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magazine

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The Beijing model

China implemented action in Beijing and all the 26 provinces around it to control air pollution

- They expanded and upgraded public-transport infrastructure that supports walking and cycling; increased ridership to ensure travel is led by public transport
- Beijing capped annual car sales/license registrations; cut emissions by adopting electric vehicles
- Beijing region has minimised coal use; cleaned up power plants; moved towards stringent emission control system and clean fuels in industry; eliminated waste-burning

By Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director, research & advocacy, Centre for Science and Environment

GOODBYE, DELHI

As small groups of residents in the national capital flee toxic air and relocate to other cities, could this be the start of a 'smog refugee' crisis?

Swagata Yadavar

For the first few weeks after they returned to Hyderabad in 2019, Padma Priya, 39, and her husband would stare into the blue sky in awe. They had stopped looking at the sky during winters in their five years of living in Delhi. "Either it was not visible due to the smog or it was this dirty grey," says the media consultant.

They moved cities so that their daughter could breathe easy. Ever since her birth, she would fall sick frequently; by the age of 2, she had three bouts of bronchitis. As parents they did everything they could, from buying air purifiers to restricting outdoor exposure, but her breathing issues persisted. "By the age of 3, she already knew how to hold the nebuliser," says Padma Priya, who had to quit her communications job owing to the frequent leaves she needed for managing their daughter's health.

Padma Priya remembers one scary night in 2017, when their daughter was breathless, coughing for over 40 minutes straight. The paediatric pulmonologist recommended steroids and antibiotics and asked the question that changed their life trajectory – is there any way that they could move out of the city? Since their daughter was under the age of five, he told them that her lungs could still recover, else she would develop asthma and need inhalers all her life. The couple took the difficult decision to leave, paring down expenses and opting for a small 2BHK in Hyderabad. "It was a gamble but it was better than getting our daughter susceptible to lifelong breathing issues," she says.

Within a few weeks of moving, the little girl's health improved. They have never regretted their decision.

Six years ago, this kind of move was unheard of. Old-time Delhi residents sneered at those who wore masks due to smog. Now, amid talks of climate change, moving out of the city is becoming a strange new reality. A growing section of people – concerned parents, those facing debilitating health issues, young professionals with remote jobs – is opting to counter the impact of air pollution by leaving the city, either temporarily or permanently. They are being called "smog refugees".

According to a new survey by consumer insights platform Smytten PulseAI, about 34.6% of the 4,000 residents surveyed in Delhi NCR are considering moving out of the region, due to deteriorating air, for their family's health and future.

This trend of 'air-pollution exodus' is neither new nor restricted to Delhi. Migration fuelled by extreme weather events or environmental degradation has been well observed globally and several studies show that air pollution is one of the key factors leading to migration. A 2023 study, published in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, based on China Labour Force Dynamics Survey data, showed if the level of PM2.5 (particulate matter less than 2.5 micrometres, a measure of air quality) increases by 10µg/m³, the probability of migrants coming into the city will be reduced by 21.2%. Such studies have also shown that when the air quality deteriorates, it's the highly educated and skilled workers who are the first ones to relocate. That is the case with Delhi NCR. This kind of migration not just shapes the labour market but also deepens economic inequality.

'The poison in our air'

Several contributing factors have turned the Delhi NCR region into a 'gas chamber': Delhi sits in the majorly land-locked Indo-Gangetic Plains surrounded by other polluted States while lacking strong sea breezes that help cities like Mumbai or Chennai. Further, winter air traps pollution, heavy local emissions and smoke from outside the city, creating prolonged PM2.5 spikes, which are worse than other cities. An average Delhi resident can lose up to 10 years of their life due to poor air, a 2022 study by Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago showed.

While there has been some improvement in the recent years, Delhi's air pollution remains high, averaging more than 100µg/m3 for at least 15 years, and is among the worst globally. The air quality was in the extremely bad range in the early to mid-2010s, peaking around 2015-16, but residents mistook smog for winter fog. There has been gradual improvement after 2018, even though it remains in the "unhealthy" range most of the year.

Through judicial rulings and strict policy measures implemented between 1998 and 2018 – like banning pet coke, furnace oil, coal industry and shifting diesel fleet to CNG – there has been a gradual decline of the city's air pollution but it still requires 60% further reduction to meet the cleaner standards, says Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director, research & advocacy, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), Delhi.

In 2024, the annual average of PM2.5 level in Delhi was 104.7µg/m3, according to a CSE assessment, more than twice the national ambient air quality standard (40µg/m3) and 20 times the WHO guidelines (5µg/m3). PM2.5 particles are 30 times thinner than a strand of hair and can enter the bloodstream and cause strokes, heart attacks and respiratory diseases like asthma, COPD, bronchitis and pneumonia. Exposure to PM2.5 levels is linked with 3.8 million deaths during 2009-19 in India (report published in *Lancet* 2024), along with the risk for pre-term and underweight birth weight, lung cancer and diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure.

Roychowdhury adds, the lesson from Beijing's successful clean air transformation (2013-17) is that this cannot be achieved through emergency measures such as the government's Graded Response Action Plan aka GRAP I, II, III, but would "require energy transition towards clean fuel in industry, adoption of zero-emission electric vehicles, and the elimination of waste-burning at scale and speed across not just Delhi NCR but also the entire Indo-Gangetic Plains". No one city can clean up on its own.

In the last 30 years, there has been a dramatic shift in the demographic affected by lung cancer, says Dr. Arvind Kumar, founder trustee, Lung Care Foundation, Delhi, and chairman, Institute of Chest Surgery, Medanta Hospital, Gurugram. He says, earlier 90% of lung cancer patients were smokers, mostly men in their 50s and 60s, while today, half are non-smokers, with nearly 40% being women, in their 30s and 40s. "During surgery, we now find black deposits even in young non-smokers which is a change that strongly correlates with long-term exposure to polluted air," he says.

To save the children

Gurugram resident Anjali (name changed) and her husband, too, could not imagine their two-and-a-half-year-old daughter growing up breathing the poisonous air.

The 39-year-old IT consultant, a daily 5-10 km runner, started noticing how her throat began to itch and her heart rate increased within the first 2 km itself. Anjali started reading up on pollution and decided that long vacations in the winter wouldn't help any longer. The couple is all set to move 2,500 km away to Kerala, to a suburb of Kochi, where her husband hails from. She has a remote job and will have to adjust to the place's language and lifestyle. Her husband, who works in a hybrid set-up, is yet to reveal to his company the planned move and is banking on his accumulated leave.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 4

IMAGING: ARIVARASU M.

RUSHDIE AND HIS MAGIC SPACE

We encounter an older, mellow Salman Rushdie in these stories. (GETTY IMAGES)

In his first work of fiction after the 2022 attack, the author explores art and mortality through five poignant short stories

Uma Mahadevan-Dasgupta

Salman Rushdie's new collection of short stories is his first work of fiction after the 2022 attack on his life which left him blind in one eye. The volume is titled *The Eleventh Hour*. The phrase 'the eleventh hour' originally comes from the *Bible*.

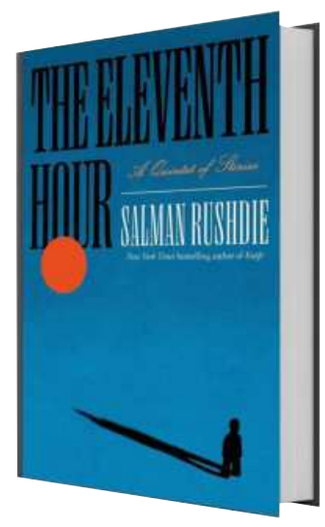
In Matthew 20:1-16, in the 'Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard', a landowner hires workers at various times of the day to work in his vineyard. At the end of the 12-hour workday, workers hired at the eleventh hour receive the same wages as those hired earlier in the day – suggesting that God's grace applies in the same way to all, and that it is not based on the length of an individual's service or effort. "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen," concludes the parable.

In contemporary usage, 'the eleventh hour' means the latest possible moment, or the moment when it is almost too late. For the two elderly argumentative Indian friends named Senior and Junior in the first short story in this collection, 'In the South', it is indeed almost too late. Over the years, the two gentlemen neighbours have bickered endlessly, as long-time friends do. In the front yard of their Chennai apartment building, they have witnessed an Indian laburnum plant grow from a tiny shoot to a grand and beautiful tree – but for them, in the twilight of their lives, it is a daily reminder of their mortality.

One morning, Junior has a needless fall on the roadside, and dies; the very next day, the tsunami claims thousands of lives; and Senior, bereft, is in despair. "The world was meaningless... The texts were empty and his eyes were blind." Suddenly, on the empty adjacent veranda, he sees the slight movement of a shadow. That is when he realises that there is nothing to fear, about this life or the afterlife: "Death and life were just adjacent verandas."

When words fail us

In different ways, these stories are meditations on art itself. 'The Musician of Kahani' is about how art can create and destroy. Chandni, the musician of Kahani, is "one of the very rare artists whose work directly impacted and shaped the world in which she lived". In 'Late', we meet Rosa, another girl from Mumbai,



The Eleventh Hour
Salman Rushdie
Penguin Hamish Hamilton
₹899

now homesick in Oxbridge, where she develops a friendship with the ghost of an elderly Fellow – and discovers the remnants of the imperial past. In 'Oklahoma', two writers, young and old, collaborate on a Kafka tale set in an imaginary America that the German writer has never visited. The older writer had flown the Pathfinder aircraft in the raid on Bremen during World War II. He still suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. Meanwhile, his wife is described "a fine writer herself" – but also responsible for the large Sunday brunch and the garden of their Long Island house. No wonder then that she is seething with resentment and literary envy.

In the final story in this collection, 'The Old Man in the Piazza', language is personified as a woman: "our language... a very old language, one of the oldest and richest, even though she prefers not to flaunt her wealth, requires no throne to sit upon." In the public square, the old man becomes arbiter of rightness and righteousness – so much so that eventually, in a powerful warning, language stands up and begins to shriek. The intensity of her shrieks puts deep cracks in the buildings. "The piazza is broken, and so, perhaps, are we." But when language finally falls silent and disappears, it is indeed too late. Sounds have no meaning. "Our words fail us."

Ode to Mumbai

In this elegiac collection, Rushdie is also thinking of the city of his birth. Mumbai, "the magic space of my childhood – and not only of my childhood but of my richest imaginings and happiest dreams", is warmly, achingly present in these pages. ("Many of the stories I have told were born here. I think this will be the last such story," he adds.)

Mumbai, especially the city of a certain period, is here in the details, the place names – Bandra, Breach Candy – the Wayside Inn, the absent horseriding statue at Kala Ghoda, the movie stars, the gang killings, the golf at Willingdon Club. It is in the eidetically precise description of a cherished street: "If you drive up Warden Road past Scandal Point, and you go around the little bend there, you'll see... a narrow, leafy lane running (slowly) up a small slope."

And most affectingly, it is here as a tribute, in the figure of "the great poet of the city, who had surrendered to Alzheimer's disease (and) still walked to his small magazine-infested office every day, without knowing why he went there. His feet knew the way and so he went and sat looking into space until it was time to go home again and his feet walked him back to his shabby residence through the evening crowds massing outside Churchgate station, the jasmine sellers, the hustling urchins, the roar of the BEST buses, the girls on their Vespas, the sniffing, hungry dogs".

In *The Eleventh Hour*, we encounter an older, mellow Rushdie, aware of his own mortality – but also profoundly interested in the world, and present in it.

The reviewer is in the IAS.

Trauma, with a side of humanity

Avtar Singh tells yet another pandemic story of people and the ties that bind them together

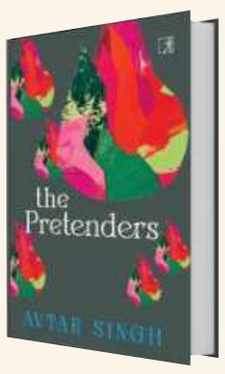
The novel is set across Asia at the peak of the COVID-19 Delta wave. (GETTY IMAGES)

Akankshya Abismruta

In *The Pretenders*, Avtar Singh sets yet another story in the COVID-19 pandemic, after *Into The Forest* (2024) whose sparse prose and sharp vignettes of characters living in a German village during the first lockdown left a lasting impression.

In April 2021, Shamsher Singh shouts at a man who shows up in his posh Delhi neighbourhood carrying a corpse for cremation. His driver, Sewa Singh, keeps himself occupied in acts of service in the gurudwara. His nephew Farid pines for his lover, Mei, living in Beijing. Mei's mother is grappling with her marriage and her husband's paranoia in Jakarta.

Meanwhile, Changez Khan, the one who served Farid and Mei during their time together in Bangkok, struggles to find friendship and connection in isolation. Set across Asia, these characters carry secrets that threaten to reveal themselves in the loud silence and stillness of the Delta wave of the pandemic – a period that wiped off families altogether, left pyres burning, and bodies floating in rivers.



The Pretenders
Avtar Singh
Simon & Schuster
₹599

Tension on the page

The opening chapter showing a working-class Muslim man carrying the corpse of his friend across the city in search of a Brahmin to cremate it creates a strong yet grim picture of the lockdown before moving to an upscale part of Delhi. This intensity fades but the story holds forth by connecting the boundaries between past and present, creating mirroring stories between characters.

The novel takes a jibe at the visibility of religion and acts of services, showing that people are who they want to be irrespective of the god they might or might not pray to. Poignantly, Singh features people on the margins and their restricted movements, desire for freedom, and expression and acceptance of love. Lest the reader forgets the severity of those days, the sound of the ambulance serves as a chorus, cutting through the intergenerational friendships, and adding to the tension on the page.

Singh's prose is both dense and subtle, mastering the art of 'show, don't tell'. He deceives his readers, a trademark storytelling tactic, in ways that warm their heart rather than leave them with a feeling of betrayal. *The Pretenders* should be on everyone's TBR.

The reviewer is an independent writer based in Sambalpur, Odisha.

A French-American superstar singer at the zenith of her fame is the antihero of this novel. (GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK)

Flawed yet memorable

This character-driven satire of celebrity culture is the perfect weekend read

Preeti Zachariah
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On a desert islet, "a place without running water or electricity, cut off from all contact with the outside world", a woman is giving herself a gift of sorts. "For everyone to leave me the f*** alone," proclaims French-American singer Cléo Louvent, the decidedly narcissistic antihero of Maud Ventura's darkly funny new novel, *Make Me Famous*.

An unputdownable page-turner from its idyllic opening scene, the book then goes back in time to Cléo's childhood, spent in a book-filled apartment in Paris, and recounts how she knew exactly what she wanted from life even at the tender age of four: to be famous.

Over the course of the book, set in Paris, New York, Los Angeles and the South Pacific, the reader will discover precisely what Cléo has done to garner this fame: the sacrifices, the moral trade-offs, the relentless hunger, the persistence and the ceaseless self-curation that allow her to reach the "top of the pyramid" at only 32. "Fame is a hard drug – a ferocious monster. And I sought it out, fought tooth and nail in my pursuit of it," says Cléo in the novel. "Extreme notoriety unleashed in me a beast, merciless and cruel."

Malleable reality

As her star rises, Cléo becomes increasingly more draconian and egotistical, her moral decline as inevitable as Daphne du Maurier's Julius Levy, Shakespeare's Macbeth, Oscar Wilde's Dorian Grey, or the guests who visit the White Lotus. Cléo, despite her faults, is a compelling character, thanks to her startling self-awareness, biting wit, and pithy observations.

Make Me Famous
Maud Ventura, trs Gretchen Schmid
HarperVia
₹499

It also helps that Ventura has chosen to employ the first-person voice to tell Cléo's story: the intimacy created by this stylistic choice means that you may even end up rooting for her, despite being fully aware of her megalomania.

Like many distinctly flawed, even unlikeable female characters in literature and popular culture – think *Wuthering Heights*' Catherine Earnshaw, *Gone with the Wind's* Scarlett O'Hara, *Vanity Fair's* Becky Sharp, many of Elena Ferrante's protagonists, all of Lena Dunham's girls, Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag* and R.F. Kuang's June Hayward in *Yellowface* – Cléo is a memorable one.

But, at times, Ventura hammers Cléo's unlikeability into the reader a little too hard, introducing numerous acts of pettiness and cruelty that often feel repetitive and hamper the novel's pacing. Having said that, this clever character-driven satire of celebrity culture and the malleability of reality in an Instagram-obsessed world is still a deeply engrossing book, perfect for airport lounges, weekend getaways or bedtime reading.

GETTY IMAGES

Sanjoy Hazarika's musings on journeys on the Brahmaputra are a cautionary tale against planned disaster

The river will retaliate

Abdus Salam
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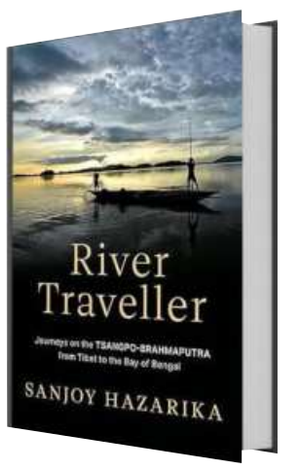
The origins of the mighty Brahmaputra, and even the fact that the river is the Yarlung Tsangpo downstream by another name, took decades and generations of explorers to unravel. It was not until 2000, when the Chinese allowed a *National Geographic* team led by Ian Baker to film the Great Bend and beyond, that the last few kilometres were mapped.

But then again, as author Sanjoy Hazarika points out, these explorations and incremental 'discoveries' are purely from a Western gaze; it's inconceivable that the local Tibetan wouldn't have known about some of the passages, falls and torrents. The former *New York Times* staffer counts among the few Indian journalists to have landed at the Lhasa Gonggar Airport in the 1990s. *A River's Story - The Quest for the Brahmaputra*, the filming of which took him there, is also the genesis of *River Traveller*, his musings on journeys on the Tsangpo-Brahmaputra from source to end point, the Bay of Bengal.

In Beijing's clasp

Hazarika's vignettes paint a picture of a Tibet firmly in Beijing's clasp. While he could not make it to the Namcha Barwa gorge, he passed through the Zangri valley, Shigatse prefecture, Yamdrok lake and Yarlung valley. Outside the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, one of Tibet's holiest shrines, he saw a sprawling spice market, emptied and replaced since by Han-owned shops. A pithy comment sums up the overall experience: "In virtually all ways, the Chinese treat Tibet like a colony, peopled by communities they particularly don't care for but a land blessed with rivers, minerals and other resources that they can exploit."

The book's mid-section finds Hazarika in more familiar environs as he follows the river's entry into Arunachal Pradesh as the Siang or Dibang, and 200 kilometres on into Assam as the Brahmaputra. While the timelines get hazier on account of the repeated visits, his description of the tenuous connection between the hills and the plains of the region until the late brush with colonial rule are masterful. He summons the destruction wrought by the river changing course after the great earthquake of 1950, as also its braided progression and birthing of islands, to emphasise how it takes with one hand and gives with the other.



River Traveller
Sanjoy Hazarika
Speaking Tiger
₹899

The author takes several detours – the air-dropping of supplies in remote parts of Arunachal, the ugly underbelly of the tea industry in Upper Assam, the marginalisation of the Bengali-origin Muslims in Lower Assam, the panoply of boats on Bangladeshi waters, etc. By the time he gets to Arichar Ghat, the point of confluence of the Ganga (Padma) and the Brahmaputra (Jamuna), and Hatia, the last piece of land before the Bay of Bengal proceeds to embrace the Indian Ocean, he is convinced of how the fate of the people is inextricably tied to that of the river.

This brings Hazarika to his core concern. That taming the river, as China is seeking to do with its dams and India plans likewise, or exploiting it to death carries a risk burden heavier than the 100 million tonnes of sediment it disgorges into the bay every year. The river will retaliate.

Godmen wield absolute control over every detail of their followers' lives. (Image for representation only.) (GETTY IMAGES)

CALLED BY THE CULT

Priyamvada Mehra offers an intimate look at what happens when a godman's unchecked power takes root in a family

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India is a land of godmen. Their framed photos hang in living rooms. Their sermons stream on TV. Stickers with their names adorn the windscreens of cars. Yet the term 'cult' never comes up. Why not? When does a congregation of the faithful tip over into the realm of the cult? How does membership of a cult affect a person's mind and relationships? Priyamvada Mehra's *The Cost of a Promised Afterlife* is a gripping memoir that offers an intimate look at how a cult can take root in a family, and once it does, tear it apart.

Mehra is nine when her mother Shalini (not her real name) is diagnosed with a brain tumour. The only remedy is surgery, but survival is not guaranteed. As Mehra writes, "Gripped by fear and desperation, my parents began clinging to the faint hope that something, anything, might undo the diagnosis and the impending surgery." A family friend offers to take them to his 'guru', Rampal.

Seduced by "stories of people healing from even the gravest illnesses through Guruji's grace", the Mehra family goes for a '*darshan*'. Once they enter Rampal's force field, the wheels of the cult kick into gear. Their personal details are taken, forms are filled, and before they know it, their '*naamdaan*' (initiation) is done. They've become followers of 'Sant Rampal'.

In the days following the initiation, Shalini's tumour goes dormant. Doctors aver that immediate surgery is unnecessary. For Mehra's relieved parents, this coincidence could have only one explanation: Rampal had orchestrated a miracle. Fully sold on his divine credentials, they double down on their allegiance to their new guru.

Loyalty to Rampal

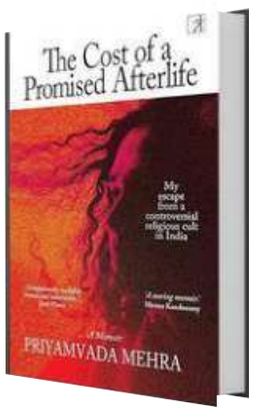
Like any cult leader, Rampal wielded absolute control over every detail of his followers' lives. He gave the Mehras 23 rules to live by. These included strictures such as not airing (or even hearing) any criticism of Rampal, no singing or dancing or listening to music, no meat consumption, no birthday celebrations, and no last rites after death. The cumulative impact of the rules was to cut the Mehra family off from every kind of social, cultural and emotional tether. The only all-consuming presence in their lives was Rampal.

The Mehras started visiting Rampal's ashram frequently. While her school mates spent their vacations travelling to new places, Mehra spent her holidays doing '*seva*', or menial work, at the ashram. Demonstrating loyalty to Rampal became the governing principle of their lives. Recordings of Rampal's sermons played non-stop in their home. A family under perennial financial stress splurged on travel for his *satsangs*, on feasts in his honour, and on donations to his ashram, with Shalini even donating her jewellery. But none of it was ever enough, because their faith was founded on a lie – Shalini's 'miraculous healing'.

In due course, Shalini's tumour became active. Her seizures returned. But the Mehras would not seek medical help. Mehra narrates an incident when Shalini had a bad episode, her "body contorted in horrific spasms, as if seized by an unseen force". The family, all educated individuals, responded by feeding her "Amrit Jal" – tap water 'sanctified' by Rampal. The family also reverentially consumed "*charanamrit*" – water 'sanctified' by being used to wash Rampal's feet.

The collapse

As Shalini's condition deteriorates, Mehra's parents blame themselves. Perhaps they didn't chant the *mantras* with enough conviction, perhaps they had fallen short in their devotion, perhaps something was lacking in their *seva*. They are so brainwashed and guilt-tripped they cannot see the obvious problem: Rampal's opposition to treating her with modern medicine. And so they don't do the obvious – take the sick woman to the hospital.



The Cost of a Promised Afterlife
Priyamvada Mehra
Simon & Schuster
₹699

Their '*bhakti*' towards Rampal is such that it does not permit them to question him even when Mehra is used as a human shield during a violent clash at the ashram. The surrender of will and collapse of intellect are so complete they remain his adoring followers even after he is arrested, jailed, and convicted for murder.

The sections detailing the cult's impact on the household ring eerily familiar, with Mehra detailing how each family member's allegiance to Rampal supersedes, and vitiates, the bond between father and daughter, brother and sister, husband and wife. The Mehra family disintegrates, and the trauma of systemic emotional abuse leaves every member devastated.

Unfortunately, the passions unleashed by cultish worship continue to be confused, in the Indian context, with old-fashioned '*bhakti*'. The term '*bhakti*' in its traditional sense describes religious worship founded on absolute devotion to a god. The person professing such '*bhakti*' is called a '*bhakt*'. Today, the term is used pejoratively to denote a cultish follower of a certain political leader.

For the '*bhakt*', loyalty assumes the sacrality of religion, and not just facts but even friends and family merit less consideration than fealty to the object of their veneration. In detailing the laws of the cult and the psychological toll they exact, Mehra also inadvertently makes intelligible the sometimes baffling irrationality of political *bhakts*. Reading her saga, it becomes clear that in any cult, be it political, religious or a combo of the two, the rules are immutable, and betrayal, inevitable. As long as India abounds in godmen, one can expect it would abound in *bhakts* too.

Ground to air

A factual narrative on the growth and prospects of the aviation sector in India

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Indian aviation has witnessed multi-dimensional growth in the form of better air connectivity and airline fleet expansion, among others. (GETTY IMAGES)

Advancements in aviation – a world of fast-paced technological developments – can be riveting for the enthusiast and perplexing for the casual observer. These are the two reader groups that Shiv Kumar Mohanka, Deputy Inspector General, Central Industrial Security Force, attempts to appeal to in his book (it is an e-book too), *Above and Beyond - Exploring the Amazing World of Aviation*.

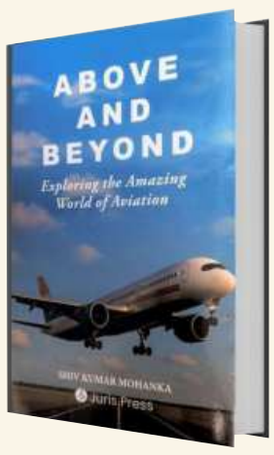
India, according to global aviation data markers, has found a place as one of the largest aviation markets, placed among other leaders such as the U.S., the U.K., China and Japan, and is growing at an impressive rate on a year-on-year basis.

As a result, Indian aviation has witnessed multi-dimensional growth in the form of better air connectivity, low-cost carrier services, airline fleet expansion, and also the modernisation of airport infrastructure.

This last factor, for instance, has resulted in headline grabbing statements – airport terminals, especially in the metros, that win accolades for terminal rating and even special prizes for 'interiors', and airports that hold out hope of helping the aviation sector evolve further. The author, for instance, acknowledges that a lot of what he learned during the planning and execution of Terminal 2 at Bengaluru airport was his tailwind in the writing of this book.

Bird's eye view

The 454-page book, across eight chapters, covers a swathe, touching almost every aspect of aviation, from ground to air. These include details such as runway design, maintenance and operations, air traffic control and management, airport technology and innovation, aviation weather and meteorology, aviation human factors and crew resource management, medical emergencies, and cybersecurity challenges encountered in the sector. There are also details on ticket pricing strategies and rights of air passengers – which would be appealing to an air passenger in this part of the world.



Above and Beyond – Exploring the Amazing World of Aviation
Shiv Kumar Mohanka
Juris Press
₹650

Of interest too is the chapter, 'Weighing of passengers and baggage by airlines'. An engrossing fact is the programme called the 'Passenger and Weight Survey', where the data is used to "calculate the average weight of passengers" and, in turn, the "maximum take-off weight for aircraft". There is a look at helicopter aviation, military aviation history, which includes the Indian Air Force, and drone technology, which could have been knit better with the rest of the book.

The author has tapped industry sources and media reports – *The Hindu* included – to weave together, with illustrations, a factual storytelling of the sector and industry. The aim has been to produce a concise handbook, but a more engaging style would have recast the reading experience.

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

GOODBYE, DELHI

(Clockwise from far left) A citizens' protest against air pollution near India Gate; water being sprayed on trees and pavements in Delhi to check dust pollution; and 'smog refugees' Ravi Verma, Praneet Saxena and Padma Priya. (GETTY IMAGES, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

Hiration, an ed-tech startup, it was not an easy decision to leave his birth city. Having spent a few months with his brother in Berlin and with parents in Bhopal, when he returned to Delhi in November 2024, he suffered from persistent eye infections due to pollution and could not step out for walks. "I realised that nothing has changed, there is no government action and no accountability," he says. Looking back, he's glad he got out of the city since the Supreme Court lifted the firecracker ban this year and made its decision that opens up 90% of Aravalli range for mining and construction.

Toying with the idea of Bengaluru, he moved to Goa within a month, because his friend was renting out his apartment. "There are problems of mining and deforestation even in Goa but the quality of life is overall still better," he says. While he misses Delhi friends, food and the theatre and music circuit, in Goa, he has found greenery, nature and blue skies. Saxena believes this kind of migration is no longer a choice for only those with remote jobs; when the three-month-old daughter of his best friend, also an HR-tech startup co-founder, developed breathing issues in Delhi, the family had to temporarily move to Saxena's Goa apartment this winter.

Whose air is it anyway?

While children with respiratory and cardiac issues and senior citizens are vulnerable across classes, more vulnerable are the malnourished, occupationally exposed low-income groups. Poornima Prabhakaran, director, Centre for Health Analytics Research and Trends, Ashoka University, concurs, "Only a very small section of people can afford to relocate because of air pollution; a large section of Delhi residents belongs to the working class, outdoor workers, daily wagers, who have no choice but to stay on here and are the most vulnerable groups to the impact of air pollution."

> **Only a very small section** of people in Delhi can afford to relocate because of air pollution; a large number belongs to the low-income, occupationally exposed working class
>
> **POORNIMA PRABHAKARAN**
> Director, Centre for Health Analytics Research and Trends, Ashoka University, Sonipat

Vimlendu Jha, head of Delhi-based environment non-profit Swechha India, says, "When those who have greater equity and agency move out, there are even fewer people to raise their voice for clean air. This affects those who are poorest and live through far worse conditions." Residents need to ask their elected representatives about clean air. "Even though air pollution is a political-party-agnostic issue, it is a political issue," he says. It was evident in the Delhi Police's forceful response to peaceful protests by citizens last month.

As of 2025, there have been at least five PILs (public interest litigations) and, or, writ proceedings filed before the Supreme Court and the Delhi High Court with respect to air, according to Justin Bharucha, advocate and managing partner at Bharucha & Partners, Mumbai. "This follows from the position that clean air is a fundamental right as per Indian law and enforcing that right must necessarily be through Indian courts," he says.

Prabhakaran says, "In our study on impact of air pollution across 10 cities in India we found that cities like Bengaluru, Shimla or Varanasi with lower levels of pollution of 15-40µg/m3 also showed increased risk of mortality."

Leaving Delhi is neither practical nor possible for most residents. As Roychowdhury quips, "Wherever you run to, those cities are also polluted. Most air pollution-related illnesses and health effects occur at much lower levels of pollution. It is not a linear effect." Leaving Delhi is neither practical nor possible for most residents.

For nine-year-old Aatrey S. Menon, whose family moved to Chennai in 2023, Delhi will remain home, a place he'd love to return to. Leaving his birth city meant saying goodbye to half his childhood. "I miss everything about Delhi – the weather, my friends and even the cold," he says.

He loved wearing sweaters in winters, misses his favourite pizza place and toy store, and even the air pollution – which meant he could stay at home and skip homework.

(With inputs from ***Tanushree Ghosh****)*

The Ahmedabad-based independent journalist previously lived in Delhi NCR.

(Clockwise from left) The Earthlore fellows rehearsing; an Earthlore performance in Kerala; tribal musician Bala with Jenu Kuruba music instruments *kai gajje* and *kal gajje* from Arpo's earlier documentation project. (COURTESY ARPO/ SHAMIL IBRAHIM)

Anasuya Menon
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SONGS OF THE FOREST

Arpo-Tata Trusts fellowship stages a new music band of honey-gatherers, other tribespeople from Wayanad and Coorg

On a November evening, at Nisarga Art Hub in Angamaly, Kerala, as a bunch of indigenous musicians from Wayanad and Coorg sang of the forest, of people's struggles, in their native tongue, the audience joined in, clapping hands and tapping feet. That day, the newly formed Earthlore band made their stage debut.

The band comprises 12 members from the Jenu Kuruba tribe, six from the Paniya tribe and one from the Kurichiya tribe, of Kerala's Wayanad and Karnataka's Coorg regions. A part of the not-for-profit Archival and Research Project's (Arpo) flagship programme, Earthlore the band is the result of a year-long fellowship.

Funded by Tata Trusts, the fellowship, with a monthly stipend of ₹15,000, was announced last year, to form and professionally train a collective of indigenous musicians.

Of over 70 applications, 18 young musicians were selected by a panel which included members from tribal communities. "We work closely with marginalised and under-represented artists to keep regional art forms alive, protect traditions, and create spaces for them to thrive. The Arpo Earthlore Fellowship is an example of this vision in action. It reflects our commitment to inclusive cultural empowerment," says Paroma Sadhana, programme manager, arts and culture, Tata Trusts.

To make the programme inclusive, two slots were given to non-tribal members – Parvinder Singh, an instrument maker and handpan artist, and Rishab Nair, a keyboard player and composer from A.R. Rahman's KM Music Conservatory.

The Jenu Kurubas, or honey-gatherers, also known as Kattunayakars in Kerala, are a reclusive forest-dwelling community, recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, with a deep-rooted culture of music and percussion. Living along the Kerala-Karnataka border, their dialect is a mix of Kannada and Tamil.

Preserving artistic heritage

"The Jenu Kuruba are a largely neglected group, which has been battling poverty, displacement and the resultant loss of cultural heritage," says Sruthin Lal, co-founder of Arpo. "A few tribal artists, such as Ramesh J.B., have been reviving the Jenu Kurubas' music and composing songs in their dialect, with an aim to help younger people from the tribe to get re-acquainted with their heritage."

Last year, Arpo facilitated a few senior artists from the community, including Ramesh, to participate in Bengaluru's second edition of the Mahindra Percussion Festival. The fellowship idea was born there, says Lal.

While many of these youngsters have been actively involved in singing and are part of musical collectives within the community, few could showcase their talent to a larger, diverse audience. Lal adds, "They were extremely keen to do mainstream numbers. 'Why should our music be limited to traditional songs?' they would ask."

Voices from the margins

That the youngsters endured hours of bus travel, in unrelenting rain, from various parts of Wayanad to come to the training centre in Mananthavady town, just to learn and perform was inspiring, says Charu Hariharan, percussionist, singer, composer and a fellowship mentor. The other mentors were musicians Sreekanth Hariharan, Viveick Rajagopalan and Vasu Dixit.

Charu, who co-designed the programme curriculum, says, "We left the design of the programme to the tribal artists. They know their music the best. We offered suggestions and introduced them to some instruments, such as the *konnakol*. The words they write and the songs they sing are powerful and rich with meaning." The mentors took the fellows through the technical aspects of a performance, advising them on "how to overcome voice strain" and "how to finetune *shruti* and tempo".

The young musicians built a repertoire of 10 songs, which includes storytelling, theatrical elements, and rap. Ajithlal Sivalal, founder of Space of Act Theatre Collective, helped choreograph the performance movements. A mix of indigenous drums were used, such as *thudi* (used by the Paniya tribe), *kottadhatta*, a kind of drum made from bamboo, and the *gajje*, an anklet worn by the Jenu Kurubas, the *djembe*, and plastic drums the tribal youth use.

Tunes of home and resistance

Band member Shyni M., 35, from Chembakamoola in Mananthavady, and an ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) worker, says, "Jenu Kurubas are generally a shy group; education is still a problem and we have been robbed of our land. The forest was our home and farming was our profession. Our ancestors grew ragi, corn and rice among other things. But today, we are landless and forced to become daily-wage labourers. I now live in a small house amid several other houses." Shyni sees the fellowship "as a great opportunity to sing about our lives, our realities".

A talented vocalist, Suraag S., 24, who's pursuing his B.Com at St Mary's college, Mananthavady, says, "People may not understand our language, but the emotion they would get." While he participates in *ganamelas*, which focuses on film songs, he prefers singing *naadan paattu* (folk songs). His own collective, Thidambu Gothra Kala Sangham Group, platforms tribal musicians. "Our music is inextricably linked to the land of our ancestors. We are the children of the forest," says Shyni, dreams of returning to the forest someday.

Earthlore band is next performing in Bengaluru on December 21 at Courtyard Koota and December 25 at Sabha.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

TRIBUTE [1937-2025]

TOM STOPPARD: THE MORAL CONSCIENCE OF OUR TIME

It wasn't the British playwright's characters that were trapped in absurd plots, but *us* who were living in them

Quasar Thakore Padamsee

On November 29, the world awoke to the devastating news that the much-loved British playwright, Tom Stoppard, had passed away. It is understandable that the news shook the U.K. theatre community, but it also sent waves of mourning among many of us stage practitioners around the world.

In popular culture, Stoppard is immortalised by his Oscar win (Best Original Screenplay) for the 1998 period romcom, *Shakespeare in Love*. At the time, many wondered who this strange man was. But for us theatre-*wallahs*, just a sample of the film's dialogue, immediately characterised by a deft turn of phrase that only Stoppard possessed, was enough. That award was an acknowledgement of his genius from the mainstream, but it gave us a reason to wear smug grins since we were 'in the know' of his mastery from much before the film.

My first brush with Stoppard's work was the ridiculous farce, *On The Razzle*, an adaptation of another play, I was to find out later. But the bizarreness of the scenes was brilliantly offset by the charming dialogue – full of puns, repartee, and double entendre. For my teenage brain, it was a goldmine. I loved the way he connected words. Homophones allowed him to make hilarious exchanges like:

"I love your niece"

"My knees, sir?"

Stoppard taught me that the real tool of communication in theatre is not the rambling soliloquy or the beautiful descriptions; it is the dialogue.

For most of us 'Lit types', college is usually where we first encounter Stoppard. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966) is a seminal work of absurdist literature, but unlike Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* (1952), it seemed much more accessible and identifiable. Existentialism became understandable. When Atul Kumar finally staged his vibrant version with actors on stilts, at the NCPA Experimental Theatre in Mumbai, 1998, I was riveted. The play leapt off the page and became urgent, vital.

Rock music and mathematical logic

What's more is that Stoppard was a contemporary playwright, a modern master who was still contributing to his canon. That gave him an aura of coolness, and gave us our poster-boy of theatre.

While still in college, a dear friend introduced me to the absolute immediacy of *Albert's Bridge* – a play about a philosophy major who is more happy painting a bridge than having to deal with his day-to-day tasks. Stoppard satirises education, class struggles, corporate or government decision-making, and even mathematics that doesn't account for the human being. The friend eventually staged it as a college production at St Xavier's Auditorium in Mumbai in 1998, and working on it and watching rehearsal impacted me in a very powerful way. I still find myself quoting lines from it to relate to my everyday experience. It's a play that I had hoped to eventually stage in Hindi, but I am yet to find the courage.

Drama king (Clockwise from left) Tom Stoppard; a poster of NCPA's production of *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, starring Neil Bhoopalam and Denzil Smith; and actors Joshua McGuire and Daniel Radcliffe in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, London, 2017. (GETTY IMAGES)

It's a pity that more of his work hasn't been staged in India, especially given the fact that he spent some of his younger years in Darjeeling. This might be due to the difficulty in obtaining rights, or perhaps that changes/ localisations are often not encouraged. Other than *Rosencrantz*, or *The Real Inspector Hound*, there haven't been too many Indian productions.

Perhaps my favourite Stoppard memory is a production of *Rock 'n' Roll* at the Duke of York Theatre in London, 2006. Other than its enticing title, or the fact that the production had Brian Cox and Rufus Sewell, the real magic is that it is a political play, but about rock music. I don't think I have ever paid as much for a theatre ticket. It was a last-minute impulse, and the seats were 'restricted viewing'. But despite the obstructing pillar, I was transported to Cambridge and to Prague seamlessly as the play talked about the role rock music and, particularly, *Pink Floyd* played in the Czech resistance against communism. Stoppard's writing is greatly researched, unusual in theme and almost always feels urgent and necessary even though it's talking about a time long ago.

> **In his play *Albert's Bridge*, Stoppard satirises education, class struggles, corporate or government decision-making, and even mathematics that doesn't account for the human being.**

I felt the same when I watched *Arcadia* in London in 2009. Although written in 1993, and talking about the early 1800s, the play somehow predicts the future. In an early scene, a character describes a leaf. And in doing so, she literally lays out the modern mathematical logic for algorithms. The very same algorithms that now control our entire lives. In some ways, the play is a homage to the phrase 'the sciences tell us how the world is, while the arts tell us what the world can be'.

Absurd yet poignant

The most recent Stoppard production I saw was the National Centre for Performing Arts' ambitious *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (2022). Most of the play is set in a jail cell, but it uses a full orchestra. It is set many years ago in Soviet Russia, but why do the absurdity of the bureaucracy and the totalitarian ideas seem, once again, so current, so... India?

Stoppard was not just a playwright for the ages, he was also in many ways the moral conscience of our time. He spoke truth to power, but with humour and satire. He made us realise that it wasn't *his* characters that were trapped in absurd plots, but *us* who were living in them.

A few years ago, while lighting a stage production of his tele-play, *A Separate Peace*, I remember having to pause because I was floored by a snatch of dialogue between a nurse matron and a patient in a hospital.

"I'm glad you feel at home"

"I never felt it there"

On the one hand, it made no sense. And yet it seemed to encompass a feeling all too familiar.

Stoppard's magic was that he could be absurd and poignant at the same time.

The writer is a theatre director and shares Tom Stoppard's love for puns, theatre and cricket.

Woof Stills from (clockwise) *Merv*, *Good Boy* and *The Friend*.

BINGE WATCH

Canine comeback

From *The Friend* to *Good Boy*, this year Hollywood has put dogs at the centre of many stories

Traditionally, the year-end holiday season has been the time for two classic Hollywood templates – the Christmas-themed family movie and the old-fashioned romcom. Of these, the former has been delivering diminishing returns across the last decade. The latter, however, is showing signs of recovery after a poor beginning in the 2020s. And the latest symptom of said revival might just be *Merv*, Amazon Prime's latest romantic comedy, premiering on December 10.

Directed by the British writer-director Jessica Swale (maker of the excellent *Summerland*), *Merv* follows an estranged couple who share custody of their dog. Since their breakup, Merv the dog has been depressed and listless, and to cheer him up, Russ (Charlie Cox) and Anna (Zooey Deschanel) agree to go on a Florida beach trip together. As a line from the trailer goes, "You know he was happiest when we were all hanging out together and having fun".

It's essentially *The Parent Trap* but with an adorable dog instead of a child actor. *Merv* arrives at a time when Hollywood has several films built around their canine stars, and across different genres, too. Clearly, when marketing departments are running out of 'organic' promotional strategies, dogs are seen as an easy sell, and for good reason. Dogs make everything and everyone around them better, softer, kinder.

Unconditional love

The actor Grant Gustin, best known as the star of *The Flash* (the TV series, not the film) appeared in a pair of canine-themed movies a couple of years ago. In the romantic comedy *Puppy Love*, Gustin and Lucy Hale play young people who meet on a disastrous first date and agree to never cross paths again. However, their respective dogs are already inseparable, and before they know it, they're sharing custody of a brand-new litter of puppies.

Puppy Love doesn't really tug at the heartstrings in the way Gustin's *Rescued by Ruby* does. In the coming-of-age film based on a true story, Gustin plays Daniel, a well-meaning but tone-deaf and clumsy young man who has tried and failed six times to become a search and rescue officer with the local police's K-9 unit. When Daniel meets Ruby, a border collie with a terrible temper, the two strike an unlikely bond, and they eventually join the K-9 unit.

Another grade-A tear-jerker from 2025 is the Naomi Watts-Bill Murray drama *The Friend*, based on the Sigrid Nunez novel of the same name. Murray plays Walter, a well-known writer struggling with depression. After Walter dies by suicide, his close friend Iris (Watts) is left with custody of his gigantic, arthritic Great Dane called Apollo. Together, the lady and the dog help each other grieve the loss of the one human they both loved unconditionally.

I really enjoyed watching *The Friend* on the large screen, especially because of the palpable rapport between Watts and Bing the dog, who played Apollo. While dogs are associated with uncomplicated joy, they are just as likely to be grief-counsellors-by-proxy, and I'm glad *The Friend* depicted this reality with grace and humility.

A dog's POV

The most unusual dog-centric film I have ever seen also happened earlier this year – Ben Leonberg's directorial debut, the horror film *Good Boy*. The premise of this film is simple but it leaves the makers with considerable technical challenges – the story follows Indy the dog, who is convinced that her owner Todd is being haunted by a supernatural entity that lives in the house they (i.e. Todd and Indy) have just moved into. What makes the situation even tricker is that Indy alone can see the supernatural entity in question – a reference to 'dogs-seeing-ghosts' being a trope in horror movies like *The Exorcist* and *Poltergeist*.

I don't want to reveal too much because the film's magic lies in its technical skills and the way it centres Indy in the narrative. Humans in the film are seldom shown from the waist up, mirroring the average dog's field of vision. Indy is shot from extremely low angles in the dark, and Leonberg has done a fantastic job with these scenes that really force you to see the world from a dog's point of view.

The film was shot on a shoestring budget of just $70,000 and it has gone on to earn more than $8 million at the box office. For much of the film's shooting, there were just three people present on-set: Leonberg, his wife and producer Kari Fischer, and Indy, who is the couple's real-life dog as well.

The trio recently gave some interviews together and they remind me of 'slow cinema' pioneer Kelly Reichardt, whose own dog appeared in several of her late 2000s indie triumphs. So if you love a good dog movie, the aforementioned films should be on your list this season.

Aditya Mani Jha is working on his first book of non-fiction.

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

TRICKTIONARY EPISODE 21

ARE YOU A COMPLAINER?

When people take to social media to air their grievances and it does not end there

Dear readers, recently I have come to notice an irritating trend, especially on social media, where Indian people of a certain age complain about something. Actually, let me preface my analysis of this trend with some more details.

First of all, the people I am referring to are usually between the ages of 18 and 65. Sometimes, they are slightly younger. And sometimes, slightly older. There is no official terminology for this group. But for the sake of this column, let us call them the Complainers.

Secondly, their complaints usually have to do with a handful of situations. Perhaps they are stuck in an airport because their flight is delayed. Or they are travelling in a train. And the bogey is covered in filth. Or they are living in an apartment building and someone is playing brain-meltingly loud music as part of a wedding or birthday party or some such.

Or they are at a bank, and there is utter and total chaos due to an excess of customers and a shortage of competency. Or they are attending a sporting event at a stadium and there is a grand total of seven toilets for 36,000 spectators. Or they are at a Metro station, and the metal detectors are not working, and now the queues are so long and moving so slowly, that some commuters have ordered microphones on Zepto and are now hosting podcasts from the queue.

Let us call these the Situations.

So, one day, a Complainer finds themselves in a Situation. And the only way they can cope with this vexation is to log onto their favourite social media platform and scream at the world in general, and the concerned authorities in particular.

"I am in Mumbai airport right now," they will say, "and my flight JKG7865 to Siliguri has now been delayed for the 67th time!" Which is very bad. "There are no staff members at the counters, there is no information on the board. The airline app is showing some utter nonsense information like avail of 10% discount if you buy your next ticket using HFDC Bank Millenia Diesel Plus Ultra Classic Platinum Pneumonia Albania Singhania Credit Card Plus! WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO NOW?"

All of which is utter and total catastrophe.

(Side note: Does any other country in the world use the word "avail" more than India?)

So far so good. I have no issues with this complaint. The Situation demands it.

But then they will do that one thing that absolutely drives me up the wall. They will start complaining on behalf of other people. But not all people. Just two types of people.

"This is utterly unacceptable! Also this is creating a lot of inconvenience for... small children and senior citizens!"

Small children and senior citizens.

Dear readers, what has happened to Complainers in this country? Why can't we wholeheartedly own our complaints? Why can't we express our frustrations at Situations that are grievously inconveniencing us... by just focusing on ourselves. Instead, most Complainers feel that their complaints are incomplete if they don't throw in the fact that the Situation is also impacting small children and senior citizens.

In fact, sometimes they will complain on behalf of fictional small children and senior citizens. "I ordered my food two hours ago and it still has not been delivered. Imagine if some small children or senior citizen was in my position and had to wait till 10 p.m. for High Protein Dosa Bowl with Avocado and Chia Seeds? Preposterous!"

Friends, I dream of a country where everyone is free to complain about anything purely because it inconveniences them. I want all Indians to own their pain and suffering. Because all our sufferings are valid. Please let us not shoot our complaints from the shoulders of small children and senior citizens. Let us put a stop to this chicanery, that, from today onwards, I would like to call: gripocrisy.

Example sentence: "Anamika's complaint about the broken audio at the multiplex quickly devolved into gripocrisy: 'I personally don't mind sitting in silence, but think of the senior citizens and small children who were eagerly looking forward to watching *Saw 19: Unprecedented Levels of Amputations.*'"

Which leaves me with with one final question: why are only the seniors considered citizens? What about us handsome middle-aged people? Are we not patriots?

Gripocrisy

/grɪˈpɒkrɪsi/

noun

Definition: The practice of legitimising one's personal complaints by invoking the suffering of small children and senior citizens, rather than simply owning the grievance oneself.

Related forms:

Gripocrite (*noun*)**:** A person who practises gripocrisy

Sidin Vadukut *helps early stage companies communicate better. He blogs at www.whatay.com.*

GOREN BRIDGE

Avoiding temptation

Both vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

South knew that he was catching a bad dummy when he leaped to slam, but a bad dummy with three-card spade support might be all that he needed.

South ruffed the opening heart lead, cashed the ace and king of diamonds, and led another diamond.

West ruffed with the five of spades and South over-ruffed with dummy's 10. What now? South was tempted to take the club finesse at this point, as he might not have another entry to dummy. He gave the position some serious thought and came up with a better plan. He led a spade to his ace. When both opponents followed suit, there was only one trump outstanding. Instead of drawing that trump, South led another diamond, hoping that East had the missing trump and would have to follow suit while South ruffed the diamond in dummy. South could then take the club finesse for a possible overtrick.

West, however, had the missing trump, and he ruffed this fourth round of diamonds. South discarded a club from dummy on this trick. West led another heart, but South ruffed in hand and cashed his established long diamond to discard another club from dummy. He then cashed the ace of clubs and ruffed the queen of clubs with dummy's last trump. Making six!

NORTH
♠ 10 4 2
♡ K 8 6 5 2
◇ 9 7
♣ 9 8 6

WEST
♠ 9 6 5
♡ J 10 9 4
◇ 6 5
♣ K J 5 3

EAST
♠ 7
♡ A Q 7 3
◇ Q J 10 4
♣ 10 7 4 2

SOUTH
♠ A K Q J 8 3
♡ Void
◇ A K 8 3 2
♣ A Q

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2♣	Pass	2◇	Pass
2♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
6♠	All pass		

Opening lead: Jack of ♡

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

International Civil Aviation Day

What is the safety protocol that requires pilots to follow a specific practice so that if one is affected by food poisoning, the other can still safely operate the aircraft? (GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK)

Berty Ashley

1 On January 1, 1914, Tony Jannus flew a Benoist XIV biplane flying boat for 23 minutes. He took off from St. Petersburg, Florida and landed in Tampa, Florida – a trip that usually took five hours by ferry. On board was the former Mayor, who paid $400. What historic record did this flight make?

2 One of the most important jobs in civil aviation is that of the hard-working ATCs. They are responsible for the safe, orderly, and expeditious movement of air traffic through the airspace. Though they have 8-hour days, they are required to take a break every 90 minutes to ensure they are not fatigued. What is the full form of ATC?

3 This standard practice that pilots and co-pilots follow in the cockpit is not because of personal dietary preference but is actually a global safety protocol. It is done to ensure that in case of contamination or poisoning, there is at least one person capable of handling the aircraft. What practice is this?

4 The Airbus A380 started flying in 2005 and cost $445 million, and currently has 189 aircraft flying around the world. It has a full-length double-deck and can accommodate a maximum of 853 passengers. The Airbus A380 stretches 72.7 metres with a wingspan of 79.8 metres, what is the record that it holds in the industry?

5 This record has been held by two airports over the last five years. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL) and Dubai International (DXB). The record is monitored by Airports Council International and gives ATL 108 million passengers and DXB over 92 million. What impressive record of logistics is this?

6 This was the fastest ever successful commercial plane in the world, able to reach a cruising speed of twice the speed of sound. It could carry more than 100 passengers in three-and-a-half hours from London to New York and was instantly identifiable by its sleek shape and movable nose cone. Which aircraft was this that last flew in 2003?

7 A prevalent myth in India surrounds the usage of a certain call sign for aircraft. The myth is that it refers to the fact that India used to be under a 'Viceroy' when the first aircraft flew in the country. That statement has no basis, and India was just assigned the call sign. What two-letters would you find on all aircraft in India?

8 A pressurisation cycle is the process of pumping air into the cabin during take-off to match atmospheric pressure, and then releasing the same during landing. This cycle causes the fuselage to expand and retract every time. If short-haul flights have 1,10,000 cycles and long-haul flights a maximum of 40,000, what do these cycles indicate?

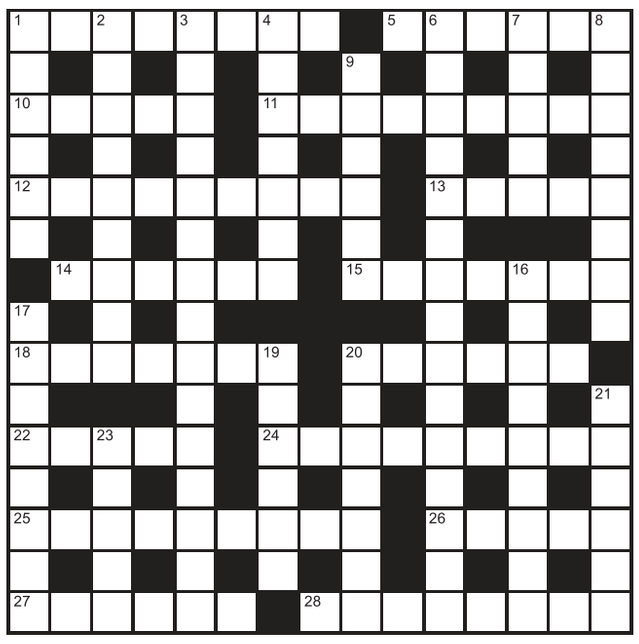
9 Tom Stuker is a New Jersey-based car dealer who, over the last 20 years, has racked up 24 million miles flying around the world. It all started with an unlimited-flight pass that he purchased in 1990. What alliterative term describes what Tom is the world's No.1 of?

10 As of 2025, United Airlines operates a mix of Airbus and Boeing narrow-body aircraft and a full Boeing fleet of wide-body aircraft. Currently at 1,055 and growing, what record does the airline hold in civil aviation?

A molecular biologist from Madurai, our quizmaster enjoys trivia and music, and is working on a rock ballad called 'Coffee is a Drink, Kaapi is an Emotion'. @bertyashley

Answers
1. The first scheduled commercial passenger flight (the birth of civil aviation)
2. Air Traffic Control
3. They eat different meals
4. The largest civil aviation aircraft
5. Busiest airports in the world
6. The Concorde
7. .VT
8. The lifespan of an aircraft
9. Frequent flyer
10. The largest fleet of aircraft

THE HINDU SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 33 (SET BY DR. X)



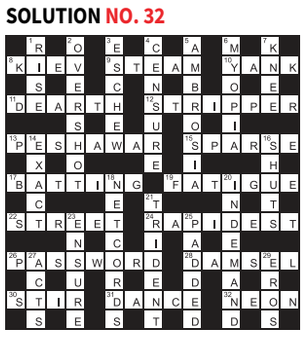
Across

1 Pleasure-seeker is a bit overwhelmed by painful problem (8)
5 A small box containing phosphorus in hollow beneath fireplace (3-3)
10 Restrain drunk grabbing maiden on island (5)
11 Took fresh sandwiches, cut of meat and vodka at centre (9)
12 Flat in Seattle, fancy and extremely spacious (9)
13 Girl dumps male, stuffy and tempestuous (5)
14 Bowl from ancient city stolen by youth (6)
15 Learn about new company holding inauguration of industrial plant (7)
18 lement in starch, a bit atypical (7)
20 Ecstasy, heroin and marijuana finally found in flat (6)
22 Article about India's foremost female bandit (5)
24 Doctor finally ordered rest cure to revitalise (9)
25 Offended by doctor, nurse left (9)
26 Very upset after onset of arthritis, getting help (5)
27 Most pretty model breaking signal on street (6)
28 Climber died in an incident on top of ridge (8)

Down

1 Fantastic gelato in American city (6)
2 Check quips about primarily boring anticlimax (4,5)
3/7 Where bums might be using intuition (2,3,4,2,4,5)
4 Plenty of university fellows receiving physical training on base (7)
6 Naughty nights with amour are ultimately leading to this? (7,8)
7 See 3
8 Current leader of band captivated by doll is British rebel of 1950's rock subculture (5,3)
9 Emergency in Cuba with endless threat to lives (6)
16 Most intelligent boy wins competition finally in American city (9)
17 Bombast of rich rogue consuming ecstasy with revolting degenerate (8)
19 Tense disagreement about husband's frugality (6)
20 Hurries as ruthless criminal runs away (7)
21 Tells about lacking energy, becoming more tired (6)
23 Smaller map of island close to Mykonos in pocket (5)

SOLUTION NO. 32



Steaming silences along academic corridors

Jasmine Anand
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The kettle exhales before anyone does. Clink. Steel spoons kiss glass tumblers. Tap-tap. Someone crushes *adrak* and *tulsi*, releasing their fragrance. *Ghooon-ghooshhhh*... Milk swirls into black tea like monsoon clouds drifting into the sunrise. Across the staffroom, a professor pauses mid-sentence – her spectacles fogging – while a student, clutching freshly printed research drafts, forgets both citation formats and imposter syndrome. In this moment, academia dissolves not in theory, but in steam.

We have spent decades speaking of knowledge exchange, yet seldom of warmth exchange. University corridors buzz with deadlines and debates, but rarely with gentleness. Tea, in most institutions, arrives hurriedly on steel trays, shouted for rather than invited. Cups drop on desks as punctuation marks rather than pauses. But what if tea were not caffeine intervention, but communion? What if we reclaimed tea not as a beverage, but as a philosophy?

Inspired by Okakura Kakuzo's *The Book of Tea*, let us propose a new academic ethic: tea as ceremony, not consumption. Tea must be a pause, not a transaction. Let the boiling of water be heard like a prelude. Let silence be served before tea. Let mobiles be face-down, and eyes face each other.

Each gathering must carry intention, let ingredients speak before words do. If calm is needed, let *tulsi* or jasmine float softly in the pot. If courage is demanded before a presentation or committee decision, let black pepper or clove awaken the tongue. For affection, offer *elaichi* or *kesar*; for grounding, stir in jaggery. And let this be announced as the tea is offered: "Today's tea carries pepper – for clarity and boldness. Let us speak firmly, but never harshly." Suddenly, tea becomes not a flavour, but a language.

Most of all, let tea dissolve hierarchy. In that circle, there must be no Head of Department, no Junior Research Fellow, no Professor Emeritus. Only co-drinkers. The cup is the great equaliser. A slightly chipped mug in one hand and a terracotta *kulhad* in another become the true academic credentials. No tea gathering is successful unless someone laughs without fear and someone speaks without caution.

Before dispersing, look once – at the kettle, at the cup, or at the person who poured – and say aloud: "Thank you –for warmth, not just tea." For only gratitude completes a tea gathering. Not applause, not politics, not metrics.

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

Shrinking space for the **Humanities**

A better understanding of the complementarity of science and the Humanities is essential for a functional and progressive society

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Higher education across the world has, of late, been witnessing a significant shift toward disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). These disciplines foster technical knowledge and analytical skills and are much sought after because they are considered job-oriented. Modern universities, driven by global economic uncertainties and market forces, and seeking external funding and research grants, seem to be under pressure to prioritise programmes based on these disciplines. Besides, elite private universities, eager to justify exorbitant tuition fees, offer state-of- the-art courses aligned with the STEM trend.

It is unfortunate that the excessive patronage extended to such new-generation programmes is at the expense of the Humanities, which includes subjects such as history, philosophy, language and literature. There has been a systematic and organised attempt to marginalise and deprioritise such academic disciplines. Such discrimination is evident in the slashing of departmental funding and downsizing of the faculty – developments that inevitably lead to declining student enrollment, programme termination, and, ultimately, the closure of entire departments.

The Humanities engage with human culture, history, and experience through critical and interpretive enquiry. They explore human values, expressions, and societies to deepen our understanding of what it means to be human. Studying the Humanities develops critical thinking, cultural awareness, empathy, ethical intelligence, and strong communication skills, shaping learners into well-rounded individuals. Endowed with historical perspective, moral sensibility, and creativity, such individuals stand ready to bring qualitative changes to social life.

Though these attributes may not always ensure lucrative jobs, unemployment is not particularly widespread among Humanities graduates. Their versatility, general awareness, leadership qualities, and flair for languages are indeed marketable. They have the potential to become great teachers who can mould the minds of millions; statesmen who think about the next generation and not just the next election; intellectuals who raise the level of public discourse; and social activists driven by justice, equality, and democratic values.

Social harmony

The decline and devaluation of the Humanities and the shrinking space they occupy on university campuses does not augur well for social harmony and peace. The trend reflects a moral ambivalence and cultural degeneration, often camouflaged by the ostentatious display of material prosperity.

The diminishing role assigned to disciplines other than science, technology and business studies can undermine the cause of social justice and bring about cultural disintegration and moral corruption. It might spawn a generation that is too positivist and desensitised. A system that focuses solely on the creation of a knowledge economy would produce enormous wealth but promotes endless mass consumption, an outcome of a commercialised education system.

A better understanding of the complementarity of science and the Humanities is essential for a functional and progressive society. A convergence of the head and the heart, intellect and emotion, what Matthew Arnold called "sweetness and light" would be the panacea for a wounded civilisation. Scientific temper blended with creativity is essential for the modern man.

In this context, it might not be out of place to recall the insightful observations made by Jawaharlal Nehru, the visionary leader of India, on the need to combine scientific temper with the emancipatory potential of the Humanities. According to Nehru, a university must stand for humanism, tolerance, reason, adventure of ideas, and the quest for truth. He visualised the harmonious coexistence of the Humanities and science and technology on Indian campuses. He believed that critical thinking, humanism and social responsibility would humanise technology.

Herbert Marcuse, the German-American social critic and political theorist of the 'Frankfurt School', posited that denial of the study of Humanities and the broader philosophical capacity for critical thinking, contributes significantly to the creation of the "one-dimensional man", who seldom questions the status quo and always accepts the dominant social order.

Modern society, propelled by technological rationality and consumerism, focuses on what is immediately useful. The prevailing education system that dispenses with critical thinking will promote a utilitarian culture that produces individuals who are unable to recognise their own alienation or challenge the social control under which they are reduced to blissful slaves.

Scientists seek to unravel the mysteries of the physical universe. But empathy, emotional intelligence and intuition nurtured by the Humanities are needed to know the inner universe, to strike a chord with the "still sad music of humanity" and to probe the possibility of a more fulfilling existence on this planet.

The price of breathing

Compliance collapses when people see neighbours lighting crackers or farmers burning stubble without consequences

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Delhi is facing winter, and with it the familiar air of emergency – schools closing, flights getting diverted, masks reappearing, and the skyline dissolving into a grey wall. The pollution is not the only worry. The deeper concern is that, like every year, we have arrived here after violating all deadlines meant to prevent this crisis. Firecrackers were banned, but burst in full splendour; stubble-burning cut-off dates were set, but ignored; construction norms exist, but get flouted. Even the decision to create artificial rain – at enormous cost – came only after the air had turned toxic.

This raises a deeper question: why are deadlines and public-interest rules so routinely broken in India?

A common psychological belief is that individual actions are too small to affect an entire city. Farmers burning a few acres of straw, motorists skipping a pollution control test, or residents lighting "just a few" crackers – the reasoning is the same: 'My crackers can't pollute the whole city, can they?'

But when millions act on this belief, we get exactly what follows Deepavali every year: a massive spike in PM2.5 levels (particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 micrometres or less), sharp drops in visibility, and children with breathlessness being rushed to clinics. Behavioural scientists call this the tragedy of the commons – where each individual's small gain creates a large, shared loss.


AFP

India is a country of festivals, but our "celebrations" have expanded into noisy and toxic dimensions. Firecrackers – once limited to simple *phool jharis* and *diyas* – have now turned into industrial-scale explosives. The sentiment "This is a once-a-year event; let's enjoy without restrictions" prevails. But pollution is not a one-day event. Its effects linger – spikes in asthma and respiratory distress within 24 hours of Deepavali, and air quality sliding into "hazardous" overnight.

Cultural introspection is overdue. Laws and bans exist, but enforcement is inconsistent. An unenforced rule rarely becomes a real law. When people see neighbours lighting crackers or farmers burning stubble without consequences, compliance collapses.

Cities around the world are replacing fireworks with drone shows, laser and projection-mapped light festivals, and low-smoke, low-noise regulated pyrotechnics

Contrast this with Delhi's behavioural shift after seat belts and speed cameras became the norm. Compliance rose sharply because enforcement was visible. Pollution rules need similar visibility – real-time challans for cracker violations, drones monitoring hotspots, and ward-level pollution reports displayed publicly.

Civic pride

Can culture change? Yes – and there is precedent. Indore turned waste segregation, once resisted everywhere, into a badge of civic pride. Cleanliness was reframed as identity. School campaigns, neighbourhood competitions, and public celebration of compliance created a culture where following rules was socially rewarded.

Delhi's air crisis demands a similar rethink. Clean air must be linked to shared identity, not just individual sacrifice.

A cultural shift cannot rely on bans alone. You cannot take something away without offering something equally joyful in return. Cities around the world are replacing fireworks with drone shows, laser and projection-mapped light festivals, and low-smoke, low-noise regulated pyrotechnics. These are not dull alternatives – they are spectacular, photogenic, and family-friendly. India has already experimented with drone shows at the G20 Summit and in several State capitals. Imagine Indian cities hosting grand, free, open light festivals every Deepavali – creating a true community celebration without toxicity.

Children are among the strongest forces for cultural change. When schools run "Green Deepavali" campaigns, families listen. When children calculate the cost of air pollution – school disruptions, health impact, emergency expenses – they bring the moral clarity adults often lack.

Delhi's worsening air is not inevitable. It is the sum of our choices. This winter, we must ask: can we celebrate without poisoning the air our children breathe? If we can shift even one festive habit – from noise to light, from smoke to spectacle – we would not just be keeping the air clean. We would be redefining celebration, responsibility, and civic sense in modern India.

FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

The article captures a pivotal moment for India's gaming sector, which is finally shifting from quick-profit models to genuine creativity and long-term value. ('Bets gone, game on'; Nov. 30) It is encouraging to see States investing in talent, infrastructure, and studios that can compete globally. India's gaming ecosystem can grow responsibly while opening new opportunities for young creators.
A. Myilsami

There already is growing concern of the increasing dependency on digital devices among pre-teens, teens and young adults. Gaming will become another social addiction. With the government backing the growth of gaming capitals, it may add numbers to the GDP, but definitely does not add up to the well-being of people and their future.
Rammohan Swamy

Universal appeal

Urdu has today become a language with a truly universal appeal, not limited to any particular religion but warmly embraced by people of all castes and creeds. ('Coming home to Urdu'; Nov. 30) Writers from diverse backgrounds have contributed to its richness and gained great popularity — writer Kanhaiyalal Kapoor being a prominent example. To restrict Urdu to a single religious identity overlooks its inclusive and shared cultural legacy.
A. Safvan

The AAP story

The rise of Aam Aadmi Party did rekindle the hopes and aspirations of the millennial generation in the country on an unprecedented scale. ('Sweeping view'; Nov. 30) However, the leaders could not rise to their expectations.
Ayyasseri Raveendranath

Delhi in danger

The article, through satire, personifies the extreme ordeal of Delhiites. ('Call it evolution'; Nov. 30) While Delhiites are afflicted by and grappling with various diseases caused by hazardous chemicals found in Delhi's polluted air, outsiders are scared to visit Delhi, lest they fall victim to its toxic air.
Kosaraju Chandramouli

The OG hero

Dharmendra forged a distinct cinematic identity ('How Dharmendra defied sameness'; Nov. 30) that was rooted in hard-won discipline, meticulous attention to dialogue delivery, and a natural affinity for action long before 'action hero' became a label in Bollywood.
Vijay Singh Adhikari

Chocolate dreams

The story highlights a quiet but meaningful shift in India's farm sector, where growers are moving beyond raw produce to create value-added products rooted in local skill. ('Cacao farmers with craft ambitions'; Nov. 30) This transition deserves wider support, as it strengthens local incomes and showcases India's ability to compete in premium markets. A steady push for training, fair pricing, and small-scale processing hubs would help more cacao farmers.
S.M. Jeeva

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

The movie magic
Many of them run on outlandish formulas and offer naive solutions
Chanchala Borah

Continuing divides
Every conversation veers around to a quick sketch of where a person sits in the country's social hierarchy
Siddharth Sundararajan

Halloween impact
The attraction for the surreal and unknown transcends generations and classes
G. Gayatri

The paradox of right and wrong
The essence of morality, therefore, lies not in action, but in awareness.
Shivam Bhamre

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SERENDIPITY'S DECADE SHIFT

10 years later, Goa's most ambitious arts gathering that has seen over 3,500 artists, has become a movement

Nidhi Gupta

Sunil Kant Munjal remembers the moment precisely. During Serendipity Arts Festival's (SAF) 2024 edition, he watched a local fisherman's family spend an entire afternoon at Thukral & Tagra's *Nafrat/Parvah* installation, where visitors exchanged packages of hate for acts of care, such as a haircut. The grandmother, who had never attended an "art event" before, told him it reminded her of communal rituals from her village. "That's when you realise art isn't alien to anyone," Munjal, SAF's founder-patron, reflects. "It's the contexts we create that either invite or exclude."

Ten years after it first began as a fairly outré and small cultural gathering, Serendipity Arts Festival isn't fringe any more – it's an institution. When Munjal and his team launched Serendipity in 2016, sceptics questioned whether a free, large-scale interdisciplinary platform could sustain itself while maintaining artistic integrity. The answer has been emphatic. The festival has expanded from eight venues and 40 projects to 22 venues presenting over 250 multidisciplinary projects across eight disciplines: visual arts, theatre, music, dance, culinary arts, craft, photography, and accessibility programming. More than 3,500 artists have participated over the decade.

Shaping memories

Every December, Panjim transforms into a cultural wonderland. Heritage buildings become galleries. Waterfront promenades host performances. Government schools send children on guided tours who later confidently explain contemporary installations to their parents. And chances are that everyone who has visited any of these sites has their own unique memory, their own special takeaway. "I have found myself in Goa every winter since the first edition of the festival," says permaculture teacher and current Camurlim resident Simrit Malhi. "I especially enjoyed the art and music installations on the oil barge when [Goa-based collective] HH Art Spaces were curators in 2017, and last year, I enjoyed the food talk on insects by Tansha Vohra, I try to catch the River Raag music performance every year – it is gorgeous sailing down the Mandovi at sunset listening to music."

Musician Bickram Ghosh, who curates the River Raag performances, describes stumbling out of a Carnatic Bharatanatyam concert in 2022, only to find the Kolkata outfit Sanjay Mandal and Group and street musicians playing pipes and cans 50 paces away. "There is synchronicity between art forms which cues very easily at Serendipity," says Ghosh. "That is the beauty."

For chef Thomas Zacharias, one of the curators of this year's culinary arts programming, the festival's magic lies in how "it's expanded the notions of what art can be" – bringing together food, craft, theatre, music, and dance in ways that give people "permission to slow down, to participate, to engage, to be surprised".

"Our most significant achievement has been proving that a multidisciplinary arts festival can be both artistically uncompromising and deeply accessible," says Munjal, whose family's philanthropy extends from the performing arts centre in Ludhiana that opened in 1999, to the forthcoming Brij cultural centre in Delhi. For him, Serendipity represents a conviction that "culture isn't decorative, it's foundational to how we understand ourselves and each other".

Food and craft installations

Beyond building on bold, sometimes risky curation and programming, the culinary arts segment has become its own beast, unlike anything ever seen in India, and mirroring the ambitions of events such as the Mad Symposium in Copenhagen. Food historian Odette Mascarenhas will present *The Culinary Odyssey of Goa* at the Art Park, featuring five traditional kitchens representing different Goan communities. Through it, she will be asserting that food deserves the same curatorial attention as painting or dance. "The kitchens aren't demonstrations," Munjal explains. "They're active cultural exchanges where recipe becomes narrative and taste becomes memory."

Craft interventions at Azad Maidan also exemplify this vision. Master weavers from Maheshwar work alongside contemporary designers; Kashmiri artisan workshops become living installations. "We're saying that craft isn't heritage to be preserved in amber," says Munjal. "It's living knowledge."

According to an internal impact assessment report in 2018, 84% of local Goan residents (who made up 55% of the 630 audience members, besides 200 stakeholders and 80 team and volunteer members surveyed), said "they would encourage their children to take up arts as a career after the 'Serendipity Experience'". Munjal sees this as proof that "creative communities aren't built top-down through curriculum mandates; they're built through lived experience and cultural permission."

Whose heritage gets highlighted?

There is a more tangible impact on the city that Serendipity has made its home. The festival has actively restored heritage buildings, including the Adil Shah Palace, Old GMC Building, Directorate of Accounts and Excise Building. Many people we spoke with believe that the festival has repositioned Goa – itself in transition between the raver's terra nullius and the devout's sanctuary – into a viable cultural destination. The economic impact, the SAF team say, extends through employment creation and support for the local creative community.

But not everyone is buying it. Joanna Lobo, a Goa-born journalist who has attended multiple editions, says: "My biggest issue with Serendipity is I don't find too much Goan representation there." While acknowledging the festival's importance and past programming that had local representation, Lobo argues that after 10 years in Goa, there should be more of it and featured prominently. "You are holding it in our State," she says. "Teach people about our culture, our musical and dance forms, our artists."

She also notes the festival's evolution from entirely free programming to ticketed workshops during weekdays, and paid vendor stalls at Nagalli Hills – the main stage for big musical performances. These, she believes, muddies the framework when it comes to access. "When you make it so prohibitively expensive, it's only the bigger brands and bigger restaurants who can afford to put up a stall."

Word of mouth has it that the vendor stalls cost anywhere between ₹10,000 and ₹15,000 per night at the 10-day festival. (It might also be worth noting that entry to the festival remains free, curators receive a small honorarium, says Zacharias, and to Malhi's knowledge, artists aren't paid.) "It isn't a place for small businesses," agrees Malhi. "But for artists,

Beyond accessibility

The festival provides ramps, tactile Braille artworks, sign language interpreters, and Indian Sign Language poetry performances as core design principles, not afterthoughts.

Expansion plans

The festival now visits Birmingham, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Varanasi, Chennai, Gurugram, Dubai and Paris before culminating in Goa.

(Clockwise from top) *Enowate*, curated by Jayachandran Palazhy; bassist Mohini Dey performs as part of *Three Divas* at SAF 2024; a yarn installation from 2019; mixed media art piece *Mini Narkasur* by Shree Betal Kala Sang; *The Legends of Khasak*, curated by Anuradha Kapur; and *Hands, Tools, and the Living Thread from Kashmiri Craft Ateliers*, curated by Sandeep Sangaru. (FOTEINI CHRISTOFILOPOULOU, PRANESH CHARI, AND RANEESH RAVEENDRAN)

Yes, culture needs permanence... But it also needs to be experienced in unexpected places, to transform entire cities into living canvases. The magic of this festival is precisely that it's ephemeral yet recurring

SUNIL KANT MUNJAL
Founder-patron, Serendipity Arts Festival

On the charts

This year's edition represents the festival's most ambitious programming yet, with over 35 curators, many of whom have been associated with it in the past, such as the actor Lilette Dubey and chef Manu Chandra, and including names such as L. N. Tallur, Rahab Allana and Rajeev Sethi.

- **Zakir Hussain special:** the festival will honour the *tabla* maestro with a tribute concert.
- **New venues:** a barge at Captain of Ports Jetty in Old Goa and Casa San Antonio in Fontainhas for immersive theatrical dining.
- **Book launch**: Munjal's book, *Table for Four*, a culinary exploration of India along with his Doon school set, will be released.
- **Zacharias' What Does Loss Taste Like?:** an immersive installation set in 2100 exploring climate collapse through five interconnected rooms where visitors taste mango as gelatin cubes and encounter descendants who are part-human, part-android. "We wanted people to experience tangibly the impending feeling of loss," he explains, "but also the agency we have in doing something about it."

Think of Serendipity as the public face and The Brij as the engine room. Together, they create a complete ecosystem from learning to livelihood, from experimentation to sustainability

SMRITI RAJGARHIA
Festival director

Ghosh, who orchestrated the festival finale last year – a concert titled *Three Divas*, featuring Shubha Mudgal, Usha Uthup and Aruna Sairam, that, he says, drew over 20,000 people – has always had an expansive vision for Serendipity: a space where classical tradition swirls with fusion, where rap meets the nine *rasas*, where the fading *surbahar* (or bass *sitar*), *sarangi* and harmonium encounter iPad musicians (in 'Fading Traditions, Emerging Sounds'). "Cultures do not need to live in isolation," he insists. "If you are smart enough, you can create bridges. And those bridges are very important for humanity because then we start identifying with the other."

He offers a final metaphor: "Goa's proximity to the ocean is key. You look at it, and you can't help but think: every kind of species lives inside the ocean, and it has such harmony. That is what Goa gives Serendipity and Serendipity gives Goa."

The Mumbai-based independent journalist writes on culture, lifestyle and technology.