



# magazine

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Seema Chowdhry

Four months ago, when Amit Batra, 46, head of operations at a renewable energy company, left his family behind in Gurugram to take up a job in Hyderabad, he knew renting an apartment wasn't worth the hassle. Shibani Marathe, a 28-year-old data analyst at Deloitte, was moving from London to Hyderabad and sought a vibrant community in a new city. Vineet Arora, 39, a Navy veteran and technical manager at Salesforce, lived in a hotel for three months when he moved to Hyderabad and struggled to get homely meals.

All three urban migrants found the answer to their homing needs in co-living spaces – modern, hassle-free homes that are becoming a surprising hit with professionals of all ages. I should know because I am one of them.

Six months ago, when I moved from Delhi to Hyderabad, I looked for apartments close to my workplace but skyrocketing rents and my frequent travels to Delhi often made renting seem like a folly. That's when I heard about a co-living space through my college-going daughter's friend. Her father, Ashish Lal, 48, associate director of process excellence at Novartis, managed his hybrid work situation by renting a co-living space and referred me to Buzz Quarter. For my single room and attached bath, I paid a negligible security deposit, half of what I would have shelled out as rent elsewhere, and got facilities such as Wi-Fi and housekeeping in the deal – urbane living without the attendant headaches.

**Hostel or not**  
Co-living spaces are different from hostels or shared apartments. Often considered a new-age facility for Gen Z or young millennials, these spaces are now finding takers across a more diverse crowd. From 20-somethings navigating their first jobs to seasoned professionals embracing career pivots, these

modern habitats redefine urban living for professional migrants. "I believe co-living spaces epitomise modern, urban, single living. Busy professionals want a functional lifestyle with access to activities and common areas to meet and mingle, to ward off loneliness and the loss of home and family. Co-living somewhat fills that vacuum," explains Sandeep Agarwal, 51, head of design, GMR Group, who has lived in Buzz Quarter, a co-living space in Hyderabad, for over three years. Agarwal could have stayed in a company-provided shared flat when he moved from Bengaluru to Hyderabad. But, "it was just too lonely", he says.

According to a 2021 Statista report, 43% of adults in India often or always feel lonely. In 2023, the WHO declared loneliness a 'global public health concern'. Co-living spaces, rooted in the idea of community via shared spaces and activities, are thus increasingly becoming sought after.

**Epicentre Hyderabad**  
Swarandeeep Singh, 45, an NOC delivery lead for Bank of America in Hyderabad, had never heard of co-living spaces when he moved from Bengaluru in 2023. The option



opened when a friend's son, a student intern at Google the previous year, told Singh and his wife about Boston Co-Living. "We looked up a few places online, saw the videos, and made calls. I have been living here at Buzz for over a year," he says.

"Co-living offers a more holistic lifestyle than a hostel, serviced apartment or paying guest accommodation. It is like living in an apartment community without the responsibility of managing a home," explains Srini Moramchetty, founder

of Skep Co-living in Bengaluru, where he runs four co-living centres. Nehru Babu, CEO and co-founder of Atnest, runs around 15 co-living facilities (2,000 beds) across Hyderabad, and believes affordability and no-responsibility make co-living attractive. "I am 45 now but as a young man I lived in shared apartments and it was tough. Weekends were full of household chores and we were forever chasing the press-wala, grocery delivery guy, maids, and so on. Co-living frees you from these responsibilities."



**Modern family** Moulshree Mittal (in white), Sandeep Agarwal (in green), Amit Batra (in yellow) and Swarandeeep Singh (in blue) with other Buzz buddies on a trip to the Nagarjunasagar-Srisailem Tiger reserve; and (below) residents at a Buzz Quarter in Hyderabad. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & NAGARA GOPAL)

now, with many companies in hybrid or back-to-office mode, Hyderabad has seen a steady influx of tech professionals from other parts of the country. The demand is on an upswing and we are gearing up to open more co-living spaces."

According to a 2024 report by Indeed, job postings in IT have increased in Hyderabad by 41.5% and 24.3% in Bengaluru. This means more urban migrants are on the move to these cities resulting in an increase in housing demand. Babu adds that Hyderabad is seeing an influx and demand rise because of many higher education facilities, too.

**Bending biases**  
One of the common issues migrants face when they move to a new city sans family is finding the right house to suit their needs. Sometimes, it is the distance from the workplace; other times, the high rent or not belonging to the right community become deterrents.

In a country where it can still be challenging to rent homes as a single woman, co-living spaces offer a feasible alternative, especially for female tenants. "I did not want landlords to tell me who I could bring over, what I could eat, or ask which community I belonged to. I did not want to provide a male guarantor in the rent agreement. Why should I? Thank god my friend introduced me to a co-living space. I share a room, that helps with the rent, and can come and go as I please," says Masooma, a software architect.

**CONTINUED ON**  
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GETTY IMAGES

# THE CHANGING NATURE OF GRIEF

Despite recurring themes, Jeet Thayil’s new poems present a shift in their articulation of loss, to encompass larger political ideas

as a delectable surprise. Considerably so, as, his ardent followers would agree, the despondent veil of not being able to ‘equal or improve on your last book’ has lifted – and, oh boy, with such a dazzling comeback.

Grief occupies centrestage again, which, if we were to think of Philip Larkin’s *The Trees*, makes sense. This greenness of grief – its ever-returning nature – remains one of the most haunting expressions. However, Thayil’s articulation has become more outwardly, immediate, and politically-themed.

Sample these:  
*The climate is in crisis, to breathe is to ache in India.*  
*Too cold or too hot, we freeze and bake in India.*  
*They police our thoughts, our posts, our clothes, our food.*  
*The news, and the government, is fake in India.*  
(February 2020)

Or:  
*Children crawl backward like crabs to the cradle, no light, no progress, only a cleansing of the unclean.*  
(‘Wapsi’)

### Symbols of imagination

The sudden unmooring effect on a poet, who has a clutch of words and rhyme to make sense of a nation’s decline into intellectual depravity, censorship, xenophobia, and ecological gas chamber, remains the central theme of the book. *[W]e sick bitches lick/ our wounds and try to recuperate,/ cow logic, cowed rhetoric, cowardly assassinations replicate* – Thayil pointedly locates the political symbol that has gripped popular imagination. The wordplay of ‘cowed’, becoming ‘cowed’, and finally turning ‘cowardly’ highlight the country’s newfound obsession as well as the violence such an innocuous symbol is capable of unleashing.

In ‘The Ghost of Mr. Greatsoul’, a speculative poem where Mahatma Gandhi reappears as a *talkative, still slender house gecko*, Thayil bitterly remarks: *The carving knife you used/ like some tiny god/ still drips blood/ on the old floorboard...* The carving knife is the knife of Partition, causing the family to sit down for dinner in India and get up in Pakistan.

While the politics in the above verse might feel less nuanced, that’s exactly the point of Thayil’s poems. Quite a few of them, in his usual tongue-in-cheek style, turn debates of appropriation and political correctness on their heads: *Why cancel my own pleasure/ and half my bookshelf for good measure/ when all I’m doing in truth/ is shooting myself in the foot?*

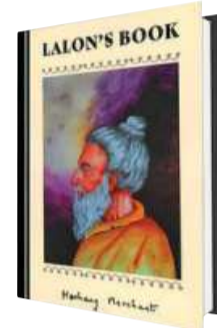
The personal elegiac poems, most of them compiled in the third section, that try to grasp the changing nature of grief with respect to time, move the reader the most. These don’t have the puerile urgency of a ‘small child’, as Joan Didion describes in her 2005 memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking*, but what the American poet Jane Mayhall calls *this complex, heartbreak survival*.

It is harrowing to see a clever poet being outsmarted by grief’s perpetual presence. How it wrecks him (*Time moves like a broken mind*) and, in doing so, wrenches out a new human (*opened my eyes/ to the man I am, still alive,/ all matter, never mind*) remain the most illuminating parts.

*The reviewer is the author of the Hindi short story collection Yeh Dil Hai Ki Chor Darwaja (2023).*



**Rainbow Warriors of India**  
Hoshang Merchant, Akshay K. Rath  
HM Books  
₹450



**Lalon's Book**  
Hoshang Merchant  
HM Books  
₹149

## Missing voices

Hoshang Merchant’s two new works — of prose and poetry — are self-indulgent

Soumitra Das

Social media has spawned a class of so-called influencers who make it a point to visit every art gallery, fair and museum here and abroad, and thereafter very generously share their experience of viewing the latest exhibitions with “friends”.

However, there is a catch. The influencers in their glad rags invariably pose in front of the works of art on display, partially eclipsing the exhibit. Art plays second fiddle to the influencer’s ego.

The same can be said about Hoshang Merchant, who, Wikipedia says, is a “preeminent voice of gay liberation in India”, and is “best known for his anthology on gay writing titled *Yaarana*”.

When I took up his new book, *Rainbow Warriors of India*, co-authored with Akshay K. Rath, I expected it to be a collection of short biographical sketches of 22 “extraordinary individuals from India’s queer community. These gay icons have navigated adversity to claim their rightful place in society” – to quote the blurb. Any effort at documenting the pride movement in India should be lauded.

However, it turned out to be an outpouring of Merchant’s self-indulgent and rambling ruminations on the life and times of these “stately homos”, to pinch a truly quotable quote from that truly great gay icon, Quentin Crisp, author of the famous work, *The Naked Civil Servant* (1968). Merchant can’t look beyond himself. One of the ‘rainbow warriors’, R. Raj Rao, is a gadfly. How I wish Merchant was blessed with Rao’s infectious and irreverent sense of humour.

### Mumbai representation

Most of the notable queers he mentions are from Mumbai although he makes exceptions of filmmakers Rituparno Ghosh and Onir, both from Kolkata. Quite justifiably, the likes of Ashok Row Kavi and Gita Thadani, who were on the frontline of gay activism in the 70s, are there. From the cultural field there are artist Bhupen Khakhar, poet Adil Jussawalla, photographer Sunil Gupta, playwright Mahesh Dattani and dancers Ram Gopal and Navtej Singh Johar, not to forget Merchant himself. Quite expectedly, the writer devotes one whole chapter to himself, tellingly titled, ‘Mourning Became Meena Kumari’. Sadly, such posturing is just exasperating.

What is worse, Merchant never stops bickering about novelist and poet Vikram Seth and playwright Dattani, because, he feels, they never came out early enough, or never at all. Seth’s early masterpiece, *The Golden Gate* (1986), made his preferences clear enough. There was a certain ambiguity, but it is foolish to expect everyone to wear one’s sexuality on one’s

sleeve all the time. Must Merchant be reminded that activism and creativity aren’t always on the same page?

It’s a pity Merchant never mentions some of the other significant rainbow warriors of India. I shall confine myself to Kolkata where I grew up. Krishnagopal Mallick, a journalist, wrote about Kolkata’s gay scene in the 1940s in his fiction which is available in English translation. The late Siddharth Gautam, one of India’s first LGBTQIA+ activists, had co-founded AIDS Bhedbhav



**Love all** A participant at Namma Pride 2024 solidarity march in Bengaluru last month; and (bottom) Hoshang Merchant.  
(AFP, GETTY IMAGES)

Virodhi Andolan around 1989. There’s Pawan Dhall, a queer activist from the early 90s, who had co-organised a Friendship Walk march on July 2, 1999, now dubbed South Asia’s first Pride Walk. Sudarshan Chakravorty of Sapphire Creations Dance Company staged *The Alien Flower*, India’s first queer-themed dance production in 1996. He continues to organise international dance fests. And there is young performance artist Debashish Paul and designers Nil and Kallol Dutta, both of whom have high visibility. The bibliography in the last pages can be of use.

### Lalon by chance

The problem is that famous writers and artists are, in general, treated with a reverential awe, and their work automatically becomes immune to criticism. Merchant “is the author of 25 books of poetry. He was awarded a Lifetime Achievement award at Queer Lit Fest in 2023”.

The reader should judge Merchant’s verse, in his new collection *Lalon’s Book*, for her/himself. Here is an entire poem titled ‘Epilogue’: *I traced a whole alphabet/ Finger on thigh/ I created a continent/ That slipped without a sigh*. No invocation of Kali, Ginsberg or Lalon Fakir, Bengal’s celebrated philosopher and mystic poet, can redeem this.

And now a couplet that is no better than the others: *No man nor maid be dry/ Lalon has grown up/ Lalon cries...*

There are certain lucid interludes – *I divided my heart/ Into man and woman/ To keep my sanity/ To heal my heart* – but these are few and far between.

The cover of *Lalon’s Book* is a painting, presumably of Merchant’s profile, his locks worn in a top knot. Poor Lalon in reality was a scrawny old man. His only surviving portrait was sketched by Jyotirindranath Tagore, Rabindranath’s elder brother. Merchant appears again on the cover of *Rainbow Warriors* in a black-and-white photograph. This does not become one who has named a book of poems after a bard-philosopher about whom few biographical details are available. The portrait is there only by pure chance.

*The reviewer is interested in Kolkata’s vanishing heritage and culture.*

## July’s perimenopause fiction

In *All Fours*, filmmaker and author Miranda July presents a 45-year-old writer who, after receiving an unexpected \$20,000 from a licensing deal, decides to treat herself to a trip to New York City. Instead of continuing to New York, however, she decides to stay at a motel just outside her hometown Los Angeles, and transforms her room into a personal sanctuary with the bonus money. As the days pass, she finds herself rediscovering a zest for life and a renewed sense of self while maintaining the facade of her original plan to her family.

Soon after its release, *All Fours* found its way to nightstands across the U.S., especially among

middle-aged, long-partnered women, with whom it struck a chord, not for advocating escape but for redefining intimacy. Such was the book’s influence, *The New York Times* reported, that these women began having conversations about sexual freedom on Instagram DMs and even in book clubs.

**Scan the QR code to read the full review online.**

– Pranavi Sharma



## 3 book review platforms to track

Engage with the book community, and it won’t be long before you stumble upon readers expressing their preference for an up-and-coming app named The StoryGraph, the cataloging platform called Library Thing or even Bookly, which offers readers ambient sounds of a flowing river or fireplace.

While it looks like Amazon’s Goodreads, despite last year’s review bombing controversies, is here to stay, we might be at the threshold of a slow but steady market shift.

**Scan the QR code to read more.**

– Vidhya Anand



### Girls Who Stray

Anisha Lalvani  
Bloomsbury  
₹699

This coming-of-age thriller set in Noida took the author eight years to complete. Spurred on by heartbreak, criticism and some tough love, Lalvani decided to not let go of the writer in her, and penned this first novel, which is based on a case that took place in Delhi nearly 20 years ago.



### The Homecoming

Preeti Shenoy  
HarperCollins  
₹399

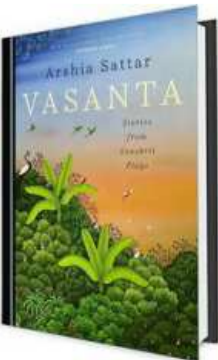
One of India’s bestselling contemporary authors, Shenoy is known for her youthful stories that shine a light on modern relationships and society. In this sequel to her 2022 novel *A Place Called Home*, she revisits themes of identity and living up to society’s expectations.



### Vasanta: Stories From Sanskrit Plays

Arshia Sattar  
Juggernaut  
₹599

In her ongoing mission to make Indian mythology and folklore more accessible and mainstream, the author-translator delivers this standout collection of plays by Kalidasa, Vishakhadatta and others, offering a vivid glimpse of life in classical ancient India.



### The Girl in the Window

Diana Wilkinson  
Boldwood Books  
₹265 (ebook)

How does one go from being an international tennis player to bestselling thriller writer? The author whose novels mostly deal with “obsession and relationships” says her inspiration comes from the women she coached tennis to over the years and the confidences they shared over coffee.



INTERVIEW

A LOYALTY TEST

With years of research and ground reporting, Rahul Bhatia unravels the minority experience in contemporary India

Ziya Us Salam  
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Writer-journalist Rahul Bhatia's *The Identity Project: The Unmaking of a Democracy* is an investigative memoir, in which he attempts to find the roots of Hindutva. It is an honest yet disturbing account of contemporary India, as he takes readers through the protests around the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the 2020 Delhi riots, and the aftermath. Excerpts from an interview.

**Question:** *This appears to be the age of triumphal majoritarianism. What were the early signs that Indian society was changing?*

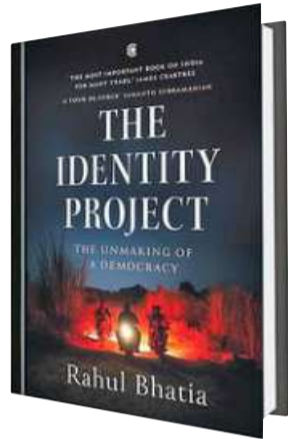
**Answer:** It was the instances of people being beaten into standing up for the national anthem in cinemas about 20 years ago. The weaponisation of the anthem and its introduction in unexpected contexts largely went unquestioned. The dissent to the coercion in it was somehow seen as traitorous. People were genuinely offended by theatregoers who did not stand when it played. I don't think they considered that the dissent was not against the anthem, but against its very political imposition. I could see the manipulation of public emotion clearly. The fealty to authority, the unwillingness to question, and the submission to force and public pressure have existed for a long time, but in crucial moments like this one you see these societal qualities surface all at once, and when matters cool, society is transformed in some way. In this case, it was a loyalty test that became a part of everyday life. Nationhood is now wound up in an everyday activity.

**Q:** *Hindus comprise about 80% of the population. Yet the BJP and the RSS have instilled a feeling of insecurity in a large section of the community. Can you expound on the tools used for it?*

**A:** It's a question I grappled with while reporting the book. What made people so eager to believe conspiracies, especially when conspiracies had a political aspect? After hundreds of interviews and archival work, I was able to construct a rough framework about the methods and approaches. One method was to blur the line between what is real and what is not by flooding the public sphere with misinformation; this has the effect of tiring people out and making them closed to the truth. I recognised a pattern of communication to the larger public that did not state things clearly. It was suggestive, implying something about a person or a group of people, attributing some moral failing or sinister design to them. By not naming that group, the receiver of the communication was left to take that last step of making the connection. That gives the suggestion of power because making a connection is a proactive act; it comes from you. And if it comes from you, you tend to believe it.

**Q:** *What lessons does Partha Banerjee's RSS experience hold for a foot soldier?*

**A:** Partha is one of the most important people in the book. He grew up within the RSS, and then became deeply sceptical of its methods. He found it incredibly hard to break away, and now that he has, he sees them with immense clarity. When I met him, he was travelling



**The Identity Project: The Unmaking of a Democracy**  
Rahul Bhatia  
Context/Westland Books  
₹899

the country to share what he knew about the organisation, how it recruits people, how it wins trust within communities and families. In our interviews he wanted me to know how betrayed he felt by the abandonment of his father, an RSS loyalist. Partha came away convinced that it abandoned people once they had fulfilled their purpose. But there's an element of luck in this reflection. He had a sceptical parent, and her influence allowed him to walk away.

**Q:** *Why has the RSS leadership's divisive politics not percolated enough to the common man?*

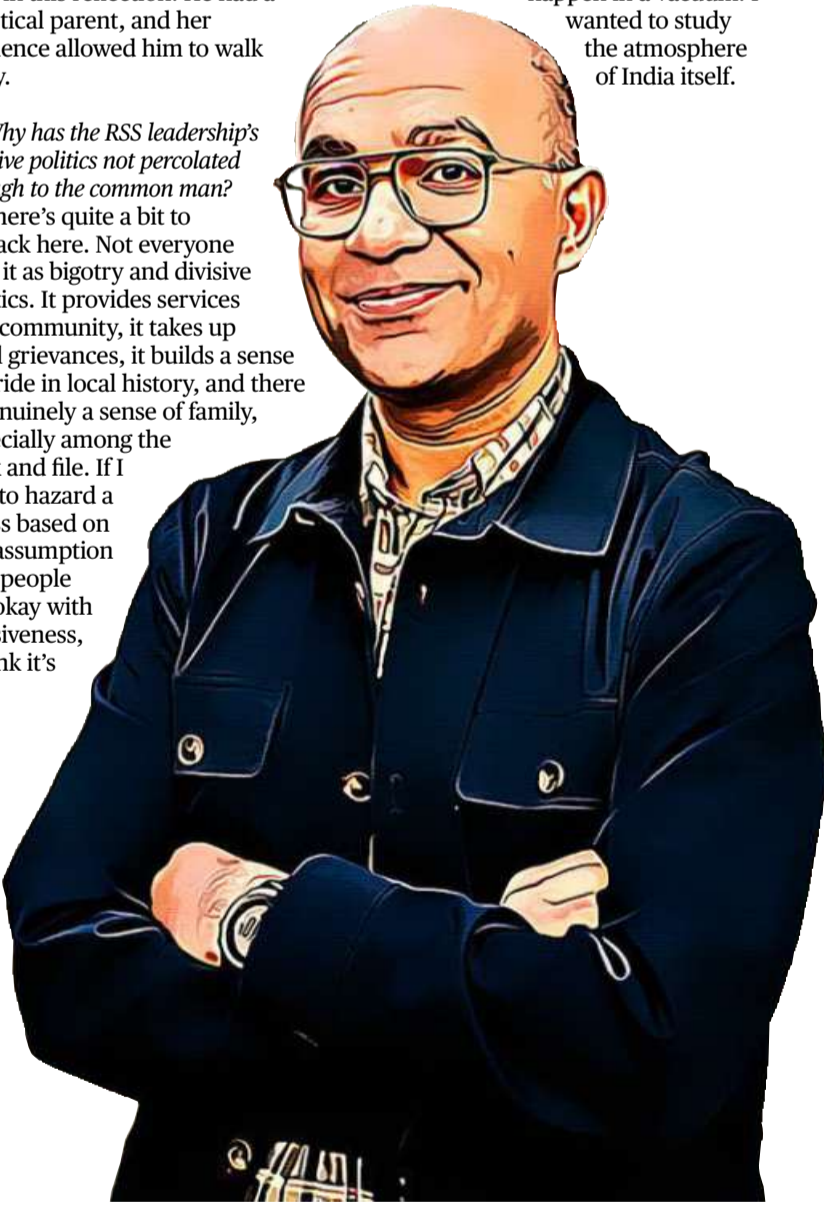
**A:** There's quite a bit to unpack here. Not everyone sees it as bigotry and divisive politics. It provides services and community, it takes up local grievances, it builds a sense of pride in local history, and there is genuinely a sense of family, especially among the rank and file. If I had to hazard a guess based on the assumption that people are okay with divisiveness, I think it's

**Seeking justice** A protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, at Shaheen Bagh, in New Delhi; and (below) Rahul Bhatia. (SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

because they also see the more humanitarian side of the organisation. That's one part of it. The other is that people see bigotry as just one of those things, a quirk, rather than something that needs correction. I don't know if the percolation of a negative opinion is the issue here. It's more like, why are people okay with this behaviour at all?

**Q:** *You talk of CAA protests and the violence in northeast Delhi. Wasn't the police violence to control the mob a manifestation of state power against dissenters?*

**A:** I have reported these events by recreating how the protests and the violence unfolded. I interviewed dozens of victims and other participants, and by following a witness as his case wound through court. The people felt the police could have done much, much more. But I wanted to go beyond the moment, because CAA did not happen in a vacuum. I wanted to study the atmosphere of India itself.



Architect of change

Looking back at the life and work of Ratan Tata

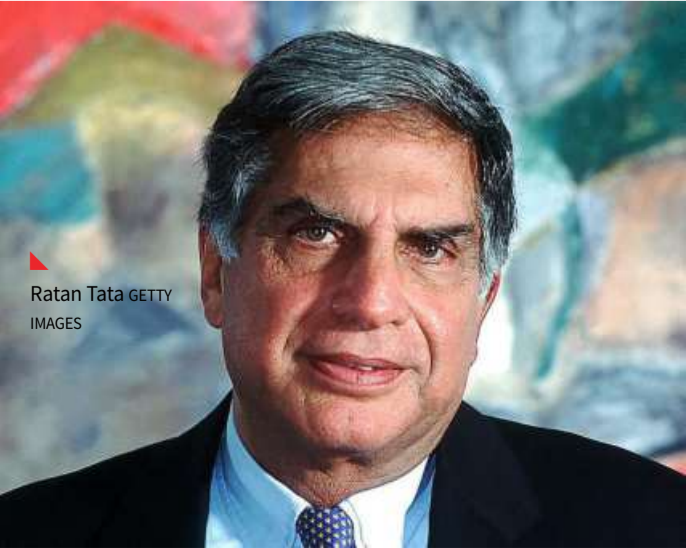
Kunal Shankar  
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Ratan Naval Tata (December 28, 1937 – October 9, 2024) is considered to be the chief architect of the Tata Group's rise to a global salt-to-software conglomerate, valued at more than \$400 billion. An e-book,

**Ratan Tata: A Life in Innovation and Enterprise**, published by The Hindu Group Publishing Pvt. Ltd., assesses his life and work with essays led by friend and colleague Arun Maira.

**Rare photographs**  
We also have essays by *Businessline's* Janaki Krishnan and P.T. Jyothi Datta, and *The Hindu's* D. Suresh Kumar, aside

from rare photographs from *The Hindu's* archives. R.N.T., as Ratan Tata was fondly called by his colleagues and peers, was a highly unlikely contender to head the group after Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoi Tata, or J.R.D., fell ill and stepped down, appointing his nephew Ratan, in his place. But R.N.T., with his background in architecture,



**Ratan Tata: A Life in Innovation and Enterprise**  
The Hindu Group  
₹191

steered the group ably in his two decades at the helm, turning it into a multinational, though, along the way, there were several fits and starts, hits and misses. There were some messy boardroom and legal battles,

labour unrest at group companies, and allegations of unfair treatment of tribal populations and the environment. But in the final assessment, R.N.T. emerged as an astute businessman, who prioritised ethics, and long-held company values over strategic decisions to maximise profits.



Download the e-book here, or get it on Amazon.



There's a bit of real-life Michael Corleone in him, as Pacino writes in a raw and untethered autobiography

AND JUSTICE FOR AL

Raja Sen

Al Pacino's autobiography, *Sonny Boy*, is not a well-crafted book. The actor, 84, seems aware. While describing an artless biography he once read, he critiques his own: "Let me tell you, it read like this: He does this. Then he does that. Then he goes here. Then he goes there. Like the book I'm writing now... It's like saying, Hamlet comes home. Then he sees his father. Then he goes to his mother."

Mercurially, Pacino's life vaults over stubby sentences and inconsistent syntax. The clunkiness only makes the voice more authentic, as if readers are sharing a beer with Pacino while he's saying "Actors, man. There's nothing like actors," or labelling himself "as dumb as a donut." Most of the book feels

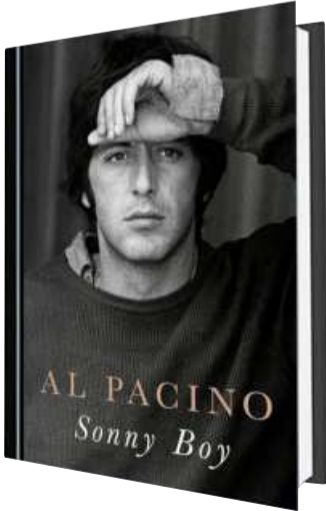


**Sicilian roots** A still from *The Godfather*; (above) Al Pacino in New York. (AP)

raw and untethered – like some of Pacino's early masterpieces – and I came away from *Sonny Boy* feeling like I had been on a bender with the great performer.

Greatness, of course, takes time. Pacino started out on infinitely small stages – "as I was smoking, in character, a woman from the audience reached in and gave me an ashtray" – and climbed to Broadway, where Jackie Kennedy came backstage to applaud his Richard III. "After performing one of the greatest plays of all time, you're liable to do anything." In that post-performance delirium, the actor, slumped in his chair, put out his hand for Kennedy to kiss.

**Sniffing a rat**  
Michael Corleone is part of



**Sonny Boy**  
Al Pacino  
Century/PRH  
₹1,399

accomplished something special, and they treat you that way, for about a week."

Names are, invariably, dropped. He shared a flat with Martin Sheen where a young Joan Baez would play guitar cross-legged, acted with his idol Marlon Brando, and fell in love with Diane Keaton – "We go together like two straws and a Coke," he writes, sweetly. The most mentions are saved for Chekhov, and Pacino seems fundamentally shaped by the pocket-sized literature he carried around in his youth.

**Uneven filmography**

"I'm a man who has more Golden Raspberry nominations than Oscars." There are masterpieces – *The Godfather*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Heat*, *Scarface*, and *Justice For All* – and unbearable clunkers like *StmOne* and *Gigli*. Has any iconic actor done as many awful films? Pacino, unfortunately, kept going broke. "I'll never learn, and that's my problem," he writes. "Or my gift."

More than anything, Pacino loves the stage, romanticising its transcendent, transient glories. "In movie acting, the high wire is on the floor. Stage acting is up thirty feet in the air." He calls playwrights prophets, rhapsodises over performances he's witnessed, and describes shouting iambic pentameter into the night, as he would "walk the streets of Manhattan, bellowing out monologues." Actors, man.

It was his mother who called him 'Sonny Boy.' Pacino calls her "a Tennessee Williams character," and feels the reason he never got married may have been to counterbalance his father's five marriages. His tone is of childish curiosity – as if he's wondering if he'll ever finish talking, or if we're still listening. Sometimes he repeats himself, dismisses a film too swiftly, veers into nostalgic cliché. In the end, Pacino acquaints us with the kid inside him, excited and impressionable and romantic. This book lets us say hello to his little friend.

*The reviewer is a film critic, columnist and screenwriter. He is currently creating an absurd comedy series.*

**CONTINUED FROM**  
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Used to living in dorms in the U.S., sustainability consultant Moulshree Mittal, 30, had experienced co-living before, and when she moved from Ghaziabad to Hyderabad, instead of looking for apartments or sharing a flat, she

With migration comes the search for home, a space where you recreate the life you left behind or build a new lifestyle you always dreamed about. Essentially, it has to be a space that gives comfort, enables social interactions, and provides financial respite. Ashish Lal, who works from the Hyderabad office for two weeks and from home in Delhi for two weeks, says, "When hybrid work came into practice, renting an apartment no longer made financial sense. I had lived in a two-bedroom flat in Hyderabad before COVID-19, and it was just too much work and expensive too, since I hardly used the second bedroom. Besides,

As a veteran, he and his family were used to moving around, but now his wife, a dentist, has established her career in Delhi. When Arora decided to take on his current role in Hyderabad a year-and-a-half ago, he was clear about three things: "I wanted to be a

Diljit Dosanjh show in Hyderabad with me," adds Singh. This camaraderie and openness to join whatever activity that suits you without any pressure has been one of the most significant plus points for me. Moving to a new city was lonely and it's hard to make friends.

● Most co-living spaces have table tennis, foosball tables and carrom boards. Some organise movie nights or special dinners during festivals, others plan emcee-led interactive games as ice-breakers every few months.

*The writer is a senior professional who moved from Delhi to Hyderabad and has lived in a co-living space for seven months.*

**Harini Nagendra**

Then there is India's loneliest tree, a giant sequoia imported from the Sierra Nevada mountains in the U.S. and stranded in Jammu – surrounded by strangers, unable to reproduce, because it is the only one of its kind in the region. And the *pilkan* tree in Makhel, Manipur, sacred to the Nagas as the

## A painting of a bearded man with a white head covering and a long white robe, standing in a forest. He is holding a staff and looking towards the viewer. The background is a large, gnarled tree with thick branches and green foliage. The ground is covered in brown leaves and dirt.

As Natesh poetically describes, these trees “stand on the sands of time and observe hundreds of generations flow past them like water”. Unfortunately, thus far, little attention has been paid to historic or iconic trees in India. In doing so, this book fills an

When we are faced with daily reports of tens of thousands of trees being cut down for mining, road expansion, industrial parks and ports – why should we care about 75 individual trees? As Natesh

reminds us in his insightful introduction, the ecological crisis that grips us is a crisis of imagination. We lump trees into an amorphous collective, implicitly assuming that one tree is the same as another. This is the fundamental misconception that is behind

**Roots and leaves** Sagar Bhowmick's illustrations in S. Natesh's book *Iconic Trees of India*.



misguided approaches to development, that believe that it is possible to cut down century-old banyan trees on India's highways and replace them with saplings, or decimate forest land and 'compensate' by afforestation in another location.

I'm sure each of us knows at least one iconic tree with which we have a personal affinity. The importance of individual relationships of this kind cannot be emphasised enough – for they rekindle the love for nature in us. In this, books like *Iconic Trees of India* play an important role, inspiring us to reconnect to nature. Even in the dysfunctional world in which we find ourselves today, it is possible to find alternate ways of living in which humans co-exist with nature, thriving together. This is an imagination we need to recover.

*The writer is Director, School of Climate Change and Sustainability, Azim Premji University.*

Rohan Chakravarty



**Dogs are animals, too**  
 I don't enter the terrace – for which I continue to pay 13 units of my blood as EMI – as I have this rabid prejudice against polluted air. So I pick up the phone and call her.

“Katta is claiming you have given permission for a dog?”

“Yeah, poor child, he is alone when we are at work. A pet will give him some companionship.”

“But you told me before we got married that you hate dogs!”

“I never said that,” she said. “I said I hate animals, not dogs.”

“Have you gone crazy? Dogs are animals! Ask anyone!”

“Can you stop being so

ILLUSTRATION:  
SREEJITH R. KUMAR



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

patronising?" she said. "I am aware that dogs are animals. I'm just telling you what I actually said – I said 'animals', not 'dogs'."

"Fine," I said. "I'll make sure to incorporate this important correction in the minutes of the conversation we had 75 years ago. Now can we please address Katta's puppy tantrum?"

"Look," she said, "I personally don't want another dog in the house –"

"Excuse me? Did you say 'another dog'?"

— but this is not about you and me. It's about him and what he wants. Let's give it a shot."

"But he himself is hardly more than

**Being minority**  
I felt betrayed. She knew I would never agree, and cynically used this knowledge to put me in the most unpopular position in the country today – that of a

**Aisiri Amin**

Climate Change and Sustainability. She feels that when people engage with public parks and biodiversity, either through book clubs, nature walks or social media, it becomes difficult to use the space for infrastructure projects or land capture. "Policymakers also appreciate the importance of green

## How Chandan Tiwary in Delhi, Ashwathi Jerome in Kochi and others are harnessing the power of social media to build bridges between people and urban biodiversity



For people such as Tiwary and Jerome, it's not just about sharing a picture or two online but about equipping people with a "tree lens". People pass by trees every day without a second glance. By sharing information, these creators hope to build familiarity through awareness.

The lack of familiarity is also what drove author and filmmaker Pradip Krishen to dive deep into trees and related ecology. A few years ago, he realised he had no idea about the tree standing by the gate of his house in Delhi. It had been there for about 30 years. “This sudden realisation sparked a curiosity to learn not just about that particular tree but the trees all over Delhi,”



(Clockwise from above) Chandan Tiwary's photo of a ghost tree in Delhi; Akshay Onkar; Tiwary; and a *mahua* tree shot by Onkar. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Krishen also says that while it is good to see social media being used to promote awareness about trees,

**I saw a tree in Delhi's Sunder Nursery that no one around me could identify... It turned out to be a carrotwood, endemic to New South Wales**

**PRADIP KRISHEN**  
Author and filmmaker

An important way of harnessing social media in conservation efforts is in the education space, Nagendra emphasises. "It helps in increasing the number of people observing and reading about trees, which is important now more than ever," she says. The content creators seem to agree. "When you learn about trees, you get protective of them. Sustained interest in trees can bring about awareness about climate change and preservation," concludes Jerome.

*The independent journalist specialises in gender, culture, and social justice.*

Ritika Kochhar

The first time I heard of Bina Sarkar Ellias was in 2017, while writing an article on her daughter Yuki Ellias’ play. I was introduced to *International Gallerie*, a global arts and ideas journal that Bina, a poet and curator, founded in 1997.

Her new work, *The Big Book of Indian Art: An Illustrated History of Indian Art from Its Origins to the Present Day* (Aleph Book Company), though is very different in its concept. It’s a 688-page encyclopaedic look at more than 300 Indian artists. While it devotes 22 pages to art from 20,000 BC till 1854 – when, after the Great Exhibition in London, the School of Industrial Art was set up by the British in Kolkata to help train Indian artists to learn craft skills – the story, as it were, really starts from 1896 when art historian E.B. Havell and artist Abanindranath Tagore introduced Oriental art and founded the Bengal School of Art.

From there, the book is divided into eight sections, six of which cover artists who were part of a landmark art movement or a school of Indian art. The Bombay School, for instance, looks at seven artists, including Pestonji Bomanji, M.V. Dhurandhar, and S. Haldankar. While the Calcutta Group, Chennai’s Progressive Painters’ Association and Cholanandal Artists’ Village, the Bombay Progressive Artists’ Group, and the Baroda Group look at around nine artists each.

“The intent was to reach out to the larger public, including the uninitiated; to open doors to a galaxy of experience that would nudge them to appreciate the visual



## READY RECKONER TO INDIAN ART

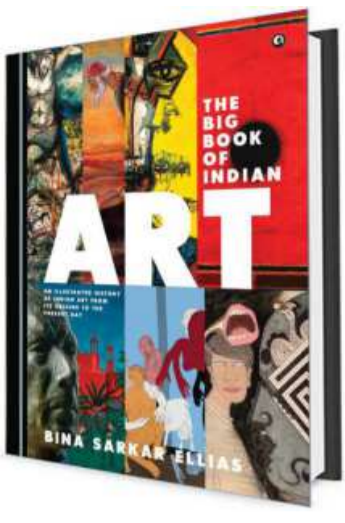
Bina Sarkar Ellias’ new book on Indian artists is a must-read this season, for its curation and little known facts

arts,” Bina says. “I do believe that art and culture humanises. In this fractured world, I hope to foster unity in diversity. Therefore, this book is inclusive. It’s connecting with those outside the sanctum of the art community.

**Research across 45 years**  
The book is a visual encyclopedia of the artists of India. Each entry is accompanied by an artwork, its provenance, and details of the artists, including their birth and background, style, awards and

exhibitions. You can see Bina’s style in many of the entries, her voice emerging like a football forward waiting for a chance to share some personal details and unknown facts about the artists.

For example, Indian-American artist and printmaker Zarina Hashmi’s favourite work, *Letters from Home* (2004), is based on letters from her sister. Or that painter Sunil Das won a National Award while still an undergraduate. It took her more than two years to write the book, and the immaculate



notes at the end reveal that many of the details come from conversations she had had with the artists. She has kept hand-written notes in her old diaries from her approximately 45 years of engagement with exceptional artists, many of whom are no more.

“I’m not an art historian or an academic, and my vocabulary is devoid of art theory. My love for art and literature is organic,” she says. “Art history studies, by and large, are inclined towards not just historical documentation and iconographic readings, but also interpretations with a certain stylistic analysis, which many lay people cannot comprehend. My joy is in knowing that the book offers a rudimentary education to people outside the art community.



**Where are the traditional artists?**  
*The Big Book of Indian Art* also acts as a corrective by including a large number of women artists, especially modernists such as Madhvi Parekh, whose work shows an intuitive connection to her surroundings, vocalist Shobha Broota, who infuses rhythm into her abstract works, and the

late Gogi Saroj Pal, who brought life to her folk-style narratives. But as a writer, I could debate the exclusion of certain artists such as Shilo Shiv Suleman, Rithika Merchant and Pritika Chowdhry, for example. Suleman’s Fearless Collective with its 400-odd artists, uses art to protest against gender violence across the world; Chowdhry creates anti-memorials to traumatic geopolitical events, such as partitions and terrorist attacks; and Merchant explores comparative mythology as well as science and speculative fiction. Each is an example of what Indian artists are doing worldwide.

Equally, I miss contemporary indigenous and traditional artists. For instance, besides folk art, murals and street art have gathered momentum. But Bina says that it’s impossible to include every art form.

There is a notes section at the very end that gives a bibliography so detailed that it’s probably worth buying the book, just to get an idea of published books, articles and catalogue on each artist. The index of artists can, in a pinch, also stand in for the table of contents, which is missing at the beginning of the book. One downside is the absence of artist portraits. The other is the poor quality of publishing, which does not do justice to the luxuriousness of the concept. The paper and the reproduction quality of the photographs are quite low.

Bina’s research on the over 300 artists is painstaking and thorough. Now, I’ll wait for her work on contemporary traditional artists, if and when she decides to write it.

*The writer is an expert on South Asian art and culture.*

## Down three is good bridge

North-South vulnerable  
South deals

**Today’s deal is from a recent team match in Australia. At this table, West threw in a cocktail-hour preempt. North had an easy bid and the normal contract was reached. South played dummy’s queen on the opening spade lead and lost to East’s king. East led back a spade, clearing the suit. South won in dummy and**

led a diamond to his queen. West won and cashed five more spade tricks for down three. Minus 300 looked to be an ugly result.

At the other table, West did not bid and the same contract was reached. West led the nine of spades, denying the 10, and dummy’s queen lost to the king. East knew that South had the 10 of spades and thought it would hold up as a second stopper, so East shifted to the 10 of clubs. South and West

**NORTH**  
♠ A Q  
♥ 7 6 5 4 3  
♦ 8 7  
♣ A 5 4 2

**WEST**  
♠ 9 8 7 6 4 3 2  
♥ K  
♦ K 6 4  
♣ Q 8

**EAST**  
♠ K J  
♥ 10 9 8 2  
♦ 10 5 3  
♣ K 10 9 7

**SOUTH**  
♠ 10 5  
♥ A Q J  
♦ A Q J 9 2  
♣ J 6 3

The bidding:  
**SOUTH** 1NT    **WEST** 3♠    **NORTH** 3NT    **EAST** All pass

Opening lead: Eight of ♠

played low and dummy’s ace won the trick. A diamond to the queen lost and West led a spade, clearing the suit. In dummy for the last time and still needing tricks, South led a heart to his queen, losing to the king. West cashed five spades and South had

impossible discarding problems. The end result was 11 tricks for the defense. Down seven for 700 points to East-West! NorthSouth at the first table were seen in the bar after the game, bragging about holding this deal to down three.

## Easy like Sunday morning

The train is a small world moving through a larger world: Elisha Cooper

Berty Ashley

Born on December 8 in 1944, actor Sharmila Tagore made her debut at the age of 14 in a Satyajit Ray film. One of her iconic scenes is from the song ‘*Mere Sapno ki Rani*’. Her part in the scene, in which she is seen reading an Alistair MacLean book onboard a train, was shot at a studio in Mumbai. Known as DHR, which train is this, that became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1999?

In 1882, Georges Nagelmackers invited guests to a railway trip of 2,000 k.m. on his *Train Eclair de luxe* (lightning luxury train), which went from Paris to Vienna and back. It had fancy sleeping coaches and five-star food made by international chefs. Its success led to the formation of a series of luxury trains that travelled across Europe, reaching as far as Istanbul. By what name were these trains known, which is also part of a murder mystery lore?

The Bandhan Express is an international train that connects the cities of Kolkata and Khulna. Unlike usual trains, a valid visa and passport are required to purchase the ticket. In which country is Khulna?

This international express train linked the Netherlands with Switzerland through Belgium and France. Twisting its way through the Alpine mountain region, the route is one of the most scenic ones. The train is



The interiors of the ‘world’s most luxurious train’. Which is it? (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK)

named after a mountain flower, which is the national symbol of many countries in the region. By what name is the train known that should remind you of the movie *The Sound of Music*?

This private train is a hotel-on-wheels that runs from Budapest to Istanbul with visits to Slovakia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Austria, and the Czech Republic. The service is aptly named after a famous geographic entity that connects all these cities as well. What is the name of this train service?

Rovos Rail runs a train that is billed as the ‘world’s most luxurious train’ and travels

through South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania. Its name, a reference to its luxurious nature, could also refer to a group of lions you might see while on the train. By what name is the train known?

The longest railway line in the world runs 9289 km. from Moscow in the west to Vladivostok in the east of Russia. It spans eight time zones and takes eight days to complete the journey. By what name is this line known, a reference to the vast geographical region that covers most of northern Asia?

The Samjhauta Express was a twice-weekly train that was, at that time, the only active train

line on this route till it was stopped in 2019. The 500 km. stretch took about 12 hours to finish with its many security checks. Starting in Delhi, in which city did the journey end?

The Empire State Express was a passenger train that ran between New York City and Detroit via southern Ontario. The train was then renamed after a famous tourist spot, which was on the way. The name also included a colourful natural phenomenon that is usually seen at the tourist spot. What was the train’s name changed to?

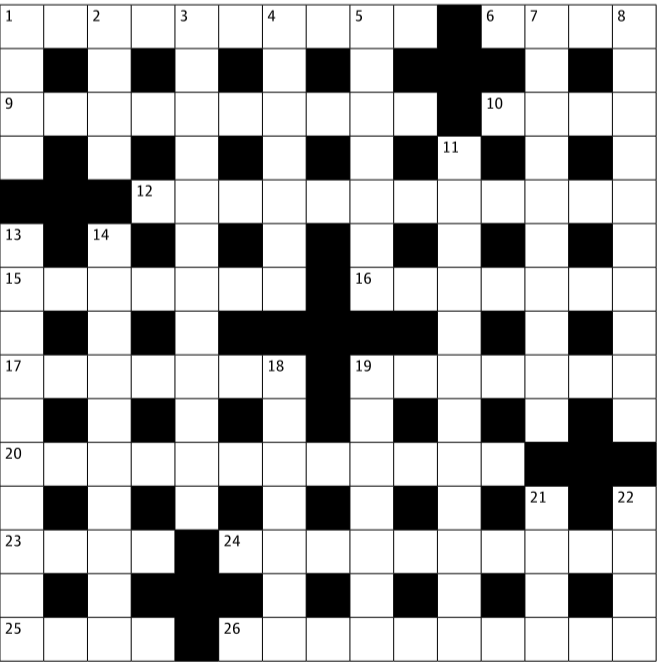
The A.R. Rahman song ‘*Chaiyya Chaiyya*’ from the film *Dil Se* became a global success and was in the ‘top 10 most popular songs of all time’ BBC poll in 2002. The song has an iconic video in which Shah Rukh Khan and Malaika Arora dance atop a moving train that later became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005. Known as NMR, which train is this?

*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

- 1. Darjeeling Himalayan Railway
- 2. The Orient Express
- 3. Bangladesh
- 4. Edelweiss
- 5. Danube Express
- 6. The Pride of Africa
- 7. Trans-Siberian Railway
- 8. Lahore in Pakistan
- 9. Niagara Rainbow
- 10. Nilgiri Mountain Railway

### Answers

### THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3335



- Across**
- 1 When sent to Coventry, one that’s barely seen? (4,6)
  - 6 Train line almost flipped over vehicle (4)
  - 9 I miss place in resort: it’s a field (10)
  - 10 Growing border husband removed remains a border (4)
  - 12 Liquid lunch with plenty of character? (8,4)
  - 15 Side in blue seeing confused voter taken in by English Nationalist ... (7)
  - 16 ... English Nationalist against adopting promise to be green ... (7)
  - 17 ... Ignoring some, scan ten Nationalists’ kit receiving signals (7)
  - 19 Deer eating mushroom recoiled, showing blotch (7)
  - 20 Activated in potion, life that’s everlasting! (8,4)
  - 23 Flower girl that may be Hazel (4)
  - 24 Not the lead horn player getting renewed energy (6,4)
  - 25 A day after Everyman’s age-old booze (4)
  - 26 University becoming independent, raises limits (10)

- Down**
- 1 Reason *Titanic* captain might think the unthinkable? (4)
  - 2 Thawed, 99 disappearing – a performance (4)
  - 3 Such a reduction applied to (s) quires? (12)
  - 4 Aquatic being, part of *Little Mermaid* toy

- that’s caught? (7)
- 5 Seen as very absurd, runs off (7)
  - 7 King overcome by slithering odious boa in stories that aren’t to be read (10)
  - 8 Entered private property: lock abruptly ‘died’ (10)
  - 11 R&B musician’s somewhat unchaste view on *derrièrès* (6,6)
  - 13 Assuming the worst oddly timesaving (10)
  - 14 Primarily, what encompasses Senegal, Togo alongside fourteen republics (Ivory Coast, also)? (4,6)
  - 18 Sloppily traced over ‘20s design (3,4)
  - 19 Cars that are often seen in Westerns (7)
  - 21 Record changing dash for cash? (4)
  - 22 Praiseful verse addressing Archbishop Tutu? (4)

### SOLUTION NO. 3334



# Buddies in the barracks and beyond

Recollecting the brotherhood in an Army camp in Manipur, and the spirit of sacrifice that prevailed in a prosthetics camp for people in Kuki and Meitei villages

Advitya Madan  
advityanidhi14@gmail.com

The other day, I got a monthly call from my two civil friends from Manipur, a Kuki and a Meitei. They had struck an emotional chord with me during my two-year command of the Churachandpur-based 27 Sector of the Assam Rifles in the capacity of Deputy Inspector-General from 2013. Both had been beneficiaries of the artificial limb, widely known as the “Jaipur foot”. After a brief tete-a-tete with them, a wave of nostalgia washed over me recollecting a free artificial limb camp organised in collaboration with Shree Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti, Jaipur.

I vividly recall my first day in office when my staff took me around the Sector headquarters premises. Though there is no discrimination based on community in the Army or Assam Rifles, I found the bonhomie between Kuki and Meitei soldiers not up to the desired level. I found one barracks Kuki-dominated, while the other was largely of Meiteis. It somehow did not gel with my grooming



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

and ethos of my parent battalion, 27 Punjab, which was the pilot project for a mixed battalion of Sikhs, Dogras and the Other Indian Classes.

As a Commander, I was determined to break the ice between Kukis and Meiteis. I decided to implement the time-tested standing operating procedure of the buddy system, though a hybrid one – the buddy pair to have one Kuki and one Meitei each.

Just to set an example, I set the ball rolling with my Commander’s secretariat. I selected a Kuki as my PA and a Meitei as my radio operator. I organised all the soldiers of the Sector HQ into hybrid buddy pairs. Every soldier is supposed to remain with his buddy 24x7 whether during operations or having food. Within a week, I could sense the bonds strengthening between both communities. Witnessing the success of this pilot project at the Sector HQ, I enforced the same SOP in all the six battalions under my command. I recount how in one deadly ambush, a Kuki scout was instrumental in saving the life of his Meitei buddy scout by charging at the militants while firing a fusillade from his AK-47.

This inflection point snowballed into conviviality between the Kuki and Meitei villages. The festivals of Kukis and Meiteis were jointly celebrated with equal gusto and fervour.

Back to the artificial limb camp. Despite catering for some reserve limbs on the last day, we were left with just six artificial limbs while we had 12 beneficiaries – six Kukis and six Meiteis – still on the waiting list. My staff was in a quandary with anxiety writ large on their faces for fear of favouring a particular community. I advised them to keep a cool head and just identify the most needy three Kukis and three Meiteis.

The next morning, we tried to identify the six most deserving cases. Suddenly, I saw an aged Kuki walk up to us with a pensive look. “Sir, let all these six Meitei people take the ‘Jaipur foot’ as they are quite young. We have already lived our lives,” the septuagenarian sporting an off-kilter hat said in a gravelly voice. His words had tugged at my heartstrings which left me utterly dumbfounded. Meiteis who were overhearing politely declined.

I immediately dialled the top man of the Jaipur samiti and made a frantic request for an additional six prosthetic limbs. Thankfully, he sent them on the flight the next day. Finally, all the 12 beneficiaries left the camp happily walking confidently on their own.

The unwavering spirit of both communities to sacrifice for each other remains etched in my mind. Against the backdrop of the now strife-torn Manipur, I pray for those times to come back.

## When youngsters migrate abroad

Rinu George  
rinugeorge57@yahoo.com

Large sections of the once-authoritative Indian parents of the 1980s and 1990s who were fiercely dedicated to raising children with strict discipline and traditional values now have professional home nurses to take care of them. Children move overseas, leaving ageing parents to negotiate old age without their support.

Deep-rooted cultural values shaped Indian parenting in the 1980s and 1990s. The children were taught responsibility, respect for elders, and social conventions. Parents who prioritised discipline led their children to choose secure, respected occupations, believing it would lead to better futures for their family.

Thus, children from these families excelled academically and earned opportunities in engineering, medicine, and technology, which allowed them to study or work overseas. Parents viewed migration as a sign of social advancement and felt joy in their children’s achievement. Pride is often tempered by the fact that elderly parents must adjust to a new caring system based on professional nurses after their children move abroad.

Separation from children hits many parents emotionally. Members of Indian families have traditionally lived together or close by. Children are the family’s emotional centre and caregivers for their parents in old age. However, the migration of children has altered this expectation.

As their children succeed far away, parents frequently feel lonely and abandoned. Distance from everyday encounters and infrequent video chats cannot totally bridge the emotional gap. Children can send money or hire home nurses for their elderly parents, but the emotional emptiness is hard to fill. With children overseas, home nurses are a sensible choice for many elderly parents who require support with health, everyday tasks, and personal care. This provides a much-needed safety net, especially for people with chronic illnesses or mobility limitations, but it also presents emotional challenges.

Previous independence and control over family affairs have been replaced with a loss of dignity and privacy for many parents.

## Blinkered views

Prejudices about skin tone and weight can leave many traumatised

Shrinidhi Mahadevan  
shri.mahadevan@gmail.com

Growing up as a dark-skinned Tamil girl, I quickly learned that comments about appearance were an inevitable part of life. At weddings, family gatherings, or even casual meet-ups, someone always had something to say. “You’ve gained weight, what happened?” “Stay out of the sun; you’ll get darker.” And the one that stuck with me the most: “You’re pretty for a dark girl.” Though such remarks were sometimes framed as compliments, they often left me feeling anything but complimented. For those who might say them, these comments might seem like harmless observations or even “helpful advice”.



ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

They think it’s just brutal honesty, but I honestly think it’s brutal.

The truth is they reflect a broader cultural pattern that many Tamil women experience, with their bodies and appearances subjected to relentless scrutiny. The excuses often given, such as “That’s just how we were raised”, do little to mitigate the lasting impact of these words. For those on the receiving end, the damage to self-esteem and self-worth is real.

In Tamil households, discussions about weight are almost unavoidable. From “Are you eating enough?” to “You’ve been eating too much”,

opinions are freely shared. Food, a source of joy and connection, often becomes a site of judgment instead. Even at family gatherings, the amount of food on your plate can invite unwanted commentary. If you serve yourself generously, someone might warn you about gaining weight. If you take less, questions such as “Are you trying to lose weight?” are inevitable. It’s a no-win situation. This fixation on weight is not limited to family conversations. Societal pressures to conform to beauty standards are deeply ingrained, and research confirms their harmful effects. A study conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences found that 47% of Indian women in the 18-to-35 age group experience body image issues, with societal expectations playing a significant role. These pressures are particularly pronounced for young women in Tamil communities, where criticism around weight is normalised and pervasive.

Alongside weight, colourism remains a

deeply rooted issue in Tamil culture. Growing up, I was frequently reminded to avoid the sun to “stay fair”. For many women and girls in India, the fear of spending time in the sun is not about getting sunburned, it’s about getting darker. Fairness creams or homemade remedies are heavily promoted in society as if lighter skin is the ultimate key to success. The message is clear: lighter skin is better.

For young Tamil women, seeing themselves judged against these unrealistic standards can deepen feelings of inadequacy and exclusion. The emotional toll of these comments, whether about weight or skin tone, is significant. Often dismissed as harmless, such remarks can erode confidence and lead to long-term mental health challenges. Studies by the World Health Organization reveal that over 25% of women in India report anxiety or depression tied to body image concerns. For Tamil women, who often face these pressures within their families and elsewhere, the effects are even more pronounced.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

unique insights into the cultural and linguistic zeitgeist of various nations.

The American Dialect Society initiated the first English-language version of WOTY in 1990, setting itself apart by relying on independent linguists’ votes and eschewing commercial influence. Over time, other

dictionaries and organisations, including Oxford, Merriam-Webster, Cambridge, and Macquarie, as well as national institutions in countries such as Australia, Japan, and Austria, have joined the tradition. Each brings its own criteria and perspective, reflecting local cultures, global issues, or even the quirks of online communities.

From the playful to the profound, these words do more than mirror linguistic trends. They reveal our collective priorities, fears, humour, and resilience. Whether chosen for their emergence in discourse or for embodying pivotal moments, these words spark debates and discussions, reminding us of the power and fluidity of language in framing our world.



## FEEDBACK

Letters to the *Magazine* can be e-mailed separately to [mag.letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:mag.letters@thehindu.co.in) by Tuesday 3 p.m.

### ▼ Cover story

Thanks to art galleries, Indian artists are being recognised and rewarded for pursuing their passions with missionary zeal. (‘Mumbai’s 2025 art face-off’; Dec. 1) With the rapid increase in high-wealth individuals in our country, the future of Indian artists looks bright, if our rich can transform into collectors.

Sri Vrinda N.



A vast country like ours needs art fairs in various places, and not just in the metros. These should be organised at regular intervals to foster a sense of artistry in people.

M.N. Saraswathi Devi



### ▼ Never say die

In this digital era, when even large publishing houses are facing enormous challenges, the courage and commitment of small publishers is laudable. (‘The joy and pain of being small’; Dec. 1) It needs passion, hard work, and a never-say-die attitude to be a small publisher and survive against all odds. The small publishers in the U.K., for instance, have become the “beating heart” of its publishing industry, with many of their books winning prestigious prizes. I hope the Indian independent publishers will also scale new heights with their tenacious efforts and enterprising outlook.

Kosaraju Chandramouli



### ▼ Showing the way

Thanks to our politicians, the caste system continues to flourish through vote-mongering politics. (‘Navayana is a necessary mistake’; Dec. 1) Navayana is doing a commendable job by publishing books from an

anti-caste perspective. Despite our progress over the years, Indians are unable to come to terms with the prevalent reality of religious fundamentalism and fight it. The efforts of the publishing house must not go in vain.

Vijay Singh Adhikari



It is interesting to know about the origin of Navayana publishing house, and the recent prize for its publication authored by Ashok Gopal is a clear recognition of the exemplary contribution of its founders. Having achieved their original objective, it is time for these publishers to widen their canvas to include numerous subjects to provide a suitable launching pad for new and budding authors.

Satvik V.M.



### ▼ Art above politics

It is very strange that the film *From Ground Zero* was denied screening at the Dharmshala International Film Festival. (‘Nobody can occupy the dreams of people’; Dec. 1) Where is independent cinema? Why do we not have the courage for films that depict ground realities and the struggles of people? Art should be kept above politics.

Navin Katyal



Cinema screens will depict social reality, whether liked or disliked by society. We must encourage such anthologies that highlight global issues.

Kirti Wadhawan



Stories of the sufferings of Palestinians must be told. Cinema is larger than us and it should serve as a reminder of the times.

Rohith Varon S.S.



## MORE ON THE WEB

[www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page](http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page)

### ▼ Motherhood and manuscripts

For many mothers, books reflect their own experiences, struggles, and hopes

Sandra Joseph

### ▼ Drowning in words

There is verbosity on social media, in the news, in speeches, and in policies

Aakashansh Vimal

### ▼ Hot potatoes

Price rise pushes even common vegetables beyond the reach of the common man

Tejaswini Sugumaran

### ▼ Non-stop cacophony

Jam-packed apartments provide no aural relief

C. Deepalakshmi

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Aastha D.

The City Palace is a sprawling complex of grand courtyards, domed pavilions, and intricately designed facades crafted from pink sandstone and marble. Built in 1727, when Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II created Jaipur as the capital of his kingdom, it has of late been shedding its image as a tourist attraction and reclaiming its practice of patronage.

Much of it is thanks to Sawai Padmanabh Singh, 26, the titular maharaja of Jaipur, who has been on a mission to revitalise its spirit. The latest addition is the Jaipur Centre for Art (JCA), a 2,600 sq. ft. contemporary art institution, co-founded with friend and curator Noelle Kadar, which opened last month in the palace. It aims to add another facet to the city's historic core and cultural legacy, which already boasts the successful Jaipur Literature Festival, and the Jaipur Art Week started by art entrepreneur and executive director of Prestige Group, Sana Rezwan's, Public Arts Trust of India. The black-tie launch was a veritable who's who of the art and culture world, with names such as author William Dalrymple, artists Shilo Shiv Sulemaan and Subodh Gupta, and designer Thierry Journo.

"Jaipur has always led in image-making, not just for itself but for the subcontinent. It was once a melting pot of ideas, trade, shaping global conversations on art, craft, and leadership. In recent decades, while cities like Paris, New York, and London set the tone for contemporary thought, we have been slow to participate," says Singh. "It took time and education [in heritage conservation and preservation from Italy] for me to truly understand the richness of this land. Our goal at JCA is to reconnect Jaipur with the global contemporary, creating a space where local and international voices can come together meaningfully."

**Matter of perspective**

To be contemporary is to tap into the present's pulse, feel its



Jaipur's new art space is a nod to the global contemporary art world and royal patronage in the 21st century

# ARTISTS IN THE CITY PALACE

immediacy, while fully aware of its inevitable flux. It is this fluidity that JCA embraces with its inaugural exhibition, *A New Way of Seeing*, curated by Peter Nagy of Nature Morte, and Kadar. The show delivers on its title – provoking and promising a fresh perspective. First, by positioning works by artists such as Anish Kapoor and Dayanita Singh, whose works are in stark contrast to each other in terms of their mediums, styles, and ethos, in the same room; it compels us to inhabit their works in a radically different manner. And second, by replacing the white cube with a space that incorporates the palace's mood, with delicate arches and columns, and panel moulding – creating its own drama.

The exhibition showcases an eclectic mix of paintings, sculptures, and photographs, each probing manners of perception. As Peter

Nagy explains, "[The artists] think about the way their worlds will be viewed by an audience, how they can manipulate or subvert what the viewer will encounter... through abstraction, multiplication, reflection, and deception."

This exploration is brought vividly to life in Hiroshi Sugimoto's ongoing series, *Theatres and Seascapes*, which the Japanese photographer began in 1978. Each black-and-white photograph captures the "same" image – a horizon line splitting the frame or a theatre's vanishing point – yet the illusion of sameness belies the impossibility of repeating time or space. Similarly, Dayanita Singh's stunning *Time Measures* (from 2016) uses 34 colour prints of red muslin bundles, their fading patterns shaped by sunlight, to evoke the distinctiveness of age and memory.

Among the large-scale works, Tanya Goel's abstractions stand out

for their process-oriented approach – crafted from pigments she makes herself. *The Botanicals* series revisits colonial herbarium illustrations, underscoring how art can reinterpret historical narratives. Anish Kapoor's striking discs, *Oriental Blue to Clear* (2023) and *Magenta to Clear* (2024), reflect and dissolve everything that confronts them.

**Spirit of collaboration**

Kadar describes her approach as inherently collaborative. "Here, we have placed artists from around the world next to each other in a setting that is deeply historical. It made me think of them very differently even though I was familiar with their work. For instance, you see Sugimoto's *Seascapes* here in the middle of a desert, but it will make complete sense – the endlessness of the horizon and its indifference to

time and space drawing you in."

A spirit of collaboration also runs through how JCA came about, after years of talking about art with Singh – a project that bridges Singh's more traditional arts background and her own contemporary one.

Why was Jaipur, a city of craft, chosen? "So many people come to the city to take things back – rugs, jewellery, textiles, craft," Kadar muses. "HH [one of Singh's nicknames and short for His Highness] and I thought about why we are doing this. Why something so experimental should make sense in Jaipur. Beyond the physical location, we hope that our exhibitions relate to the land, the city and the history of Jaipur. *A New Way of Seeing* is based on materiality, of the space as well as the streets of Jaipur in all their contradictions and synchronies. [So] in some cases, this will be more obvious, but we will make sure that thread runs through."

Alongside exhibitions, JCA will also launch an artist residency programme. Artists will live in the palace complex, have access to the palace archives and the Pothi Khana, the museum's archives and library, and foster connections through their work with Jaipur's vibrant heritage, materials, and local artisans.

JCA, as Singh and Kadar put it, aspires to be more than a gallery. "It will collaborate and engage with similar institutes across the country and the world to reinvigorate and redefine contemporary art and culture." And, hark back to its origin days while rooting itself in the global contemporary.

A New Way of Seeing is on till March 16, 2025.

The essayist and designer writes on design and culture.



## Inside six Goan homes

Photo book *The Memory Keepers* amplifies the stories of Goa's heritage houses and its families

Nolan Lewis

From their patterned mosaic floors to carved porches, many weighty books have recorded Goa's heritage homes over the years. Yet, *The Memory Keepers & Future Seekers: Portraits of Heritage Homes in Goa* by photographer Ulka Chauhan and art curator Samira Sheth offers a new trajectory.

The photo book's unique quality is the architecture of the narrative – a duologue that is both emotional and informational. "If you were to read it from front to back, there is a strong emotive arc that flows through the words and visuals, with the personal stories of the families and their fragments of memories, which reveal a deep sense of rootedness to their home and land," says Chauhan. "However, if you were to read the book backwards, beginning at the elaborate glossary at the end, you will be informed of the context – historical, cultural, social, political and religious moments that were instrumental in the making and shaping of Goa and the state's quintessential homes."

**Six historical homes**

Chauhan, who is based between Mumbai, Goa and Zürich, started

documenting Goa's homes as part of a photo series, *Beyond The Balcão*, in 2021. And though it was presented at the International Photo Festival in Olten, Switzerland, and featured in the *Leica Fotografie International* journal, the stories of the houses kept pulling her back.

"I visited these homes and families several times over the last four years, capturing countless frames," she says, adding that Sheth often accompanied her. "Samira's words sparked ideas for my images, and vice versa. In that sense, our process was completely collaborative."

The duo decided to focus on six houses whose foundations were laid as early as the 16th century. Through conversations over lunch, cups of coffee and glasses of wine, they pieced together memories and



(Clockwise from left) Menezes Bragança; Figueiredo; Ulka Chauhan; D'Sa Condillac; and the book cover.



family histories. "This tiny coastal state was once the capital of the Portuguese empire in the East, and these homes hold the evidence of those cosmopolitan, transcultural and transoceanic histories," says Sheth. Be it Vodlem Ghor and its underground escape routes and bullet hole marks that are a record of Goa's turbulent past, or the sparkling Belgian glass chandeliers, Ming dynasty wash basins and other artefacts that speak to its once flourishing trade, "there is much to appreciate and marvel at in these homes", says Sheth.

The Mumbai-based writer keeps busy with late-night networking events and crazy deadlines.

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