially, is a revelation as Julia. Although I was familiar with her recent record on TV (HBO’s *The Outsider* is one of her home runs), this was the first time I heard her doing voice work and she is incredible. The romance and lovelorn scenes between her and Garfield maintain a sense of fragility that is paramount to Orwell’s text. Garfield’s big moments typically happen at the end of every chapter, when Winston is usually second-guessing the motives of Julia or his friends and colleagues, wondering whether one of them is secretly a part of the

Reimagined (L to R) Andrew Scott, Cynthia Erivo, Andrew Garfield, and Tom Hardy – the main voices behind Audible’s 1984.

dreaded ‘Thought Police’. When he watches O’Brien during a public gathering, for instance, Winston swings wildly between pegging O’Brien as a member of the

Brotherhood – and the polar opposite, his ‘day job’ as a member of the Party’s inner circles. See how the dialogue reflects this boomerang motion – Garfield’s work is cut out for him here and he expertly steers the audience between hope and hopelessness.

Orwell reimagined
“I caught O’Brien’s eye. Just for a fraction of a second, but it was long enough to know. Yes, I know now O’Brien was thinking the same thing as me. *I’m on your side, Winston*. And just like that, it was gone. O’Brien’s face was as inscrutable as ever. Such a fleeting moment that I questioned whether it happened at all. But I know it did. And it keeps alive in me the hope that it isn’t just me.” As the passage above shows, this is Orwell reimagined through contemporary, Netflix-era snappy dialogue. Purists might take exception to the wholesale cull of the original Orwell lines but for the purposes of a radio adaptation, I found the abridged version to be just right. Audible’s 1984 provides a great starting point to this 20th century classic for beginners. I am quite sure that a significant portion of these listeners will go back and visit (or revisit, as the case may be) the original novel to expand their horizons.

Aditya Mani Jha is a writer and journalist working on his first book of non-fiction.



K.S. Sudhi

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Keshav Gupta, a young social activist from New Delhi, had always wanted to visit Sarvodaya, the house where Mahatma Gandhi lived in Durban, South Africa. When he finally did last year, he was elated. “It felt inspiring to be at the Phoenix Settlement in KwaZulu-Natal where Gandhiji was based. It felt special to be in the house and to learn about his continuing influence in society,” says Gupta, who visited Durban again recently to attend a conference organised to commemorate the 130th anniversary of Gandhi’s removal from a first-class train compartment at Pietermaritzburg railway station on June 7, 1893.

More than a century after he left the country, Gandhi continues to inspire and influence the socio-political discourse in South Africa. There are museums dedicated to the Mahatma and special tours covering the places and institutions associated with his life. And increasingly, these are of interest to not just the average South African tourist but also to Indians from around the world. “Each year, around 800 Indians visit Constitution Hill, where Gandhi was jailed in 1906,” says Janine Levinia Muthusamy, marketing manager, Constitution Hill Museum.

The former prison and military fort has been converted into a museum showcasing the history of South Africa’s struggle for freedom and democracy. “The museum also offers a Mandela-Gandhi exhibition,” says Muthusamy.

From January to March this year, about 16,000 tourists from India



ON GANDHI’S TRAIL IN SOUTH AFRICA

More Indians are choosing to explore the Mahatma’s life in the Rainbow Nation, through specially-curated tour packages

visited South Africa, says the country’s tourism minister Patricia de Lille. There are itineraries catering exclusively to Indians interested in the Gandhi experience. For instance, the six-night ‘Explore Gandhi’ tour package, which starts at ₹5 lakh, includes vegetarian meals and a two-night stay each in Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg and Durban. “Visitors can also experience the Gandhi-Mandela tour at Pietermaritzburg in a special coach,” says Bunny Bhoola, deputy chair of Pietermaritzburg Gandhi Foundation. A visit to Tolstoy Farm in Johannesburg, a safari and tour of



Role model
(Clockwise from left) A file photo of former minister Sushma Swaraj at Pietermaritzburg railway station; a special Gandhi coach for tourists; and the Pietermaritzburg railway station. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & GETTY IMAGES)

Sun City to learn about traditional village life in KwaZulu Natal are also part of the package.

Soaking in history

Last week, a group of 15 tourists from Mumbai left for Durban on a Gandhi tour. Last year, 53 Indians had taken the same tour. “There’s a continuing interest among Indians, especially middle-aged people, to know more about Gandhi’s life in South Africa,” says Syed M. Mujeeb, General Manager of Aerowings Travel and Cargo Agency, Hyderabad, which organises the Gandhi tours. “They are keen to visit the Gandhi ashrams and prisons where his wife Kasturba and he were imprisoned,” he adds.

Recently, in India, Prime Minister Modi drew ire from several quarters when he said in an interview that Gandhi became known globally only after the release of Attenborough’s 1982 film. Political leaders and critics were quick to point to the hordes of global personalities who drew inspiration from the Mahatma in his lifetime. “Several leaders, including

Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, have acknowledged the influence of Gandhiji on the social movements in their countries,” says Ela Gandhi, his granddaughter and former South African politician. “The Gandhian way of non-violent agitations left a deep impact on the American civil rights movement led by King in the 1960s. Various leaders of the African National Congress too acknowledged the influence of Gandhian ideals in their freedom struggle.”

Opinions may vary depending on which side of the political spectrum one belongs to, but for the average Indian tourist, Gandhi occupies pride of place in the history of the nation. “During my visit to Durban, I had the opportunity to meet Ela Gandhi, and she showed me some of her childhood photographs with Gandhiji,” says Keshav Gupta. It was a memorable moment and possibly the highlight of the trip.

(The writer was in Durban on invitation from South African Tourism.)

GOREN BRIDGE

Take your time

Both vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

At the sight of dummy, South realised that he needed four tricks from the heart suit to make his contract. There was no other suit that might produce an extra trick. The chances were pretty good because of his 10 of hearts. He didn’t have to rely on a 3-3 heart split, but a 4-2 split with the jack doubleton would do nicely. It was a long shot, but a 5-1 split with a

singleton jack would do just as well.

South ducked the opening diamond lead as a matter of technique. He won the diamond continuation with his ace, noting East’s club discard, and set out to see what else he could learn about the hand. He led a spade to dummy’s ace and cashed the king. He then cashed three rounds of clubs, ending in his hand, as West shed a diamond on the third round. Two high spades saw

NORTH		WEST		EAST	
♠ A K	♠ 9 7 5 2	♠ 8 6 3	♠ 8 6 3	♠ 8 6 3	♠ 8 6 3
♥ A K 8	♥ 6 3	♥ A K 8	♥ J 9 7 4	♥ J 9 7 4	♥ J 9 7 4
♦ 8 6 4 3 2	♦ K Q J 9 7	♦ 8 6 4 3 2	♦ 10	♦ 10	♦ 10
♣ K J 8	♣ 9 3	♣ K J 8	♣ 7 6 5 4 2	♣ 7 6 5 4 2	♣ 7 6 5 4 2
SOUTH		WEST		EAST	
♠ Q J 10 4	♠ Q J 10 4	♠ Q J 10 4	♠ Q J 10 4	♠ Q J 10 4	♠ Q J 10 4
♥ Q 10 5 2	♥ Q 10 5 2	♥ Q 10 5 2	♥ Q 10 5 2	♥ Q 10 5 2	♥ Q 10 5 2
♦ A 5	♦ A 5	♦ A 5	♦ A 5	♦ A 5	♦ A 5
♣ A Q 10	♣ A Q 10	♣ A Q 10	♣ A Q 10	♣ A Q 10	♣ A Q 10

The bidding:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
1NT Pass 6NT All pass

Opening lead: King of ♦

East discard another club, and South had a perfect count on the hand. West had started with 4-2-5-2 distribution and East had started with four hearts.

South led a heart to dummy’s ace, cashed the king, and confidently led a heart to his 10 to bring home his contract. A simple but elegant line of play!

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

It takes a planet to explore the universe: Dylan Taylor

Berty Ashley

Born this day in 1812, Johann Gottfried Galle, a German astronomer, was the first person to view a new planet knowing exactly what he was looking at. While working at the Berlin observatory he was told by French astronomer Le Verrier that he believed there was a new planet. Galle, the same night, discovered its position. Which planet was this that is currently the furthest from the Sun?

The Earth rotates west to east on its axis with an inclination of 23.45 degrees, from the plane of its orbit around the Sun. Almost all other planets have a similar rotation. There is only one planet that rotates on its side, appearing to roll around the Sun like a ball. Its weird orientation is believed to be due to some huge collision that happened millions of years ago. Which planet is this?

When volcano Krakatoa exploded in 1883, it was the largest and most deadly explosion in recorded history. It caused the loudest sound, sending shockwaves that travelled around the planet thrice. It sent ash 27 km high into the atmosphere. Comparatively, there are



Deadliest and loudest An 1888 lithograph of the eruption of Krakatoa in 1883. (WIKI COMMONS)

volcanoes on a moon too, which send plumes of sulphur 300 km high and emit a tonne of particles every second. This excessive energy is due to the massive gravity of the planet it orbits. Which planet is this?

The largest volcano in (as of now) is Olympus Mons. It is 602 km across and is 25 km high, three times the height of Mt.

Everest, or hundred times larger than Hawaii’s Mauna Loa, which is Earth’s largest volcano. It is believed that it reaches such heights because of the weaker gravity on the planet. On which planet is this super-volcano that future human settlers might have to deal with?

The fastest wind speed recorded on Earth was 408 kmph during Hurricane Olivia, which hit

Australia in 1996. The fastest winds in the solar system though are on Neptune, reaching speeds of 2,000 kmph, almost twice the speed of sound. Instead of air, which compound (that is a natural fuel on Earth) is blown around at these terrific speeds?

In 2014, spacecraft Rosetta discovered water on a non-terrestrial surface and gave credence to the theory of how water could have come to Earth billions of years ago. The molecular make-up of the water though was very different as its deuterium-to-hydrogen ratio suggests it was from a time closer to the formation of the solar system. Where did Rosetta find this water?

Though being the second densest after Earth, this planet has recently been found to be shrinking. It has some tectonic movement happening because the internal rock and molten metal have gotten cooler leading its inside to shrink by almost 7 km. Which planet is this that is already the smallest?

One of the most iconic visual aspects of our solar system is formed by one of two things – either ice crystals or rocky particles and dust. Many theories have been put forward for their existence, such as a destroyed satellite. In 2014, the very first non-planet to have this characteristic was found, an asteroid called Chariklo. What is this

interesting characteristic?

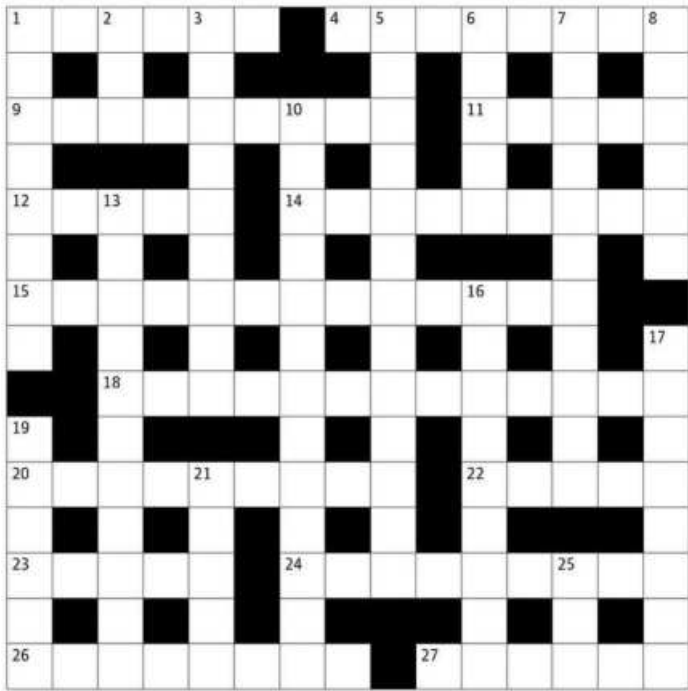
It’s been just 120 years since our first powered flight, but in that time, humans have managed to send spacecraft to visit every single planet in the solar system. The most successful of these was a particular spacecraft that visited Jupiter in 1979, Saturn in 1981, Uranus in 1986, Neptune in 1989 and is currently 20.4 billion km from Earth. Which spacecraft is this?

Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune are all bigger than Earth, with Jupiter being 1,120% the size of our planet. The smallest planet, Mercury is still 38% the size. How many of these eight planets would fit (side-to-side) in the distance between the Earth and the Moon?

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. Neptune
2. Uranus
3. Jupiter
4. Mars
5. Methane
6. A comet
7. Mercury
8. Rings
9. Voyager 2
10. All eight!

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3310



Across

- LA Times first with leader on silly municipal regulations (6)
- Father Ted’s Jewish counterpart went on? (8)
- This restaurant’ll advertise tasty tapenades, olives, ricotta — Italian antipasti — you’ll want the starters! (9)
- Plain and somewhat porcellaneous (5)
- One rambling, greeting king and queen once (5)
- Powerful scent: a billionaire’s characteristic? (9)
- Small Houyhnhnm, one hiding actual intentions? (8-5)
- An entrée with cured cod announced where soldiers get fit? (7,6)
- Many like a society without aristocrats (9)
- Replace a partner’s copper vessel (3,2)
- Outcast’s check rejected (5)
- Exotic tanginess getting act of approval (9)
- Procure leverage (8)
- Nearer the end (6)

Down

- Most of rear end and pecs area is maximally macho (8)
- We’re told of shelter in a field (3)
- Kit swears wildly, has fun on a lake? (5-4)
- Irrational, as the nastiest numbers? (13)

6 Modern experimental facility sent back curry (5)

7 Swap short amount of time — about time! — for confidential info (5,6)

8 Most of words rejected; Everyman’s beginning to get tired (6)

10 In sum, I might be one of these? (5,8)

13 City playing United, twice — plural — a matey kickaround, at first(5,6)

16 No coal tar involved in type of surgery (4,5)

17 Green tea brewed for youngster (8)

19 Carry, with difficulty, a little kitsch leprechaun (6)

21 Kind of song that brings illumination (5)

25 Sit fast, regularly dismissing uncertainties (3)

SOLUTION NO. 3309



Question the validity of information

Efforts to flag false information, promote credible sources, and diversify content can mitigate the effects of echo chambers and illusory correlation

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In the digital age, information spreads rapidly through the Internet, shaping opinions, behaviours, and beliefs. While this instantaneous access to information can be beneficial, it also has a downside: people often accept trends and patterns they encounter online without verifying their accuracy. This phenomenon is linked to the concept of illusory correlation, where individuals perceive a relationship between variables even when none exists. The impact of this can be profound, influencing public opinion and behaviour in significant ways.

Illusory correlation occurs when people incorrectly believe that two events are related owing to their simultaneous occurrence or a biased cognitive process. This cognitive bias is particularly prevalent in the context of social media and online information, where users are constantly bombarded with data, trends, and anecdotes. Humans have an inherent tendency to seek patterns and make connections. This ability has evolutionary advantages but also leads to cognitive biases. When people see repetitive themes or messages online, they may start to believe in a correlation between unrelated factors. This is often exacerbated by confirmation bias, where individuals favour information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs.

The Internet, especially social media platforms, amplifies the effects of illusory correlation. Algorithms designed to maximise engagement often present users with content that reinforces their interests and beliefs, creating echo chambers. This environment makes it easy for illusory correlations to take root and spread. One prominent example is the spread of health misinformation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, various unfounded remedies and conspiracy theories gained traction online. For instance, some people believed that certain foods or vitamins could prevent or cure the virus, despite a



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

lack of scientific evidence. These beliefs often stemmed from seeing multiple posts or articles suggesting such remedies, leading to a perceived but false correlation between these foods and health outcomes.

Another example is the widespread belief in horoscope accuracy. Many people follow astrological predictions and see patterns in their daily lives that align with these forecasts. Despite the lack of scientific backing, the repetitive nature of these predictions and their general applicability lead individuals to perceive a correlation between their horoscope and actual events.

The consequences of illusory correlation can be far-reaching, influencing individual decisions and societal trends. Health misinformation fuelled by illusory correlations can lead to harmful behaviours. For instance, people might avoid vaccination owing to falsely perceived risks, leading to outbreaks of preventable diseases. Similarly, reliance on unproven treatments can prevent individuals from seeking effective medical care. Illusory correlation also plays a role in shaping social and political beliefs. For example, stereotypes and prejudices are often reinforced through selective exposure to biased information. If individuals repeatedly encounter negative portrayals of a particular group online, they may start to believe that these portrayals are accurate and representative. Marketing and advertising leverage illusory correlation by creating associations between products and desired outcomes. For instance, repeated exposure to advertisements that link a particular brand with happiness or success can lead consumers to believe in this association,

influencing their purchasing decisions.

Addressing the impact of illusory correlation requires a multifaceted approach, involving education, critical thinking, and technological solutions. Educating people about cognitive biases and the nature of illusory correlation can empower them to critically evaluate the information they encounter. Media literacy programmes should be integrated into educational curricula to help individuals discern reliable sources from misinformation.

Encouraging scepticism and critical thinking is essential. Individuals should be taught to question the validity of information, seek out multiple sources, and verify facts before accepting them as true. This can help reduce the influence of illusory correlation.

Technology companies can play a role by improving algorithms to reduce the spread of misinformation. Efforts to flag false information, promote credible sources, and diversify the content presented to users can mitigate the effects of echo chambers and illusory correlation.

The Internet has revolutionised access to information, but it has also amplified the effects of cognitive biases like illusory correlation. By understanding how trends and misinformation can shape beliefs, and by promoting media literacy and critical thinking, we can better navigate the digital landscape.

Combating illusory correlation is crucial for fostering a well-informed and rational society, capable of making decisions based on facts rather than unfounded beliefs.



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

▼
Cover story

While it is true that films with pivotal characters essaying roles of those belonging to the queer community come once in a blue moon, it has to be admitted that the casting could be difficult as not many heterosexual actors would be willing to play characters that are gay. ('The truth about India's LGBTQ+ voices on screen'; June 2) Hats off to Malayalam actor Mammooty who played a gay hero in the film *Kaathal – the Core*.
C.V. Aravind

▼
Everyday sustainability

It's very easy to blame the system from the stands, but to go on to the pitch and play what you imagined in your head is another ball game altogether. ('Hope floats'; June 2) Like charity, sustainability too should begin at home.
Dipika Pathak

▼
Wrongful profit

The Coca-Cola giant may be plowing back a fraction of its profits into social emancipation, but all these put together cannot justify the health damage caused by them. ('Africa through the Coca-Cola lens'; June 2) Spending profits from selling a harmful product on a good cause is like committing a sin and then doing charity as atonement.
Kosaraju Chandramouli

▼
Bare minimum

It is somewhat surprising that the article on the gender mapping of Mumbai does not mention the availability of adequate toilet facilities as one of the parameters of urban design to make cities accessible to women. ('Mapping

Mumbai for women'; June 2) The absence of toilets or the presence of unhygienic and poorly designed ones restrict women's participation in the workforce and their continued employment in urban areas.
N. Rama Rao

▼
Train the young

Mansukh Bhai Khatri is a remarkable artist who chose to keep the art of *bela* block printing alive even when it ceased to be economically profitable. ('Bela's last custodian'; June 2) The state must ensure that such craftsmen continue practising the arts handed down to them by their forefathers, and inspire the younger generation to learn crafts from master craftsmen.
Samiul Hassan Quadri

▼
We are so obsessed with western aesthetic practices that we ignore our own art heritage. Craft forms such as *bela*, *ajrakh*, *rogan* and *gamthi* are the lifeline of innumerable artisans in our country. Preserving these artforms is our moral responsibility.
Kirti Wadhawan

Evenings on the terrace

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Be it summer or winter, sun or rain, work or no work, my wife and I must sit on our terrace swing every evening for about an hour. In case children have come home for a short holiday, they also join us. It's family time. Young and old sitting together and sharing their thoughts. We laugh aloud which can be heard even by the evening walkers in our lane. They also smile.

It's the time when we communicate freely about our feelings and emotions. While I talk about my cycling and meeting people, my wife shares her school experience and creative time with children. In case anything is worrying her, we discuss it and sort it out. The aim is not to carry any baggage, and to feel light.

It's also a bonding time, saying "hello" to neighbours from the rooftop. With neighbours waving while watering the plants on the first floor or carrying their toddler, the evening turns lively. Oh yes, you can see the manicured lawns and how it is being tended to.

When our children come, they point out to a lovely ecosystem of birds as the plot behind our house has a large number of trees. The loud melody of the cuckoo, the parrots screeching and the magnificent great coucal are part of it. Sparrows and pigeons come for grains and water kept on the parapet. The talk invariably turns to nature and the birds. Don't miss out the perfect V formation of birds as they return home in the evening. We also love to see the Air Force aircraft doing a sortie or a civil aircraft flying to Chandigarh, Delhi or Srinagar.

The family time becomes wholesome with children adding to our joy and grandchild multiplying our happiness. One has realised that swing time is positivity around, allowing you to bare your heart and refresh your mind.

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Neemuchana is a tiny town in Alwar district of Rajasthan. The area traces its history to the Mahabharata period, and was part of the independent princely state of Alwar that came into existence in 1775. Earlier, it was part of the princely state of Bharatpur.

It is said that rulers of Alwar helped the British in quelling the popular upsurge of 1857. When the mutiny was crushed, the Alwar ruler established friendly relations with the British. As a puppet of the foreigners, he was used to exploit the common people and fulfil unjustified demands such as several new taxes on peasants.

New land settlement



Sad chapter A bullet-riddled building in Neemuchana.

Neemuchana's rage

Royal military fired at farmers in the town in 1925, killing hundreds of them

laws were introduced in 1924, raising the rate of land revenue up to the level of 40-50%. Perplexed peasants were compelled to raise their voice against this unjustified rate, but nobody paid attention to their sufferings. Gradually,

they started organising to discuss their sufferings. Authorities got the hang of things and started new domination. Finally, the peasants decided to raise their voice through a common platform. Govind Singh and Madho Singh of

Neemuchana realised the importance of unity and an organisation. They organised a summit of peasants on May 14, 1925.

When the farmers were discussing their matters at a massive meeting, the royal military surrounded the area and started firing without warning. The official records say 250 peasants were killed and more than 600 injured. However, unofficial accounts say nearly 1500 farmers lost their lives in this attack. When the news of the cruelty spread, several national leaders visited the town to express their solidarity with the agitation. Mahatma Gandhi called the incident the second Jallianwala Bagh. The centenary of this dark episode reminds us of sufferings, sacrifices, bravery, courage and determination.

The numbers game

An obsession with marks does not allow for personal development

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The rat race for higher scores and better grades is one of the biggest problems which children in India face. Many students feel stuck in this vicious cycle as they are made to pursue studies not according to their interests and cram for those numbers that represent academic performance. This game has grown so much that it

devours everything around, overloading young minds and wrecking early lives.

The origins of this obsession can be traced to one belief deeply ingrained in society – success at school determines all aspects of a child's future career. Parents go by the proverb "Morning shows the day" and are driven by this notion often with exceedingly high expectations for what their children will achieve later in life. These hopes



ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

create never-ending demands to score nothing short of full marks every time.

To this pressure, schools are the biggest contributor. They inadvertently foster a culture of cut-throat competition by linking their reputations and rankings to the academic performance of their students. It is like playing a

game in which somebody has to lose for someone else to win, setting one student against another in a toxic situation. Such an environment breeds fear of failure, self-doubt, and anxiety.

These consequences are serious and widespread: mental health problems such as depression, burnout syndrome or anxiety disorder are now very common among young people especially teenage students. Often, the students can't cope with emotions because they are constantly stressed and afraid that they will not meet expectations, and they fall into an emotional whirlpool which only makes it harder for them to show what they can do.



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Prasanna S. Harihar

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Sanjay Chandra

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Pannala Srinivas

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Global focus (Clockwise from below) Hussain Shahzad, executive chef at Hunger Inc., with Daniel Humm of Eleven Madison Park; pumpkin stuffed with prawns, a dish from the Sienna x Jhol collab in Bangkok; Koyel Roy Nandy of Sienna at Lô Quây, Singapore; when Masque went to Cannes 2024; guests at the Sienna x Jhol collab; Yash Bhanage of Hunger Inc; Choudhary making *ezay*, a Bhutanese condiment; and foraging for bamboo shoots in Bhutan. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)



Prasad Ramamurthy

We went in June to Kyoto to cook at Cenci, which has a Michelin star and is on Asia's 50 Best list. Immediately afterwards there was a pop-up at Como Uma Paro in Bhutan. Then we did a residency at 180 Corner in London. We went back to cook at Paradise Soho and at Silo, the world's first zero-waste restaurant. It's been hectic!" said chef Vanika Choudhary, back in September, as she rattled off the places she had recently cooked at. The chef-owner of the now shuttered Noon and Sequel in Mumbai is part of a growing number of chefs, restaurateurs and mixologists based in India who are travelling overseas to collaborate with renowned chefs or to do pop-ups at restaurants and bars of repute. Their aim, say industry insiders, is multi-pronged. Chief among which is to spotlight their work and thereby boost their brand image.

"It's a form of marketing where you showcase your product in a restaurant or bar that has the credibility of being on the 50 Best list, has Michelin stars, or has been recognised by, say, the *Condé Nast Traveller* Top Restaurant Awards," says Diganta Chakraborty, head of brand at The Soul Company. The agency, among other things, works with chefs, restaurateurs and mixologists to create F&B-centric experiences in India and overseas. Their clients include the likes of Choudhary, Kolkata's Sienna Store & Café, and Hari Nayak of Bangkok's Michelin-rated Jhol. Also, celebrity mixologists such as Yangdup Lama, Pankaj Balachandran, and Arijit Bose. "Through such showcases you are recognised by a wider set of consumers, and the industry starts respecting you more."

Fast track to fame

What started as a trickle, with a handful of appearances four years ago, has now grown into nearly one a month with Southeast Asian destinations such as Bangkok and Singapore being the most popular. According to chef Prateek Sadhu, the uptick is a direct result of the "huge shift" in the conversations overseas on Indian food. Sadhu, an early adopter of collaborative showcases, is currently focusing his attention on Naar, in rural Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh. The 20-seater restaurant has been billed as 'India's most ambitious destination dining experience'. "The media conversations on Indian food are now about hyper



THE CHIEF'S GAMBLE

From London to Singapore, Indian chefs and restaurants are increasingly looking overseas for collabs and pop-up opportunities — to showcase themselves on a global platform and make it to coveted lists

The right collaborator

The key to a successful association, says Aditi Dugar, owner of Mumbai's Masque, which made it #78 on 2024's list of World's 50 Best Restaurants, is to find a collaborator who "is in the same box as you. Also, it's strategic to find a partner of stature because your work will then be seen on the same ground as them". Masque has collaborated with the likes of Bangkok's Le Du, Copenhagen's now-shuttered Amass, and New York's Eleven Madison Park. Choudhary concurs: "Cenci champions sustainability, which echoes my own food philosophy. My aim is also to be showcased alongside those I look up to. For example, Jeong Kwan [the Korean chef and monk] is a legend when it comes to fermentation."



local ingredients and micro cuisines. People are talking about food consumed by Dalit communities and dishes from Chettinad," he says.

The outward looking trend is also fuelled by the recognition of Indian talent (not always based in the country) by Michelin inspectors and 50 Best taste-testers. "Honestly, every restaurant is trying to be on a list of some kind internationally," says Yash Bhanage, founder and COO, Hunger Inc. Hospitality. Their flagship restaurant, The Bombay Canteen, which champions India's regional cuisines, was listed at #70 on 50 Best's 2024 Asia List. "The chances that the judges will travel to India and discover your art is quite slim. So, by going over there, you're also giving them a chance to experience your cuisine in their environment. [And back home] we've seen the number of tourists that come because you're on a list. So, it does add to revenue."

Knowledge exchange

From speaking to a range of industry folk, the mechanics of collaborations and pop-ups appear to follow a similar path. Initial contact with a potential overseas partner is made either by a chef, a restaurant owner, or

an experience curator, to suss out interest. Then begins the process of understanding the nuances of each other's cooking. "Collaboration is a two-way street," says Sadhu. "I give the other chef my perspective on Indian food, especially regional cuisines and the usage of spices. In return, I get to peek into someone else's mind; see how they react to the same ingredient, how they use it and learn from that."

The process often involves visiting local markets, meeting producers and dining at restaurants that only a local would know. "You get to see what techniques chefs from other countries use," says Shriya Shetty. The Mangaluru-based chef's presentation of cuisine from Karnataka has found takers at Soul Company pop-ups in Singapore. "But I feel it also helps you reinforce that Indian techniques are great on their own. You just need to bring them into the 21st century to suit the food you're making."

"It's crazy the amount you get to learn," adds Bhanage, himself a trained mixologist. "I'm always writing down flavour combinations to see how we can approach it in our own way. For example, a dish called 'fried rice salad' that I had at Ernest in San Francisco was etched in my mind. I drew on

that memory for the *khimchi khuska* at Papa's."

Playing up their strengths

Where it's a collaboration, menus are created to play both to the visitor and the host's strengths, while ensuring the end result is cohesive. Where it's a pop-up, the visiting restaurant or bar draws up a menu based on what they wish to showcase after taking into account the host's advice on what their customers might appreciate more. "Usually there isn't a fee involved," says Bhanage. "Given how expensive air travel has become, the economics of it doesn't make sense. Unless, of course, there's a sponsor involved whose guests we are cooking for."

The hosts, instead, take care of the travel and stay for the visiting team (usually three to four people) and keep the revenue that comes from the meal. Where there is a revenue share — which is uncommon — the visitor gets between 15% and 20% of the take. "These events don't tend to make an extra profit, and that's not their aim," says Michael Goodman, offering a view from the other side. Goodman is the co-founder and chief visionary officer at Singapore's The Dandy Collection. Their F&B venues include Firangi Superstar, a modern Indian restaurant, and the 50 Best-featured urban *izakaya*, Neon Pigeon. "This approach [of pop-ups] doesn't just introduce our patrons to new tastes, it turns our venues into stages for culinary innovation."

Visiting teams also profit by inviting media and local influencers to get some brand awareness of their own, adds Bhanage. And, at least where Hunger Inc. is concerned, there's also an "ulterior motive". "While we're doing these events, we are also testing the market," he says. "Because, say there's an opportunity to open a Bombay Canteen in Singapore or Dubai, you want to take it but with an educated, well-researched level of confidence."

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



Ambassadors of Indian food (L-R) Vanika Choudhary with Douglas McMaster of Silo; behind the scenes at the Sienna x Jhol collab; Varun Totlani of Masque; Avinandan Kundu of Sienna; and Prateek Sadhu of Naar. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

