

# magazine



## wideangle

Devdutt Pattanaik on how Buddha was reimagined

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## LITERARY REVIEW

Ahead of the International Booker Prize on May 20

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Neha Dixit

**O**n May 7, India woke up to 'Operation Sindoor', a series of precision strikes by the armed forces at nine sites in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. This was in retaliation to the terrorist attacks in Pahalgam on April 22, in which 25 Indians and one Nepali citizen, mostly tourists, were killed.

This was the same week that a report on the Indian Wealth Divide revealed that most of the country earns so little that an annual income of just ₹2.9 lakh puts you in the top 10%. It came just two months after a venture capital company published a report that out of the 140 crore Indians, only the top 10% have enough discretionary money to spend on non-essential items.

That same evening, during the mock drills announced by the Ministry of Home Affairs to check if the country was prepared against "new and complex threats", instead of staying in during the blackout and learning to hide their locations, many Indians thronged the streets and burst firecrackers – just like they would to celebrate an IPL cricket match victory. Meanwhile, street vendors, part of the bottom half of the Indian population, were made to prove their patriotism by shutting shop for the mock drills and giving up their daily wage.

**A work-from-home war**  
That night and the following two days, most Indians fought a work-from-home war. Content creators and news channels threw a barrage of disinformation, reporting how India had captured Lahore, Karachi and even Islamabad. And how, many Indian cities were under attack too.

There were visuals of panic buying, throngs at ATMs to withdraw cash, and jammed train stations and bus stations as migrant

# NO COUNTRY FOR PACIFISTS

Operation Sindoor has laid bare the current shift in public opinion on what is the right response to conflict – blood lust and confrontational rhetoric drowning out common sense and calls for peace

workers rushed to return to their hometowns. Simultaneously, cross-border shelling and drone attacks were killing civilians, officials, soldiers, and causing the destruction of houses, property and livestock in Poonch, Ferozepur, Uri, Jammu, Srinagar, Rajouri, Samba and other border districts. The villagers there were displaced and looking for hideouts. But people sitting afar, experiencing the virtual war dismissed it as 'collateral damage' in the war against terror.

Common sense was thrown for a toss. Demanding preventive instead of combative approach in conflict became unpopular. Some of the WhatsApp users peddling fake news were now baying for blood and the escalation of military action by using war gaming language: morale, strategy, tactics, terrain, artillery, victory conditions, order of battle, zeroed in. Some even advocated the use of nuclear weapons to destroy Pakistan in a few minutes.

There was a clear shift in public opinion and expectations on what is the right response to conflict – which had earlier acknowledged that escalation of armed actions causes losses to all, economically, socially and morally.

As Srinath Raghavan, an academic and former Indian army official, who has deeply

researched India's strategic history, says, "War is a continuation of politics." He notes that the chest-thumping and bloodlust response to conflicts has been a general trend in the last decade. Case in point: Prime Minister Narendra Modi stating on multiple occasions that India's official policy is to hit her enemies inside their territories – something he recently repeated, 'Ghar mein ghus-ghus kar marenge.'

According to Raghavan, India saw the same war mongering in the surgical strikes of 2016 and during the 2019 Balakot air strikes after the Pulwama attack. "There is a concerted attempt to whip up this response and now we have become used to responding in this way. In 2008, when the 26/11 attacks happened in Mumbai, some people asked to use other methods than war – which was also what the then government wanted. The present government does not have the same approach."

**Blow to the economy**  
Studies reveal that the 10 most conflict-affected countries in the world such as Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Venezuela lost, on average, 41% of their economic output as a result of violence. It is estimated that the 1999 Kargil war cost India roughly ₹15 crore per day. Escalation of violence could cause a food crisis or famine, like in Gaza, or even impact the IT infrastructure that facilitates WiFi-enabled virtual wars.

In this light, the common-sense response of the people would have been to demand an end to the war, but anyone who tried to publicly say 'no' to war was deemed not just a traitor and terror supporter, but was also threatened with dire consequences. Ritu Sinha, a software techie in Hyderabad, says, "I refuse to marry a person who asks for de-escalation. It shows the weakness of that man's character." When asked about diplomacy and other measures to handle

terrorism and cross-border conflict, she responds that "saying no to war is discouraging and disrespecting the Indian army, and only a terror apologist would say that".

Raghavan, however, stresses that Indians of this generation are lucky that they have not seen a large-scale war; they have only seen localised military problems in specific areas – where the people of that region have dealt with the consequences and not the entire country. "People should not assume that wars are re-enactments of movie scripts. Wars are not a trivial matter, and we have to be mindful of the consequences."

**When politicians unite**  
In this war frenzy and mass hysteria, hardly any political party has called for peace. Historian and writer Ramachandra Guha points out that jingoism is emotionally overpowering, and that people forget their own plight. Now the public calculation is that "war is bad for us but worse for Pakistan". He also reminds: "After the 26/11 attack, the then Home Minister Shivraj Patil had to resign, but no such demands are being made by the Opposition parties this time."

In fact, parties across the political spectrum, be it Right, Centre or Left, have supported military actions. They are desperate to prove their patriotism. While participants of anti-war peace rallies in Thrissur and Kolkata faced a crackdown by the state governments in Kerala and West Bengal (under the Communist Party of India and Trinamool Congress, respectively), the rally held in



**In the past decade, people have become**  
more zombie-like, they think less for themselves and rely on what they see on social media. It requires you to be an independent thinker and use your common sense to oppose killings, war, and violence

**ORIJIT SEN**  
Graphic artist and designer

ILLUSTRATION:  
SAAI

support of the armed forces by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Opposition coalition, was allowed thousands of participants.

The crucial question on the colossal intelligence failure that led to the barbaric terror attack in Pahalgam is no longer present in public discourse. Peace activists believe that in times of propaganda, dumbing down of intellect, and herd mentality, there is a shrinking of space for dialogue. Arundhati Dhuru, convener of the National Alliance of People's Movements, recounts that when she organised Indo-Pak peace missions in the late 90s after Pokhran, Indian schools hosted Pakistani delegations. "They were sceptical, [Pakistanis] were still 'they', but we had an openness to listen, talk and sit together," she recalls. "Now, it is no longer possible. You could be lynched by your neighbour for saying no to war."

But, at the same time, "pitting yourself against majority pro-war sentiment is not cowardice," reminds Ravi Nair, executive director of the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre. "Pacifism is an act of courage. It is an informed choice."

### Where is the independent thinker?

In the absence of in-person dialogues and the presence of hate spewing content on smartphones, art could be a potent tool to counter war propaganda. For decades, artists have encouraged peace with their work globally. But it is not so in contemporary India.

Within two days of Operation Sindoor, there was a rush by entertainment companies to register the copyright of the name, as if it were a product launch and not a military operation. It is not surprising at a time when movies with slanted, sectarian, and inaccurate facts about the past and present – some of them glorifying violence and war – have been rewarded commercially and by the government.

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## SHORTLISTED FOR THE INTERNATIONAL BOOKER PRIZE 2025

Stanley Carvalho

**T**hat Banu Mushtaq's anthology *Heart Lamp* has been shortlisted for the International Booker Prize 2025 is encouraging not only for the author, and translator Deepa Bhasthi, but for Indian regional literature and translation, too. This is a first for a Kannada title. In 2022, Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*, translated from the Hindi by Daisy Rockwell, won the coveted prize, while in 2023, Perumal Murugan's *Pyre*, translated from the Tamil by Aniruddhan Vasudevan, was longlisted.

Mushtaq's 12 short stories selected from a vast oeuvre, traverse religion, patriarchy, oppression, gender inequality and violence, vividly capturing the everyday trials and tribulations of Muslim women in Karnataka and South India. But they are also universal; the stories and characters could be found anywhere in India or the world.

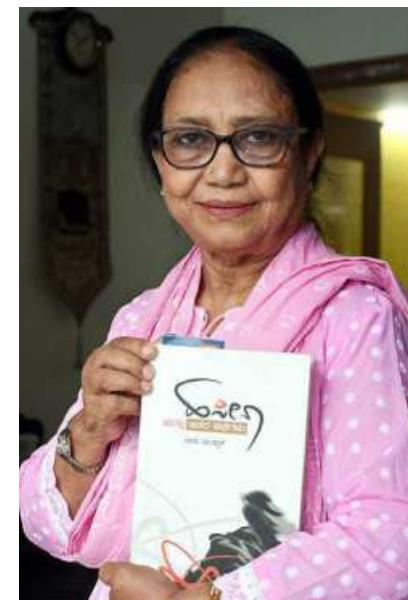
**Religious and social binds**  
In the eponymous story 'Heart Lamp', Mehrun, a mother of three, decides to end her life after her husband acquires a second wife. She has endured enough and the "lamp in Mehrun's heart had been extinguished a long time ago". She decides to drench herself in kerosene and is ready to light a matchstick when her daughter Salma rushes to her mother with her baby sister and begs her not to make them orphans.

Religion and societal structures are unjust to Muslim women; the author critiques and exposes the hypocrisy of men, including the Muttawalli Saheb (the local religious custodian). The inapt machismo and man's role of "provider" is apparent from the opening story 'Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal'.

There are women who are strong and take matters into their own hands. In 'Black Cobras', a poor mother, Aashraf, turns to the Muttawalli for succour after her errant husband abandons her



(Clockwise from left) Women take part in a religious procession in Rajasthan; author Banu Mushtaq; and translator Deepa Bhasthi.  
(GETTY IMAGES, PRAKASH HASAN)



## A QUIET STRENGTH

Banu Mushtaq captures the everyday trials and tribulations of Muslim women with candour

and their children for a younger wife, but to no avail. While Aashraf remains helpless, the women in the village, like cobras, spew venom on the Muttawalli.

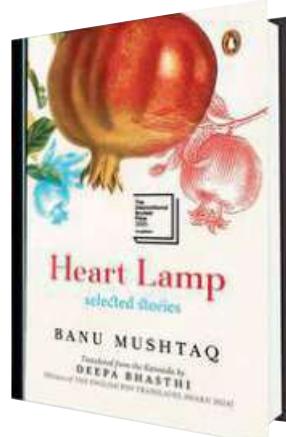
When he is walking home, a woman flings a stone towards him shouting, "A dog, just a dog." Another yells, "Nothing good will come your way... may black cobras coil themselves around you." When the Muttawalli reaches home, his wife delivers the *coup de grace*.

**Question of agency**  
Faith and inhumanity form the crux of 'Red Lungi', Razia, who has to manage 18 children

during the summer vacations, decides the only way to ensure peace in the house is to have the boys circumcised. Even the poor families in the village are told to bring their sons for circumcision at a planned mass event.

Strangely, the boys from poor families who were circumcised in the traditional, old-fashioned way, recover quickly, while those from Razia's family who were anaesthetised take a longer time. "If there are people to help the rich, the poor have God," grumbles Razia.

Men are also prone to suffering; like Yusuf, who is torn between his widowed mother and a belligerent wife in 'A



**Heart Lamp**  
Banu Mushtaq, trs Deepa Bhasthi  
Penguin  
₹399

Decision of the Heart'. Yusuf decides to get his 50-year-old mother married to spite his wife.

An amusing story 'The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchuri' talks about a young tutor who holds Arabic classes for girls with the aim of finding a suitable bride for himself, someone who must know how to make his favourite dish.

He succeeds in finding his 'dream girl' but life after marriage is something else.

The suffering of women and their lack of, or limited, agency coupled with the monotonous theme of the stories do make the reader feel dreary; equally, it engenders admiration for the author and her ability to write realistic stories, rendered with profound observations, feeling, irony and dry humour.

The collection is rounded off with 'Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord', a fitting finale, questioning God, daring God. "If you were to build the world again, to create males and females again, do not be like an inexperienced potter. Come to earth as a woman, Prabhu! Be a woman once, Oh Lord!"

**Nod to regional literature**  
As a lawyer, activist and writer, Mushtaq founded her writing in the Bandaya Sahitya movement of the 1970s and 80s which started as a protest against the hegemony of upper caste and mostly male-led writing. The movement urged women, Dalits and other social and religious minorities to tell stories from within their own lived experiences, and in the Kannada they spoke.

The stories in this collection were published originally in Kannada between 1990 and 2023. Translator Bhasthi has endeavored to retain the essence of the original text, transliterating certain words and deliberately not using italics for Kannada, Urdu or Arabic words that remain untranslated in English.

I cannot end without highlighting what the Booker judges said about the book: "... At its heart, *Heart Lamp* returns us to the true, great pleasures of reading: solid storytelling, unforgettable characters, vivid dialogue, tensions simmering under the surface, and a surprise at each turn."

*The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based independent journalist.*

## Avoidable futures

A deeply distressing speculation about machine intelligence and human failures

**Manjula Padmanabhan**

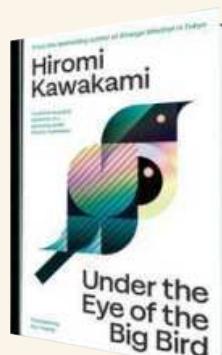
**W**e plunge headfirst into this science fictional tale via the thoughts of Kyle, a troubled schoolgirl.

Details are in short supply. We know that the girl is young, but have no idea where she lives or in which century. She appears to be rebellious and wants to run away, but it isn't clear why. Then she attacks a fellow student who, according to her, hates her.

The scene shifts to other characters and other timelines. In this way, the novel slides across people, centuries and continents in what appears to be a chaotic manner. The narrative voice changes constantly. Some characters have names such as Rien and Noah.

Others have numbers instead of names. Still others are known simply as "mothers" and have no names.

Initially, we are told that the mothers are benign and powerful beings. Then it turns out they are not human at all. Indeed, the story is about the whole of humanity, not any particular people. The prose is textured to suggest that it may have been



**Under The Eye Of The Big Bird**  
Hiromi Kawakami, trs Asa Yoneda  
Granta

₹299

written by an intelligent machine, not a person. The narrative turns into a meditation upon AI (Artificial Intelligence) and the way in which we, who created it, will allow it to supplant us altogether.

**Era of smart robots**  
Science fiction has routinely explored the theme of machines taking over. What makes this novel unusual is not the theme but the fact that it no longer feels

fictional. We are living today in an era of smart robots and super computers. Siri-voices guide us through our streets. Video games have seduced millions of young children. The first phase of the takeover has actually begun.

So yes, the novel is highly effective, in a spare and dismal way. The author Hiromi Kawakami is a young Japanese woman and a rising literary star, but the robotic tone of the writing is deeply unsatisfying to read. It provides such a horrid preview of the future that one can only hope we will never get to know it.

*The reviewer is an author, playwright, artist and cartoonist.*

(Clockwise from below)  
Translator Helen Stevenson; family members of Afrasya Ahmed Mohammed, who died in the boat tragedy, mourning his death; and author Vincent Delecroix. (GETTY IMAGES)



**Sudipta Datta**  
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**W**hat is it like to live under tyranny? Why do so many people flee their homes? Who is responsible? Distraught at the descent into chaos in several countries and the West's indifference to the plight of migrants, Irish novelist Paul Lynch imagined a country (in the West) teetering on the brink, thanks to a totalitarian government, and the choices his protagonists are forced to make in his 2023 Booker Prize-winning book, *Prophet Song*.

Senegalese writer Mohamed Mbougar Sarr traced the impact of 72 men arriving in the small town of Sicily in *The Silence of the Choir* (2017). They are "immigrants", "refugees", "migrants" or "exiles", but everyone in the Sicilian town calls them "ragazzi" or "the guys", and this encounter with "The Other" forces some reflection from the local people: to shun or welcome them?

Now, French philosopher and writer Vincent Delecroix



**Lost humanity**  
Through the true story of a 2021 boat accident involving migrants, French writer Vincent Delecroix raises uneasy questions about accountability and human empathy

has turned fact into fiction in his thought-provoking lean novel, *Small Boat*, translated by Helen Stevenson and shortlisted for the International Booker Prize 2025. Moved by a true story of a drowning in the English Channel in November 2021 – an inflatable dinghy carrying at least 29 migrants, including children, capsized, leading to the deaths of all but two – Delecroix raises uneasy questions about who is to blame for the tragedy.

**In our darkest hour**  
Divided in three parts, the novel begins with a call for help to a radio operator with the French Coast Guard on a cold winter night, and her decision to not do anything about it. After most of the migrants drown – the second part of the novel has the harrowing details – the

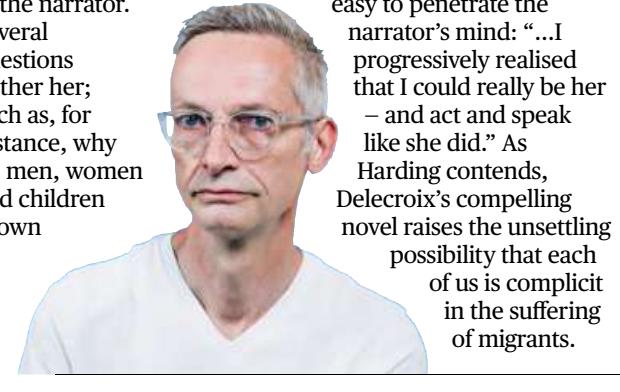


**Small Boat**  
Vincent Delecroix, trs Helen Stevenson  
Small Axes/Simon and Schuster  
₹399

operator, who narrates the novel, is questioned by a policewoman. As the recording of the night is played back, five words she

spoke to the migrants come back to haunt the operator: "You will not be saved." In his Introduction to the novel, British journalist Jeremy Harding writes that "this may have been the narrator's darkest transgression: to have denied the comforting assurance of rescue... so that 'humanity need not doubt its humanity'".

A debate about guilt ensues in the mind of the narrator. Several questions bother her; such as, for instance, why do men, women and children drown



every night in the English Channel or the Mediterranean? When did the sinking start? To her, the migrants were sunk long before they sank. "Their sinking didn't start in the Channel, it started the moment they left their homes."

**Who is to blame?**  
As her interrogation continues, the narrator wonders about its cyclical nature and why their deaths are pinned on her. "Back we came to the idea that the cause of their death was – me. In other words, not the sea, not migration policy, not the trafficking mafia, not the war in Syria or the famine in Sudan – me." Delecroix hits harder with the "banality of evil" argument, with the narrator pointing out that the voice on the tape is not that of a monster or a criminal – "it's the voice of *all of us*".

All of us who are blind to the suffering of others, whether at sea or on land. In the end, the narrator concludes that whether they drowned or not didn't matter; "what mattered were my words. What mattered was not that they were saved; it was that I should be saved, and the whole world with me, through these words. Saved by my own words, not condemned by them".

In an interview to Bookerprizes.com, Delecroix says he found it easy to penetrate the narrator's mind: "...I progressively realised that I could really be her – and act and speak like she did." As Harding contends, Delecroix's compelling novel raises the unsettling possibility that each of us is complicit in the suffering of migrants.

# Mapping Bombay

In his writing, Adil Jussawalla bears witness to the 'bigness and strangeness' of the city



**Enduring chaos** A dabbawala braving the rain while carrying lunch boxes to offices in Mumbai. (GETTY IMAGES)

## Sanjay Sipahimalani

In the densely allegorical poem 'A Letter for Bombay' (1962), Adil Jussawalla addressed the city of his birth from London. The poet, "a medieval apothecary" in exile carrying the "quintessence" of the city, pleads for guidance: "Instruct me in my art... give my chaos form." He urges the "divided city" to combine, "and I shall return and pass beyond your storm".

Jussawalla returned in 1970, and the city has never been too far from his writing. *The Diamond-Encrusted Rat Trap* gathers his prose on Bombay – now Mumbai – written for newspapers and magazines between 1980 and 2002. It complements earlier collections like *Maps for a Mortal Moon* (2014).

### Champion of new voices

In his introduction, Jerry Pinto points out that Jussawalla was "a part of Bombay's literary landscape in a way that few could challenge or would want to".

This is not just because of his poetry but also his teachings and championing of new voices. The pieces in this collection are "a way of giving witness to the bigness and the strangeness of the city", charting a relationship "between man and landscape, man and city, man and nightmare".

Many of them are riffs, segueing like a knight's moves on a chessboard. In one, Jussawalla starts with the necessity of plumbing and proceeds to Wilde and Auden. In another, the morning sun warming his bed leads to musings on the effects of the sun on lovers and others, until a deadline calls him to his typewriter.

The titular piece takes the form of a droll 19th century letter by a beleaguered pundit to his wife. It touches on many forces that have shaped the city over the years: land reclamation, cotton mills, the Kolis and a plague, all wrapped in an arresting metaphor for the city's gaudy allure.

Other pieces feature literary encounters. There is a discussion with Sharada Dwivedi and Rahul Mehrotra; evenings with Mull Raj Anand; and an encounter with Nissim Ezekiel.

Jussawalla examines Mumbai from multiple, often unexplored, angles. "Given that so much of the life of the city when it was called Bombay was linked to its docks, its shipyards, and the shipping trade, and continues to

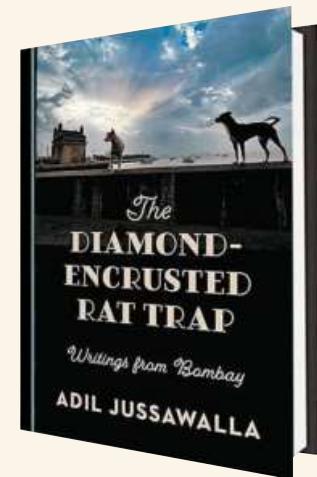
be so linked after the city was renamed Mumbai," he observes, "I find it surprising that we who live in the city have written so little about such matters."

When he writes about the city's fabled monsoon, it is not to romanticise it, but to speak about those who leave the city during the season, such as roadside cobblers and itinerant vendors. Similarly, he notes the plight of sewage workers and the homeless without sentimentality.

The simplest observations can ignite his interest. He ponders how life in the city can resemble moving from one enclosed box to another; how virtual reality, which "can make everything virtual except class", is unable to replace the city's human network; and the ubiquity of carrom, "Bombay's game".

### A shrewd approach

Much of his critique remains fresh. In a 1993 piece, he cautions against lauding Mumbai's "seemingly



**The Diamond-Encrusted Rat Trap**  
Adil Jussawalla  
Speaking Tiger Books  
₹499

"indestructible spirit", which ignores "the millions whose spirit the city has destroyed". In 1980, he observes that "a few privileged property owners and property sharks are the truly big fish, devouring and threatening to devour lesser ones". Still true.

A wry, self-deprecating tone runs through the collection, sparing it from becoming elegiac or celebratory. Jussawalla's shrewd, ironic approach is especially welcome at a time of grand narratives and inflated rhetoric – about Mumbai or anything else.

*The reviewer is a Mumbai-based critic*

## Nistula Hebbal

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**N**ajma Heptulla has been a fixture of Indian politics for decades. She served as the deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha for 17 years, through years of Congress (her earlier party) majority, and the more unsettled coalition years. She presided over the House of Elders, through some rather stormy times, when uncertain numbers created the need for consensus, charm and tact.

Her autobiography, *In Pursuit of Democracy: Beyond Party Lines*, is an anecdote-studded lookback at her public life. Heptulla's political journey began with the Congress but ended in the BJP. She became a minister in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet, and later



# The politician

**Najma Heptulla's memoir shines a light on women in public life**

**Optimism advocate**  
Rutger Bregman's works have been translated widely and featured on *The New York Times* bestseller list. (GETTY IMAGES)

## Aditya Mani Jha

Over the last decade or so, the 36-year-old Dutch writer and popular historian Rutger Bregman has argued passionately for an optimistic, goal-oriented worldview, one with less cynicism and more collaboration. His books, *Utopia for Realists* (2014) and *Humankind: A Hopeful Mystery* (2019), have been translated into dozens of languages and have made it to *The New York Times* bestsellers' list. His latest work, *Moral Ambition*, can be seen as a kind of culmination of the themes Bregman explored in his previous work. In this book, he outlines the lessons, strategies and objectives suited to those with (as the title suggests) moral ambition. During an online interview, Bregman spoke about the making of *Moral Ambition* and his own journey to move past cynicism.

**Question:** Towards the beginning of the book you write, "This is not a book that makes life easier but one that makes life a little harder. Not a book that offers solace, but one that causes friction." Was this directed, perhaps, at the world of self-help literature?

**Answer:** Yes, because self-help books are designed to make you feel comfortable, make you feel good about yourself, make you feel like you're doing everything within your power. When I talk about 'moral ambition' it comes from a place of realising, "Well actually, I haven't been doing enough," and then figuring out what you can do to make a positive impact on the world.

**Q:** You contend that the most common category of young people is ambitious and not especially idealistic, and this category ends up occupying the vast majority of corporate jobs. You cite the concept of "bullshit jobs", as described in the 2018 book of the same name by the late anthropologist David Graeber. Could you explain this concept?

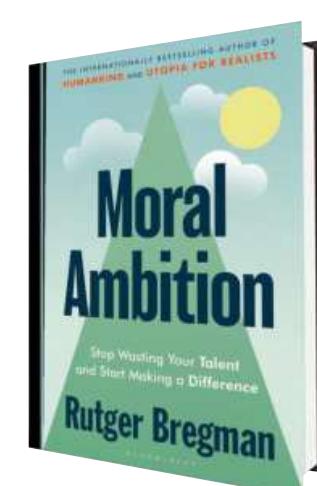
**A:** As Professor Graeber describes it in his book, a "bullshit job" is basically a job [corporate, usually] that adds very little perceptible value to the world. If these people went on strike tomorrow, it would barely make a dent in the world, nothing would stop. In polls conducted among a variety of professionals, it is people in these "bullshit jobs" that report the most feelings of insignificance and confusion – "what are we bringing to the table here, really?" that is the predominant feeling or sentiment. In Graeber's original framing, BS jobs included telemarketers, public relations specialists, lobbyists, etc.

Most of all, BS jobs are BS because they are taking time and energy away from educated professionals who could be using that for much better aims, for themselves and for the world.



# DO-GOODERS

Rutger Bregman suggests a way to a meaningful life, beyond 'BS' jobs



**Moral Ambition**  
Rutger Bregman  
Bloomsbury India  
₹699

short-to-medium-term, i.e. 10-20 years, is a key factor in choosing which problem to attack first. In this context, what are some of the likely areas you have observed in India?

**A:** I think there's still plenty of low-hanging fruit in India. When we talk about solvability, yes, time is an important factor, but even more than that we have to consider how motivated or incentivised every person involved in the process is. Like for example, fast access to medical facilities is something that is yet to be solved for many parts of India. But at the same time, we have all of these marvellous low-cost innovations and solutions coming out of the medical sector in India and of course generic medicine can be cheaply and efficiently produced here. So, it's not a problem of talent and it's not like the solutions are forbiddingly expensive. What we have, then, is that gap in motivation and scale and I feel like that's a problem ripe for tackling by sufficiently motivated people.

**Q:** You mentioned that you are taking a break from writing books now that *Moral Ambition* is out in the world. What are your plans for the immediate future?

**A:** I have co-founded The School for Moral Ambition, for ambitious idealists around the world who think that mere awareness of the issues is not enough. We are going to gather the best young minds from around the world, set up a fellowship for them and push them to challenge themselves and their own limits. If they are in corporate jobs, we are going to pay them to quit and devote themselves full time to whatever problem they seek to solve. We are going to support them in whichever way possible and back them to put their thoughts into action.

*The reviewer is a writer and journalist working on his first book of non-fiction.*

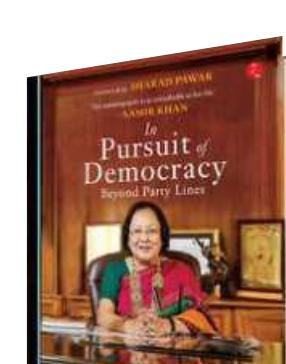
fascinating early chapter – how Indira Gandhi's first state visit to Saudi Arabia came about, and her role in it.

The second aspect of her

autobiography that is of interest is her stint as Manipur Governor, especially in the context of the ongoing turmoil in the State.

**Written with great affection**  
Her description of the northeastern State and how she attempted to breach the divide between Raj Bhavan and the people is written with great affection. She wore local attire (*phane*), and took time to speak to each group of Kukis, Meiteis and Nagas. She also lobbied hard for direct connectivity for the State by air to Delhi.

But there's a quibble, too – Heptulla does not reflect on the circumstances surrounding the passage of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, usually referred to as the Shah Bano case, which changed the course of Indian politics.



**In Pursuit of Democracy: Beyond Party Lines**  
Najma Heptulla  
Rupa  
₹695

Governor of Manipur. In her long stint, she interacted with many leaders, from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, her son and successor Rajiv Gandhi, former Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Prime

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## NO COUNTRY FOR PACIFISTS

Orijit Sen, a graphic artist, says, "In India, artists are no longer voices of dissent. This feeling that the government will come after you is everywhere. There is an overall atmosphere of fear among everyone, including artists." He adds that there is a manufactured mass hysteria among people where emotions are ripped up through propaganda-generating factories of the ruling dispensation. "In the past decade, people have become more zombie-like, they think less for themselves and rely on what they see on social media. It requires you to be an independent thinker and use your common sense to oppose killings, war, and violence," says Sen.

**A hypermasculine approach** Globally, most leaders such as the U.S. President Donald Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin and India's own PM Modi have fashioned themselves as hypermasculine leaders – in their body language and responses. Guha points out that the media has declared them as redeemers, and independent thinking people have fallen prey to herd mentality. "The same hypermasculine attitude and language is reflected across political ranks and files of BJP leadership, and in the responses of the street that lynch, tortures, and abuses people on the margins and makes hate speeches. It is no surprise that there are such masculine responses to this situation," he says.

This was apparent in the name 'Operation Sindo', where the Indian state and its leaders projected themselves as the protectors of women. On the



afternoon of May 7, when the government held its first press conference, it was addressed by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and two women, Colonel Sofia Qureshi and Wing Commander Vyonika Singh. They informed that 'Operation Sindo' was launched by the Indian Armed Forces to deliver justice to the victims of the Pahalgam terror attack and their families.'

Sindo, vermilion, is worn by many Indian women in their hair parting to indicate their married status, ceasing to wear it implies widowhood. PM Modi, in his address to the nation on May 12, repeatedly said that the military action is to seek justice for the women whose sindoor was erased.

J. Devika, an academic and feminist, says, "Operation Sindo is a hit because it upholds the fraternal social

contract where women belong to men in a patriarchal system. Where killing of a man is seizing his women, in this case, the wife. Killing the husband is killing her protector. This is the

(Clockwise from above) Guha; protests against the BJP leader's remarks on Col. Qureshi; and Raghavan. (PTI)

base of attacking in a patriarchal society where it immediately becomes a question of honour."

The press briefing held by two women officers avenging the sindoor of the Pahalgam widows was also hailed as an image of the Indian 'empowered woman' and 'united India' because Colonel Qureshi is Muslim.

Urash Butalia, a feminist and publisher, says that it is worth noting that in the past, most peace-making initiatives have been made by women. Women in Black, an anti-war movement that started in Jerusalem in 1988 against the Israeli occupation of Palestine and human rights violations, now hold vigils against any manifestation of violence, militarism and war all over the world. Similarly, in 1994, during the Nagaland conflict, the Naga Mothers Association formed a



The Indian government takes a leaf from Israel and the U.S. in creating such optics to focus a selective approach to human rights violations. Israel has been accused of 'pinkwashing', trying to give itself a liberal veneer in its war on Gaza. In November 2023, a photo of an Israeli soldier with a rainbow flag in support of the LGBTQIA+ community appeared. Similarly, the U.S. sent Thomas Greenfield and Robert A. Wood, both Black Americans, as its representatives in the UN – who have raised their hands to veto ceasefire resolutions for the Palestinian people.

**Not in the name of women** The representation of women and Muslims in the press briefing did little to whitewash the oppression of women and Muslims, however, or repair the social fabric in contemporary India. An Association for Protection of Civil Rights report suggests that after the Pahalgam terror attack, between April 22 and May 8, 184 hate crimes against Muslims were reported across the country, out of which 106 were instigated in retaliation to the Pahalgam terror attack. On May 13, BJP leader Vijay Shah called Colonel Sophia Qureshi 'sister of the same community as hers.'

Butalia says, "People think war should be the first response and will fix the problem within a week. But look at the Russia-Ukraine war and Israel-Gaza. It has been years. No wars have stopped because countries ran out of ammunition. They stopped because people sat across the table, talked and signed peace accords."

Today, reports of ceasefire violations continue, as do chest thumping WhatsApp forwards, and TV and content warriors who can't wait for season 2.

*The Delhi-based independent journalist and author covers the intersection of politics, gender, and social justice.*

Peace Team as part of a campaign called 'Shed No More Blood' that actively arbitrated a truce between the Indian government and the outfit, NSCN (IM). The group exists to give itself a liberal veneer in its war on Gaza. In November 2023, a photo of an Israeli soldier with a rainbow flag in support of the LGBTQIA+ community appeared. Similarly, the U.S. sent Thomas Greenfield and Robert A. Wood, both Black Americans, as its representatives in the UN – who have raised their hands to veto ceasefire resolutions for the Palestinian people.

On May 10, when India and Pakistan's ceasefire was declared, the collective aggression of virtual war participants was visible in rejecting peaceful solutions. The same people who were talking about averting women's honour through Operation Sindo began railing Misri's daughter, for providing legal counsel to Rohingya refugees after the Foreign Secretary announced on the government's behalf that India and Pakistan agreed to cessation of military operations.

Amid this macho atmosphere, feminists across India and Pakistan have not just welcomed the ceasefire, but also called for a dismantling of power structures that sustain violence. The logic of war – rooted in nationalism, toxic masculinity, and colonial-era borders – must be rejected.'

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**Joshua Muiwya**

**D**iscussing particle physics over a pint; debating the future of food sustainability over complimentary peanuts. Scientists hobnobbing with the public in a pub is not really what comes to mind when you think about serious science discussions. But that's what Pint of Science wants to change.

The event, started by research scientists Praveen Paul and Michael Motskin, of the Imperial College London, in the U.K. 12 years ago, is today an annual global festival taking place in 500 cities across 27 countries. And this year, it is making its India debut in Bengaluru, Pune and New Delhi.

**Making science accessible** Over the past decade, despite India's towering achievements in science and technology, data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics shows that there's been a near-stagnant investment in research and development (0.65% of GDP). In comparison, China spends 2.43%,

the U.S. 3.46%, and South Korea 4.93%. It doesn't help that authoritarian governments have had a long-standing history of delaying or cutting funding, using political rhetoric to underplay the value of this field of study and encouraging disbelief and doubt in the sciences.

Besides pedagogy, which makes science seem 'scary and unapproachable', there is also the problem of equating science with application. 'Policymakers and politicians who make decisions of

how much money should go into research, don't understand the importance of the why' behind the research, especially with regards to fundamental sciences [such as physics, chemistry, microbiology], says astrophysicist Debarati Chatterjee, an associate professor at the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics in Pune. 'Such research pushes our horizons of knowledge; they don't have immediate results or applications.'

In 2017, Chatterjee was invited to present her research at a local pub. At the time, she was working on her postdoctorate at the Université de Caen Normandie in France. 'I think I made a very pedagogical talk my first time. But after I incorporated animation into my presentation [at a later event], I remember it leading to vivid discussions,' she says. After participating in three editions in the subsequent years, volunteering at one and 'observing its impact' on people, Chatterjee decided she wanted to bring Pint of Science to India.

**Breaking the classroom effect** While Chatterjee cannot imagine a science talk in a pub while she was a student in India, today the presence of a craft beer and cafe culture, and a 'general public that has matured and is open to using these spaces to learn as well', the timing feels right. 'I have attended language meet-ups and craft workshops' at these venues, she says. 'The younger crowd is ready for this shake-up; in fact they are enthusiastic about it.'

Interestingly, in Pune, a similar format has been running successfully for almost a decade. Nakul Bhonsle, the founder-director of Pune's Great State Aleworks, and his friend, climate scientist Anoop Mahajan, inspired by the Pint of Science's format, have been running

wanted to bring Pint of Science to India. Before it took off this more organised version, Pint of Science was an event called 'Meet the Researchers' in 2012. Paul and Motskin organised it to bring people affected by Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, motor neurone disease and multiple sclerosis into their research labs and help them understand the developments and stopgaps in the research. It was a huge success. The following year in May, the duo shifted the location from their lab to pubs, and ran the first Pint of Science festival across three cities in the U.K.

### Origin story

Before it took off this more organised version, Pint of Science was an event called 'Meet the Researchers' in 2012. Paul and Motskin organised it to bring people affected by Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, motor neurone disease and multiple sclerosis into their research labs and help them understand the developments and stopgaps in the research. It was a huge success. The following year in May, the duo shifted the location from their lab to pubs, and ran the first Pint of Science festival across three cities in the U.K.

*The writer and poet is based in Bengaluru.*

through intimate conversations with the survivors.

For the Polish youth, it was a moving experience to visit the places that meant so much to their grandparents.

'Their grandfather would often tell them stories about India. The Polish children hated spinach and tried to throw it away. They played musical instruments as a band and started a Polish Scouting Team. They learned the Nawagar Anthem, but every morning they raised the Polish flag in the centre of the camp,' continues Arek.

Christmas celebrations were different in Balachadi. Jam Saheb, whom the children lovingly called 'Bapu', would send bags full of gifts

saddled on camels, and watch their

traditional performances.

'They tried to recreate the 'Jasinka' (Nativity Play) using things they had in the camp. In Polish tradition, Santa Claus comes in a cart drawn by flying reindeers but in Balachadi they saw camels, which they found exotic. They missed the Christmas snow as December was still quite warm in Balachadi,' Kasia recalls, while shopping for family and friends, picking up colourful Indian handicrafts and postcards.

'Granddad would pick these up for us whenever we visited India,' she adds, donning a hand embroidered jacket, while Arek chooses traditional Indian jewellery for his fiancée.

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We have all heard how there is no one single *Ramayana*, there are many – 300 at least. But no one tells us there is not just one Buddha; that there are dozens, maybe thousands, perhaps even millions, as per the earliest Buddhist scriptures. Also, there are hundreds of versions of his tale, in Pali and Sanskrit and Chinese and Japanese. No one clarifies that the historical Buddha we are so familiar with is a 19th century European invention.

India had forgotten Buddha by the time the British arrived. So, effectively, the British rediscovered him in the 19th century. The discovery of Pali manuscripts from Sri Lanka and Buddhist sites in the Gangetic plains was the greatest triumph of the Asiatic Society and Archaeological Survey of India. The British scholars were convinced that this cultural amnesia about Buddha was a deliberate cover-up, a Brahmin conspiracy. They used the Buddha to put clueless Hindu intellectuals on the defensive. And it worked.

**A European creation?**  
In the vast literary corpus of Buddhism were found stories of Gautama Buddha travelling to Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand in his lifetime. There were fantastic tales of him fighting Mara, the demon of desire, and realistic ones of his death following a bout of dysentery after eating pork or mushrooms. European historians took it upon themselves to decide which of these stories were true. Thus, a historical Buddha was imagined.

A bhante (Buddhist monk) performing a ritual for Buddha Purnima, in Howrah, West Bengal. (ANI)

## FROM CULT TO CULTURE A THOUSAND BUDDHAS

When the British 'rediscovered' Buddha and presented Buddhism as a Protestant movement



### GOREN BRIDGE The spots rule

North-South vulnerable,  
West deals

**Bob Jones**

A normal auction led to an excellent contract, but it seemed doomed on the opening lead. South knew from the bidding that East was void in spades and would ruff the ace of spades. A diamond shift by East, after ruffing, would leave South with a diamond loser and two spade losers to go with the ruff, and the contract would fail. South looked at his beautiful spot cards in the spade suit and

found a solution. South did not play the ace of spades at trick one, rather playing low and allowing West to win the trick. West had nothing better to do, so he continued with the queen of spades. Again, South played low from dummy and let West win the trick. West then led the seven of spades and East ruffed the ace, then shifted to a low diamond. South was now in charge. South won with the ace and cashed the ace and king of hearts to draw the trumps. He

**NORTH**  
♦ A 9 2  
♥ Q J 9 7 3  
♦ 5 2  
♣ Q 8 6

**WEST**  
♠ K Q J 7 4  
♥ Void  
♦ K Q 10 6  
♣ K J 10 3

**EAST**  
♦ Void  
♥ 6 5 4  
♦ J 9 7 4 3  
♣ 9 7 5 4 2

**SOUTH**  
♠ 10 8 6 5 3  
♥ A K 10 8 2  
♦ A 8  
♣ A

**The bidding:**  
**WEST** N<sup>♦</sup> Pass  
**NORTH** Dbl 2<sup>♦</sup>\*  
**EAST** Pass  
**SOUTH** 2<sup>♦</sup>  
All pass  
**\*Heart raise, invitational values**

Opening lead: King of ♠

then led the 10 of spades. West covered with the jack and dummy ruffed. A club to South's ace was followed by the eight of spades, on which South

discarded dummy's remaining diamond. South ruffed his low diamond in dummy and claimed the balance. Very nicely played.

### QUIZ

## Easy like Sunday morning

It's all in the name!

**Berty Ashley**

**1** Born on May 18, 1920, in Poland, Karol Józef Wojtyła started his life as a stage actor. After a conversation with a priest, he decided to study theology. This eventually led him to being elected as the youngest pope in modern history. By what name do we know him better?

**2** On May 18, 1965, American engineer Ray \_\_\_ founded a company in his name in London. It specialised in noise reduction and surround sound technology that transformed the audio quality of music and movies. What was the company named after him?

**3** Born on May 18, 1889, chemical engineer Thomas Midgley Jr. stumbled upon the discovery of leaded gasoline, which later was banned. He then went on to invent a halogenated carbon to use in fridges, which too got banned due to environmental issues. What was the name of this refrigerant this unlucky scientist invented?

**4** May 18, 1933, is the birth date of the 11th Prime Minister of India. He was born in a family of farmers in Haradanahalli in Karnataka, and along with the name 'Doddegowda', it usually gets abbreviated when referring to him. Who is this iconic politician?

**5** On May 18, 1965, screenwriter Gene Roddenberry suggested 16 names for the character of a Captain in a TV show he was writing. The name he finally chose



**Animated storyteller** Born on May 18, 1941, Miriam Margolyes is an English actress known for her character work and voice acting in children's movies. (GETTY IMAGES)

was 'Kirk' which meant 'Church' in Scottish. It had hardly been in use until then but soon became very popular, especially among sci-fi fans. What highly popular show was this?

**6** Born on May 18, 1957, Michael Cretu is a Romanian-German keyboard player and producer, who is the genius behind one of the most popular 'world music' bands. Known for the fusion of gothic voices, Celtic melodies,

Sanskrit shlokas and rock sounds, the band's name captures the mystery surrounding the composer. Which band is this?

**7** Born on May 18, 1941, Miriam Margolyes is an English actress known for her character work and voice acting in children's movies. Her most famous onscreen presence was in the Harry Potter series. With the name Professor Sprout, what did she fittingly teach?

**8** Born May 18, 1942, Nobby Stiles was an English footballer who is one of the only three to have won both the World Cup and the European Cup. He was known as 'The Destroyer' for 'The Red Devils' for his ability to winning back possession of the ball. For which EPL club did he play 395 matches?

**9** Born on May 18, 1979, Jens Bergensten is responsible for designing one of the most iconic video games of all time. In it, players explore a 3D world where they extract raw materials from the terrain and craft tools and buildings. What game is this, which recently launched a blockbuster movie in its name?

**10** On May 18, 2008, the fourth film in this franchise about an adventurous archaeologist was released. On May 18, 2023, the fifth and final film was released. On the same date, the actor, who plays the title role, was presented with an honorary Palme d'Or lifetime achievement award. Who is the titular character and who is the actor?

**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

10. Harrison Ford, Indian Jones  
9. Michaelcraft  
8. Maheshwaran  
7. Hubble  
6. Enigma  
5. Star Trek  
4. A.D. Deve Gowda  
3. Freon  
2. Dolby Sound  
1. Pope John Paul II  
**ANSWERS**

He died, depending on which text was consulted, a century, two centuries, maybe eight centuries before Ashoka's coronation. Japanese scholars of the early 20th century listed over 40 theories about Buddha's birth date. The site of his birth and death were identified based on traditional pilgrim routes, not evidence.

The Orientalists argued that the Pali texts were older, more conservative, more historical, while Sanskrit texts were later corruptions. But that is not backed up by evidence. The earliest Buddhist

manuscripts were recently discovered in Gandhara, dated to 100 BC. Many of them are in Sanskrit. They speak of many Buddhas, following a repetitive pattern that is also found in contemporary Jain mythology, and even in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. They also do not speak of the 'four noble truths'. These are simply mentioned amongst other truths. No one knows which language Buddha spoke in. Pali was a language used by Sri Lankan Buddhist monks around 500 AD, to distinguish themselves from rival Mahayana schools.

his beauty; Gopa falls in love with him. Yashodhara embodies pure love while Gopa embodies carnal love, in late Tantrik Buddhist texts, perhaps influenced by Krishna lore.

In Pali versions, Buddha's son Rahula is born on the day of his departure. In Sanskrit versions, the child is conceived on that night. There are stories stating that the pregnant Yashodhara gave birth to Rahula on the day Buddha attained enlightenment. She was accused of infidelity and had to prove her purity, much like Sita.

That we translate Gautama's transformation into Buddha as 'enlightenment' rather than 'heightened awareness' reveals how intimately the construction of Buddha's history is linked to European Orientalists of 19th century, who saw in him the Aryan sage they were looking for – outside the Christian world, and also outside Hindu idolatry.

They presented Buddhism as a Protestant movement, a rejection of Vedic ritualism. They were constructing Indian history using the framework of European Christian history. They established Buddha as historical in contrast to the mythic Ram and Krishna of the Hindus.

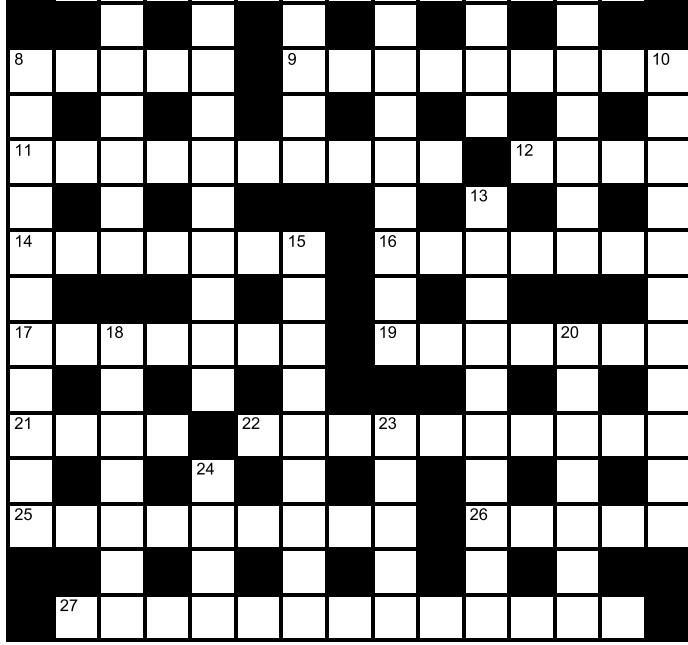
That wound festers even today, since many scholars and activists still assume these European inventions as facts. No one wants their religious leader to be just a myth – a creation of faith, a construction of the faithful. But it almost always is.

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

In the early biographies, Buddha's wife is not named and is simply mentioned as Rahula's mother. There are indications that a wife and a son were introduced only to establish Buddha's masculinity. In the Chinese *Ocean Sutra*, there are many magical tales of how courtesans who doubt Buddha's manliness are taught a lesson by him, appearing as a client.

There are stories where the prince of the Sakya clan has two wives, and sometimes even three. Yashodhara is won in a competition; Mrigaja praises

### THE HINDU SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 4 (Set by Dr. X)



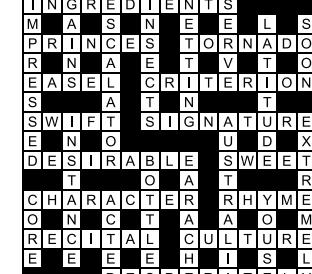
#### Across

- 1** Doctor offering lung surgery initially for patient (4-9)
- 2** See 20 Down
- 3** Prince chatters after consuming ecstasy, makes overtures (9)
- 4** New beach manor, at a bargain price in France (1,3,6)
- 5** Lives large on vacation in Capri, say (4)
- 6** Shines in tussle, easily crushing resistance (7)
- 7** Excel in covert operation (7)
- 8** Worker in NHS, a sad person who is no longer of significance (3-4)
- 9** Maiden in bed, extremely eager for enthusiastic kiss (7)
- 10** Standard part of oven or microwave (4)
- 11** Cook sent in more soup (10)
- 12** Thoroughly envy rich English rogue (5,4)
- 13** Favourite student describing a part of flower (5)
- 14** Outrageous clip with nude belle gets censored (4-9)

#### Down

- 1** Old fare turned sour and pungent (7)
- 2** Meet to catch ultimately shady character in unofficial trading place (4,6)
- 3** Penny enthralled by remarkably pure stimulant (5)
- 4** Fine hot topless dancing in places of lascivious entertainment (9)
- 5** Crash close to steep slope (4)
- 6** Empty group in maths final keeps university students a little stupefied (4,3)
- 7** Little difference in coins of low value (5,6)
- 8** Get approval for catching extremely loathsome creep running clandestine unit (7,4)
- 9** Briefly look at huge swimming pool in city on the Black Sea (10)
- 10** Awareness of judge grasping crux of testimony (9)
- 11** Unusual stamp featuring ancient city's queen (7)
- 12** Be aware of what is going on, like a tennis umpire? (4,3,5)
- 13** Moral principle in quote about capturing hearts (5)
- 14** Promotion in class hotel for model (4)

#### SOLUTION NO. 3



## Vijaya Bharat

vijayacardio@gmail.com

**D**uring my visit to Japan on a family holiday, I was astounded by two features. The first was the pristine cleanliness across the country. As we travelled through big cities and rural areas, public spaces such as parks, markets and train stations and along the seashores, river fronts, ponds and even roadside canals, nowhere did we find any litter; not even a bottle, can, or piece of paper. Surprisingly, when we wanted to dispose of some coffee cups, we just could not locate a trash can. We had no option other than to shove the paper cups in our backpacks.

How does the whole of Japan stay squeaky clean? As we travelled further, we realised that cleanliness has been achieved through a strong civic sense in every individual and social norms ingrained as part of the cultural identity. No one eats or drinks while walking on the road or using public transport. Shops that sell snacks request their customers to take the food away and not eat on their premises. In only very few places did we find trash cans that were labelled: plastics, PET bottles, bottles and cans, and combustible garbage. Such segregation is practised in houses, shops and everywhere. Trash neatly packed in white see-through plastic bags is kept on the roadsides and collected by the municipal staff. In most countries, waste disposal is done through land filling, but in Japan with a limited land area, combustible garbage is put in incinerators, with special measures to reduce the release of toxins in the air.

"Reduce, reuse, and recycle", the common slogan for minimising plastic waste is well known, though not widely practised. I was fascinated to learn about *furoshiki*, a traditional Japanese method of cloth-folding to gift-wrap and make bags. It eliminates the need for paper, plastic, tape, and ribbons.

The second aspect that fascinated me was the toilets. The Japanese have combined the best practices of the East and West. It was really an awe-inspiring moment to find, on entering a toilet, a clean and dry floor, the lights getting switched on and the lid opening automatically. The warm seat and

## Tale of a beautiful vintage theatre

**The building with 38 balconies is a splendid example of European and Indian architecture**



**High drama** The interiors of a vintage theatre in Jhalawar. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**Atul Kanak**  
atulkanak@yahoo.com

**W**ould you believe there is a theatre in Rajasthan where real chariots and even elephants were brought on the stage during the performance of dramas? The theatre in Jhalawar city is popularly known as Bhawani Natyashala. The beautiful public theatre was built in 1921. It still exists, but in a poor condition.

Raj Rana was the title of the erstwhile rulers of Jhalawar. Raj Rana Bhawani Singh had great interest in cultural activities. When he visited some of the opera houses in Europe, he decided to build one such in his princely state.

Thus the Bhawani Natyashala was born.

**Huge spending**  
As much as ₹1.5 lakh, a princely sum then, was spent on the construction, the entire amount borne by the ruler. It was designed and constructed under his order by Thakur Umrao Singh, the then Home and military member of the Jhalawar State Council, with 38 beautifully carved balconies. The three-storey theatre is a splendid example of European and Indian architecture.

*Abhigyan Shakuntalam* of Kalidas was chosen for the first



## Clean and lean Japan

A strong civic sense and social norms ingrained as part of cultural identity set apart the nation

**Spotless drive** A squeaky clean road in Tokyo. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

gurgling sound as from a pool lent a feeling of calm. Toilets everywhere in Japan were clean, functioning and adequately stocked. Before the 2020 Olympics, renowned architects were commissioned to build unique public toilets in Tokyo. One such was the transparent glass toilet near the Yoyogi Park. On locking the door from inside, the glass would turn opaque! The Olympics were postponed due to pandemic and later held without spectators. But the Tokyo Toilet Project was shown to the world through a movie, *Perfect Days*. The protagonist who played the role of a toilet cleaner won the Cannes award for the Best Actor.

A penchant for perfection in everything, considerate behaviour, and no PDA (Public Display of Affection) practised by the Japanese were quite amazing. In the 1990s, I was exposed to Total Quality Management that had helped the Japanese to improve their production after the Second World War. TQM started in a steel plant in Jamshedpur, and was implemented in the health sector and town division also. We memorised the 5Ss:

sort, set in order, shine, standardise, and sustain, translated from the Japanese words *Seiri, Seiton, Seiso, Seiketsu*, and *Shitsuke*. But seeing the larger picture of an entire country kept clean through discipline, with social norms as the driving force was remarkable, though an impossible aspiration for elsewhere.

Cleanliness in Japan is rooted in culture. Japan's oldest religion, Shinto is based on worship of nature and the relationship between humans, nature, and the gods. There is no supreme deity in Shinto and no single founder. Shinto believes in religious pluralism, polytheism, and maintaining harmony with nature. Most Japanese are Shintoist, Buddhist or both. As we visited some Shinto shrines and walked through the orange-colored *torii* gates, my husband wondered, half-whispering, "We don't know who is the God of the Japanese. Nonetheless, the country is doing great. Let's pray and act towards cleanliness and prosperity for us too."

Truly, cleanliness is next to godliness.

## Runners' block

**Lack of pavements, stray dogs come in the way of a good sprint through city**

**Anand Raj**  
taraj2804@gmail.com

**R**eams and reams have been written about road safety before, and more would be written in the future too. But safety remains a distant dream for all sorts of road users.

I am a runner, part of a vibrant running group in Velachery, Chennai. Recently, we lost a fellow runner who was hit by a speeding car. I do not want to go into the merits of the incident as to who was at fault. The fact remains that we runners practise at our own risk each day.

Amateur running has gained huge popularity in India in recent times; and almost every month, if not, every week, a major event is conducted in some part of the country. Our runners, both professionals and amateurs, are taking part in many prestigious international events such as Comrades Marathon and Boston Marathon and bringing laurels.

However, when it comes to practice, we are literally on the streets, with dangers lurking from all sides. Every time we step out, we stand like Oliver Twist and enact his food table role in our own way, "Please sir, I want some space."

The only place where runners could run safely is roads that have a wide platform or sidewalk. Wide platforms are available only in major cities, especially on major roads. Even interior roads of major cities are narrow; with vehicles jostling for space.

That apart, most of the roads across the nation are battered and bruised. When motorists themselves are exhausted in their fight for a motorable road, claiming a separate lane for runners and cyclists would be viewed contemptuously and rejected as a luxury and scandal.

The theatre, which has witnessed accomplishments of several legendary artists, including sitar maestro Pt. Ravi Shankar, is eagerly waiting for a renovation.



ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

needing administration of vaccine for weeks, which would mean, staying away from practice.

With a decade of experience and numerous encounters and face-offs with the man's best friend, now I can convincingly guess, by its very gaze, if a canine is going to charge at me or remain silent. In a lighter vein, these chasing dogs help us to get some extra pace.

During rainy season, we face another set of problems. Inundation and muddy roads force us to stop our practice. Potholes lie hidden under the muddy water. When walking itself is difficult on such roads, running cannot even be imagined or attempted.

Woman runners have their own set of woes. They suffer harassment, cat calling, rude remarks, indecent gestures and the like. I personally know a few woman runners who have quit because of these issues. After some persuasion, now we are running as a group, to safeguard ourselves.

Long-distance running is an art. We need a safe stretch to practise. At the same time, I understand the ground realities and I do not wish to blame the government.

I only call upon my fellow runners to be extra cautious while running. The solution lies only with us. Please always run as a small group. Wear bright T shirts. Run in the opposite direction of traffic so that you would be visible to the drivers and you too could notice the oncoming vehicles.

Keeping ourselves fit is very important; more so being alive. Your family needs you.



### Guardians of nature

Our tribal culture is unique. ('It takes a village'; May 11) The traditions, beliefs, and practices of tribal communities are closely associated with nature. They are the protectors of our environment, wildlife, and birds. Their culture must be preserved and passed down to future generations.

**N. R. Ramachandran**

### Feathers and feelings

On close analysis of the physical, intellectual, and emotional attributes of our winged friends, one might be tempted to conclude that the term 'bird brain' is a misnomer. ('Birds are like us'; May 11) It is clear that birds' emotional quotient is similar to, if not higher than, that of humans.

**Ayyaseri Raveendranath**

### Agent of change

Aamhi, or the 'We' club, has declared war on waste. ('Rosalind Pereira's quiet war against waste'; May 11) Pereira's determination, devotion, and discipline will inspire others to become agents of change across India.

**V.M. Satvik**



### Strings of deception

The ruses used to make people take to a product, idea, concept

**Sundar S. Nathan**

### Choice overload

More of them mean better outcomes, but in reality, they can lead to uncertainty

**C.S. Krishnamurthy**

### Managing workplace bullies

Protect your peace by working harder and more diligently

**Nirupa Jayakrishnan**

### The whiff of mother's cooking

What's the secret sauce that makes it doubly delectable?

**Vidya Vasudevan**

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