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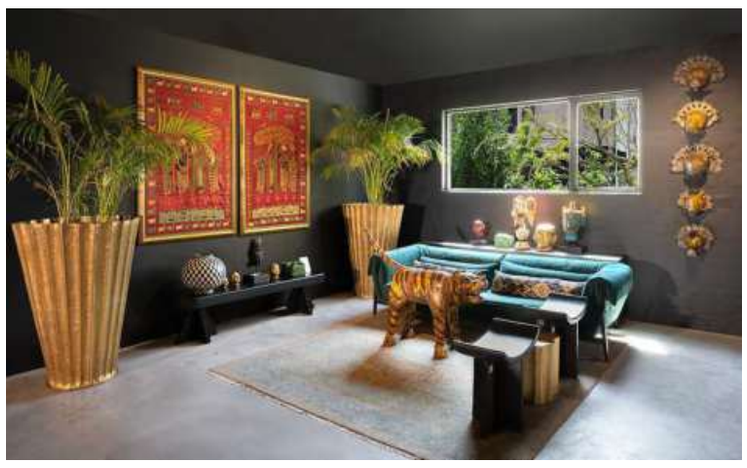

INDIA'S LUXURY BOOM:

VIA RETAIL PLAYGROUNDS AND WHATSAPP CHATS

As the 2% grow in wealth, luxury, accessibility and customisation are driving the country's retail market evolution. Think stores the size of two football fields, and high-end brands DMing customers about the latest drop

Gayatri Rangachari Shah

In March, Asian Paints had a swish opening for Nilaya Anthology, its gallery-style decor store in the heart of space-starved Mumbai. Hailed as the most ambitious interior design showroom in the country, and spread across 100,000 sq.ft., it is the size of almost two football fields.

At the launch, guests sipped Veuve Clicquot Champagne while admiring wares from Milan's haute design gallery Nilufer, Vikram Goyal's museum-worthy brass creations, and whole rooms devoted to bespoke Italian-designed kitchens, bathrooms, home spas and furniture from Europe and the Far East. In a city where fancy store openings happen on an almost weekly basis, it was, by far, the grandest, buzziest opening party.

"This is easily India's most luxury-focused retail concept," says Greg Foster, artistic director at Jaipur Rugs and former editor of *Architectural Digest* India. "To have designs from Nilufar, one of the world's most important galleries, alongside fabrics from some of the most prestigious European textile houses, fabulous carpets from Jaipur Rugs, certified Indian antiquities from Natesan's [and more], all under one roof, would be a fabulous concept anywhere in the world, let alone in Worli." Foster recalls how the debut collection of art works shown by Sabyasachi's Art Foundation – a series of female forms by artist Atish Mukherjee, in a contemporary take on the Bengal School of Art – were sold out on opening day. The prices ranged from ₹13.5 lakh to ₹52 lakh, and "people were fighting to buy them", he shares.

India is experiencing a retail boom, and luxury consumers are increasingly spoilt for choice as a proliferation of high-end, museum-esque stores are opening across the country. Western high-end brands too are launching targeted collections for the Indian customer. Four years ago, Bulgari, the Italian luxury fashion house that retails, among other things, classic jewellery with price tags that can easily go over ₹1 crore, debuted its version of the *mangalsutra*. The brand, which priced the piece at a fraction of their in-house designs, at around ₹13 lakh, hired actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas as its brand ambassador. In 2022, Louis Vuitton, the French luxury fashion house, which generated €20 billion in revenue globally, produced a capsule Rani Pink collection of shoes just for India for the festive season. And last year, long-time Indophile and fancy shoe designer Christian Louboutin, whose designs walk down red carpets at Cannes and the MET Gala, showcased a Diwali edit with velvet and brocade sandals and stilettos embroidered with *zari*.

Earlier, I would buy luxury bags, clothes or gifts when travelling abroad. But during and after COVID, numerous new stores and better offerings have made me buy more in India. It is convenient – you don't have to get on a flight, you don't need to worry about Customs when returning home. Plus you can build relationships with the sales staff, and have personally curated concierge services. Abroad, you are just a tourist, unless you are a regular at a particular store. With better curation, almost everything being available here, and excellent pre-and post-sale service, I find it easier to shop in India now

SHILPA BHAGAT
Entrepreneur and former Mrs. India

Many buyers who once limited their purchases to when they travelled abroad are no longer waiting to do so, instead preferring to shop in India. A day before luxury content creator Pooja Advani was leaving for her summer holidays to the U.S., she got a WhatsApp alert from a salesperson at Le Mill in Mumbai. The chic multi-brand luxury concept store was letting her know that the latest Alaïa collection had arrived. Advani, known for her trendy style in the city's social circles, had wanted a pair of the celebrated Parisian brand's sandals, prices for which start at an average of $900 (approx. ₹77,000). She did a quick online price comparison between India and the U.S., and immediately bought it.

"I got the tip in advance, they had my size, the price compared, and I didn't have to leave my home. It's these small conveniences that make it easier to shop for luxury in India," she says. Advani is just one of many clients that the Le Mill sales team has been steering towards the most *au courant* fashion as soon as it lands in the store – through a mix of WhatsApp messages and calls. Hitesh Rathod, creative director of Le Mill, says: "Many key pieces are sold even before they get uploaded on our website because our VVIP clients know exactly what they want," he says. Luxury retail is not just about exclusivity anymore, it is also about accessibility. Especially in India.

Why luxury retail is thriving in India

Over the past decade, a new affluent class has emerged, as the start-up culture and rise in stock market performance led to greater wealth generation amongst the top 2% of the population, many of them younger entrepreneurs. This class is more brand conscious and globally exposed. And after COVID-19, there appears to be a psychological shift amongst the rich to enjoy their lives and live in the present.

This means that while there are still big numbers online (the e-retail market has surged to approximately $60 billion in gross merchandise value, according to global management firm Bain & Company), there is renewed interest in offline. "We are definitely seeing a strong resurgence in offline retail, particularly in the premium and luxury lifestyle segment," says Abhishek Agarwal, founder of Purple Style Labs, which owns Pernia's Pop Up, the multi-brand fashion store, which recently took over the lease of the iconic 53,000 sq.ft. Ismail Building in Mumbai's Fort neighbourhood. Its counterpart in Chennai, on upscale Khader Nawaz Khan Road, is equally popular among wedding shoppers who browse their aisles and iPads, the latter making it easier for shop assistants to source from stores anywhere in the country.

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Rewriting the rules (Above, L-R) Offerings from Nilaya Anthology; House of Rose; and The House of Things. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

India's new Bata, the Birk

Aspirational luxury is experiencing a boom, too. Last year in Chennai, fashion influencer Pavitra Sagar was part of a Birkenstock promotion at Express Avenue mall. With everything at the German sandal brand's store at 50% off for four hours, she noticed college students buying four and five pairs of "Birks" each, which usually retail at ₹10,000. "I was shocked to know how many people wanted to buy them," she recalls. But, according to consumer behaviour consultancy Datum Intelligence, after the brand launched in India in 2019, the iconic double-strapped sandals, a European staple so far, has become one of the fastest-growing footwear brands in the country — with many in the media even calling it the "Bata for India's elite". "By the end of three hours, everything was sold out. There were no shoes at the store," says Sagar.

Author and translator Jhumpa Lahiri. (GETTY IMAGES)

IN CONVERSATION

JHUMPA LAHIRI'S ACT OF LOVE

When we talk about authors switching languages, it's always men, says the Pulitzer-winning writer, determined to change such thinking

Biswamit Dwibedy

For the last three years, Jhumpa Lahiri has been translating Ovid's *The Metamorphoses*, the most demanding literary endeavour she's ever undertaken, she claims. It's a book she fell in love with while in college, one in which "change serves as a plot, and pretty much anything can become something else". Who better to appreciate this than Lahiri, whose career is one of constant transformation – she is always becoming a different writer. Lahiri was in Paris for the launch of her book *Bone Into Stone*, a meditation on stones in *The Metamorphoses* as well as the process of translation, published by Sylph Editions, in collaboration with The American University of Paris, where I teach.

Interpreter of Maladies, Lahiri's first book, was published in 1999, the year I left for the United States. Nine years later, I remember watching the screen adaptation of her second novel, *The Namesake*, just days before my departure for India; I don't think I have ever sobbed more wacthing a film. Upon my return to India in 2008, I devoured her later novels. In fact, reading Lahiri's last book, *Roman Stories*, in Paris, a few days before interviewing her, was a full-circle moment. In the time that Lahiri has gone from a Pulitzer-winning American writer to an author of books in Italian, to a translator of ancient Latin, I too have gone through a transformation: from being a waiter in Iowa to an ad guy in Bengaluru and now, a poet and professor in Paris.

Where are the women?

Never had I imagined that I'd be sitting in a cab, talking to Lahiri about Etel Adnan and Rosmarie Waldrop, radically experimental poets we both adore, who also wrote in languages they were not born into. Lahiri came to the writings of Adnan and Waldrop through her interest in "exophonic women writers", authors writing in a language that is not their 'mother tongue'. Waldrop has been a lifelong translator to and from French, German, and English. Though born in Germany, she migrated to America in her early 20s, and started writing in English and translating from French and German. "What I find interesting, is the way writing and translation go hand-in-hand and feed Rosmarie Waldrop's work," says Lahiri.

"Waldrop learned French, which allowed her to translate the philosopher Edmund Jabès. Though German is her dominant tongue, she doesn't translate it into German but into English, and then this translation work is fundamental to her own poetic activity in English," she says. Likewise, Adnan, a Lebanese poet, wrote in English when she lived in America and in French when she lived in France. Adnan gained much attention late in her life for her paintings, but what is often ignored is that she was also a publisher of experimental writing, mostly by women, through her Post Apollo Press, which she ran with her partner, the artist Simone Fattal. "When one talks about what it means for a writer to switch languages, it's always Nabokov, Beckett, Conrad, Kundera, it's men," Lahiri points out. In fact, she is determined to change such thinking; she has been teaching a class at Barnard College on exophonic women writers who are often left out of the literary canon.

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The allure of originality

As someone with deep ties to many countries and cultures, Lahiri resists the word 'native'. In an increasingly oppressive world, it is important that we maintain the freedom to write in the language we love. Translation, for Lahiri, is also an act of love. Her invigorating and accessible book of essays – *Translating Myself and Others* (2022) – maps how reading in Italian helped her write in that language, in the same way that translating *The Metamorphoses* has allowed her to foray into poetry. Her Italian book of poems, *Nerina's Notebook* (2021) – a diary of a year in Rome – isn't available in English yet, but the author has translated some poems, which are available online. And she might even translate the book herself someday, she suggests, because Lahiri is also a very generous author, one who doesn't hesitate to share the intricacies of the creative process with younger writers.

"If you want to write better, start with translating the work of a writer you love," she advised my students. As a young writer, she'd practice writing like the authors she admired – taking their sentences as a structure she could aspire to – something emerging authors shy away from doing, so enthralled we are by the allure of originality. But, to her, writing goes beyond being original. Like translation, it is a way of keeping the past alive. "Sometimes I worry that young writers are meeting too much contemporary or relatively contemporary stuff. That they are not 'relating to older authors'," she says. "Let's hope that young writers are still speaking to the dead." Excellent advice for anyone who's picked John Greene over Henry James, Manga over Manto.

The writer is a poet and professor of creative writing at The American University of Paris.

(GETTY IMAGES)

A rare departure

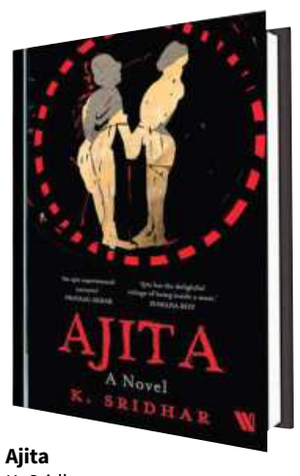
Set in an Indian past and present, the novel captures social reality and the psychic journey of individuals

Kavya Murthy

There have always been rules in literature. Take poetry, for instance. A sonnet has 14 lines and a rhyme scheme. A haiku is 17 syllables arranged in three lines. But, Oulipo – meaning workshop of potential literature, from the French – takes this up a notch, using elaborate literary constraints for any form of writing, whether a detective novel or a poem.

The formal experimentation in *If on a winter's night a traveller* by Italo Calvino is exhilarating as one is a reader reading a book about a reader reading a book. Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* is a single story told 39 times, each in a different style. The intention of the Oulipo is not only formal but to liberate the story *through* such limits. And the magic of reading these texts is near-mathematically wondrous, like decoding a cryptic crossword as one is doing it.

So, it is a rare and fresh surprise to encounter the novel *Ajita* by K. Sridhar, set firmly in what we might call an Indian past and present, that tells us that it takes its formal cues from the Oulipo movement. Set out in 26 sections, the novel is told from the perspective of two characters from different periods of time – the eponymous Ajita from the 5th century BCE, and Moksh from the 20th century.



Ajita
K. Sridhar
Westland
₹499

Each chapter is written without a letter of the alphabet, and expands the universe of our characters little by little. It is a fictional history that is ambitious in its scope, asking questions about ritual and tradition, ethics and morality, life and death, and politics and practice. The larger historical questions emerge from the inner lives of the characters and in dialogue with the people they encounter. Ajita is a Carvaka philosopher from the time of the Buddha and Mahavira, and Moksh is an academic steeped in Marxist tradition in a politically churning Mumbai of the 1980s and 90s.

The novel as a character

We watch the characters grow up and their questions are grand in scope: what makes humans different from ants? How does the individual cope with grief? We meet not only the fathers, mothers, teachers and lovers of our characters, but a wide cast of Vedic philosophers, Ajivikas, the Buddha, Dalit panthers, Mahayana Buddhists and trade union activists. While the novel succeeds in its experimentation and broad historical scope, the characters can tend to feel two dimensional and perfunctory. It barely passes the Bechdel test, with women characters existing merely to advance the plot or progress of the protagonists. But one could keep aside such critical concerns to applaud the freshness of this novel and its attempt to speak to a sweep of ideas and meet its formal restrictions with assurance and rigour.

The novel grows more inventive as it gathers momentum, offering intertextual surprises and metafictional confidence, surreptitiously drawing the reader's attention to its form. It becomes a character in itself, interested in the ways in which Indian society has sought to order itself against orthodoxy and tradition.

As it draws to a close, the novel recalls Doris Lessing's 'inner space fiction' of *The Golden Notebook* (1962), capturing both social reality and the psychic journey of individuals. It offers Indian fiction a refreshing new direction and conversation.

The Mysuru-based writer and editor covers books, queerness, and mental health.

If life were a film

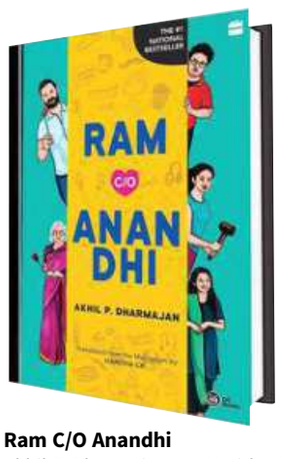
While this debut novel has all the ingredients of a potboiler, a transgender subplot stands out

Sheila Kumar

The first thing that strikes one after reading the debut book, Ram C/o Anandhi, is that it could easily be made into a film. Not so coincidentally, the author, Akhil P. Dharmajan, co-wrote the script of the hit Malayalam movie *2018*.

In his author's note, Dharmajan calls this book 'a cinematic novel', and it helps that all the elements that go into a regular commercial film are in here: friendship, love, drama, mystery, and even the proverbial fight sequence in the climax.

The story is based mainly in Chennai and the city is very much a character in the book, providing both texture and backdrop to the narrative. The protagonist, Ram, comes from Kerala to join a filmmaking institute. We soon meet the supporting characters, two of whom will be his companions as he navigates life in a new city. Then, the woman he falls in love with makes her appearance and their combative first meeting is the cliched staple of many a romcom.



Ram C/O Anandhi
Akhil P. Dharmajan, trs Haritha C.K.
Harper Fiction
₹399

Missing details

Everyone has a backstory that is explained at length but there is no effort made to delve into who these characters really are. The writing merely skims the surface, and depth is sacrificed for pace.

There is one subplot though, involving a transgender character, that is handled very well. Ram's friendship with the woman has a refreshing, charming feel to it. We get a peep into the lives of the transgender community and the travails they face.

This book has been translated from the Malayalam original, which came out in 2020, but it went viral last year, following which the translations were announced. A movie adaptation too is in the pipeline. The translation, by Haritha C.K., however reads as jarring and clunky in quite a few places.

The author has made one interesting choice, in how he ends the story. It is different in tone from the rest of the book and reflects how very often things pan out differently in real life as compared to romcoms.

The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based author, journalist and manuscript editor.

Reading station

Chennai Central Metro now has the country's first 'book park'

K.S. Swati
swati.ks@thehindu.co.in

On the way to the ticket counter at Chennai's bustling Central metro station, you can see a cosy 'book park' that promises to offer serendipity. Nestled between a pharmacy and an eatery, the 5,000 sq.ft. Chennai Book Park features a chequered grey and blue carpet, glass walls, and is fully air-conditioned. A joint initiative of the Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation and Chennai Metro Rail Limited, the facility has been built at a cost of ₹1.85 crore.

The book park has over 10,000 titles, including children's books, in English and Tamil. (AKHILA EASWARAN)

Featuring over a dozen publishers – Katha Books, Vitasta, and Kalachuvadu Publications, to name a few – the facility has more than 10,000 titles in English and Tamil, including mainstream bestsellers from Higginbotham's. What catches the eye is the sea of books for children, ranging from illustrated works to books for learning. "Tamil Nadu is the first state in India to have a book store inside a metro station. The main objective here is to promote reading," says Sankara Saravanan, Joint Director, Tamil Nadu Textbook Corporation.

The initiative will look to cash in on the large number of passengers – around 20,000 a day as of March 2024 – who pass through Central Metro, and will hopefully serve as a model for similar enterprises across the country. "I was surprised to come across this store during my commute. I find the collection interesting and it's a great opportunity to buy books for my children," said Jayamani, a mother of two. Open daily from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., the facility also has a cafeteria and a mini hall for book-related events.

Scan the QR code for a detailed look at the Chennai Central 'book park'.

Audrey Truschke

INTERVIEW

'INDIAN HISTORY IS FULL OF DIVERSE STORIES'

In her new book, Audrey Truschke traces important political, social, religious, and cultural events of the subcontinent over five millennia

Ziya Us Salam
ziya.salam@thehindu.co.in

Ever since she wrote *Aurangzeb: The Man and the Myth*, scholars and lovers of history have looked forward to reading Audrey Truschke, the U.S.-based historian who often presents a fresh perspective on Indian history. Her latest book, *India: 5,000 Years of History on the Subcontinent* (Princeton University Press), offers a panoramic view of subcontinental history, from early signs of life to the 21st century, documenting the most important political, social, religious, intellectual, and cultural events. Edited excerpts from an interview.

Question: *Who were the early inhabitants of India? Did our history start with the Indus Valley Civilisation?*
Answer: The first human beings set foot on the Indian subcontinent around 120,000 years ago, and the first humans from whom any modern Indians are descended entered India roughly 65,000 years ago. We know precious little about these early Indians, except that they were migrants. The Indus Valley Civilisation marks the beginning of urban life in India, although only for a few. Even at the height of the Indus Civilisation, most of the subcontinent's inhabitants lived in rural areas.

Q: *Wasn't the Indus Valley Civilisation a precursor to modern-day Hinduism?*
A: In a word: no. There are many ways of conceptualising the roots of Hinduism, and ultimately the religion has multiple origin points. But there is no compelling evidence that pitches the Indus Valley Civilisation as among the progenitor points for Hindu practices or beliefs. On the contrary, the earliest traces of anything we might call Hinduism today come with the Vedic migrants [also known as the "Aryans," although I shy away from this term in my book to avoid confusion]. The Vedic migrants entered into the northwest of the subcontinent a few centuries after the Indus Civilisation declined, bringing with them a host of ideas about ritual and sacrifice as well as a language that developed into Sanskrit.

Q: *Women were forbidden from listening to the Vedas in ancient India. They were denied formal education. Did this discrimination cut across barriers of caste and religion?*
A: Discrimination is rarely absolute, and we have many cases of women who gained an education, even fluency in Sanskrit, despite prohibitions articulated by upper-caste men. Also, those who revere the *Vedas* were not the only religious group that populated premodern India. For instance, I draw on women's voices to reconstruct the history of early Indian Buddhists, who did not participate in the gender restrictions of their Vedic counterparts.

Q: *You have written about Xuanzang studying at Nalanda in the 7th century. We have read conflicting accounts of the destruction of Nalanda in later years. What was the reality?*
A: There is no clear evidence that Nalanda was targeted by the Delhi Sultanate raids, which definitely impacted other Buddhist monasteries in the region. If Nalanda was hit, it recovered. We have records of Buddhist monks residing and studying at Nalanda through the late 13th century.

Q: *Historians have not always evaluated the important role played by the Panchatantra stories as an export of Indian culture. What made you appreciate its contribution?*
A: I have spent a significant portion of my adult life reading premodern Sanskrit texts, which has given me a robust appreciation for the tradition's literary and historical value. That includes the *Panchatantra*. Also, the *Panchatantra* stories proved notably popular, in various translations, in the premodern Persian-speaking world, which has come up in my prior research. Last, McComas Taylor's 2007 book, *The Fall of the Indigo Jackal*, on the *Panchatantra* is excellent, and I found it helpful for thinking about the collection's cultural specificity.

Q: *The Cholas conquered parts of Sri Lanka and exerted influence in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula. Why then are they denied their rightful place among the strongest rulers in the subcontinent's history?*
A: In my view, the Cholas get their due in most South Asian history books and certainly in mine [in contrast, I give the Guptas less attention for reasons I explain in the book]. Still, I would urge those interested in thinking about questioning standard narratives of South Asian history to ask: why are we so concerned with kings? Whose stories do we miss when we focus on the few who exercised political power? In my chapter on the Cholas, for instance, I also detail the influence of Tamil traders and the accomplishments of artisans of the period.

Q: *Coming to medieval India, what is your reading of Shivaji?*
A: In my book, I present Shivaji as a Shudra king who wanted to be Kshatriya to claim a certain kind of Indian kingship. [There's a school which believes he was indeed a Kshatriya.] Notably, Shivaji was not the only Shudra king of his era, and I also discuss the Nayaka rulers of southern India who did not try to become a different caste but instead pursued other ways of articulating power as Shudra rulers.

Q: *History, as you say, is full of sad stories. What were the silver linings you discovered about Indian history?*
A: Indian history is full of human striving that created a wide range of social, political, cultural, intellectual, and religious possibilities. These days, many people do not take pride in the exquisite diversity within the Indian past, and that is a real shame. Indian history is, indeed, full of sad stories, but it is full of other kinds of stories as well. I strive to value and honour them all through an unvarnished telling of the incredible range of humanity and human experiences that comprise Indian history.

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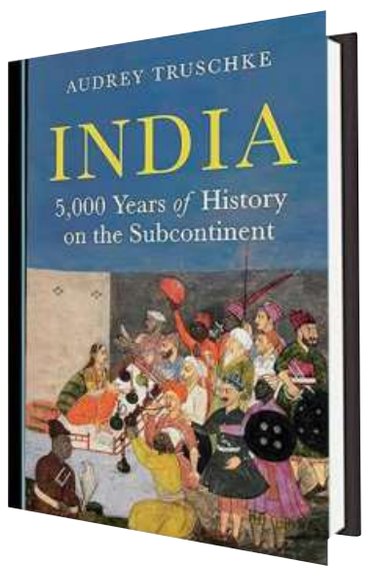


Author Perumal Murugan; and (left) students at MVM Government Arts & Science College for Women in Dindigul. (G. KARTHIKEYAN)

Perumal Murugan: Campus portraits

The writer's poignant sketches about his teaching experience are a must-read for both students and educators

K. Srilata

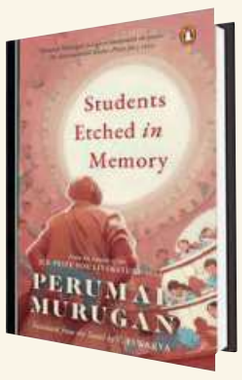
The essays in Perumal Murugan's *Students Etched in Memory* (translated from the Tamil by V. Iswarya) first appeared in 2017 as part of a weekly column in the *Vetrikodi* supplement of the *Hindu Tamil Thisai*. Contrary to the meaning of Vetrikodi (flag of victory), Murugan's stories about the students he taught during his three decades as a government college Tamil teacher in Attur weren't always success stories. "As a teacher, my attention is not always on those who have done well," writes Murugan and we warm up to him instantly.

The side most people know of Murugan is the writerly one but follow his work closely and you will see that this self is firmly rooted in his experiential world. As a free thinker who has taught Tamil to first generation learners in rural India, Murugan comes face-to-face with an educational system choked by an oppressive and feudal worldview, caste-class inequities, and outmoded pedagogical practices.

Young heroes
The essays in this book, ably translated by Iswarya, are heart-warming, poignant sketches of Murugan's students. Through his stories of their exploits, a picture emerges of Murugan himself, of a teacher who is warm, generous, compassionate and thoughtful. Murugan holds that the work of a teacher does not end with the classroom but rather, that it must extend even to the inner lives of students. He is a teacher who is constantly learning how to be one.

There is not a trace of self-consciousness or self-glorification in the essays. Murugan tells it like it is. This is what makes the book such a wonderfully engaging memoir.

Reading the essays is an immersive experience and we meet some of Murugan's most interesting students. The list is long: Maanvizhi, a female student who decides to stand for student union elections but is forced to back out; the brilliant Kalaichelvi who presents a critical paper on the *Mahabharata* and ends up earning the wrath of a professor for being too bold; Sudhakar who lives in Murugan's house for some time and loves to cook; Kumaresan who, prompted by Murugan, starts reading fiction; Prabhu with his quirky haircut; Chinnadurai the amazing performer who sings an *opparai* as part of a college competition; ruffian Ramu who turns out to be a poet and a talented *kabbadi* player; Rasu who has a green thumb; the mischievous Rajkumar who ultimately pipes down; Jhansi who knits a beanie for Murugan's daughter; Sarala who ends up as a policewoman in Valparai; the handsome Balamurugan who ultimately commits suicide because of failure in love; the dynamic Venkatachalam who is the joint secretary of the literary forum; the outlier Prabhakaran and his gang whom Murugan eventually wins over; Nandakumar who insists on prostrating before Murugan; Suresh from Javvadhu hills who has political ambitions; the hair-flipping Silambarasan; cycle Soosai; *parotta* master Gopalakrishnan; Koushik, the barber who cuts Murugan's hair when the latter is under house arrest; and research scholar Seenivasan whom Murugan mentors.



Students Etched in Memory
Perumal Murugan, trs V. Iswarya
Hamish Hamilton
₹599

The tyranny of English
Through his finely etched portraits, Murugan raises some fundamental and difficult questions. How does one teach and learn in an environment which is deeply feudal, so much so that students and their parents hesitate to sit in the presence of professors? How does one respond to class inequality and income inequities? (Many of Murugan's students work day jobs to support themselves and their families.) What work-arounds can one employ in the face of outdated curricula and pedagogical methods? How does one replace the old system of disciplining and punishing students with a new one based on respect and love?

Murugan draws our attention to the tyranny that is English when it comes to first generation learners from rural, small town Tamil Nadu. He recounts stories of students who clear all their papers but are held back only on account of the English paper. He also writes of the difficulty he faces when it comes to female students. Unlike in the case of male students, Murugan must keep a distance from them because of social dictates and so cannot mentor them to the extent he would like to. He also critiques the corrupt practice of research students buying their degrees.

Making learning contemporary
Murugan argues that while students need to be introduced to ancient Tamil writings, they should primarily be exposed to writings that engage with our own times and in ways that are accessible to them. He is happy, he writes, to share soft copies of reading materials over WhatsApp so that his students have easy access to them. His vision is that of an environment where students feel free to ask questions, where their individual talents are encouraged.

He stresses the importance of skill training and practical exposure. At one point, Murugan reflects on how the privilege he enjoys of a government job and a steady income results in his rebuking a parent who, unable to afford the college fee of ₹600, delays his son's enrolment. Equally engaging are his reflections on the importance of fashion and romance in the lives of his students and the importance of preserving their innate joy and exuberance.

What I found especially striking about these essays is the fact that Murugan narrates both "success" stories as well as "tragic" stories and stories of "failure". Reading *Students Etched in Memory* is an exercise in understanding the nature of privilege and how this plays out in the field of education. Fiesty, quirky, courageous and resilient, the young people in Murugan's portraits shine with their own light.

The reviewer is a poet, translator and academic; her forthcoming work is a book of poems, Footnotes to the Mahabharata.

Opulent place of call (Clockwise from right) Immersive experiences at The House of Things; Nilaya Anthology; The Collective; and House of Rose; Anushree Sardesai; Abhishek Agarwal; Payal Singhal; and Greg Foster. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

"There is a noticeable rise in omni-channel behaviour, where people are browsing collections online but coming to our stores for a deeper experience. While the pandemic significantly accelerated digital adoption, physical retail has come back with greater experiential demand," he adds. Pernia's Pop Up is planning more large format stores in Mumbai, Delhi and New York.

Rise of the single brand store

The proliferation of big and new players across India is strengthening this, be it malls such as Palladium and Emporio or the Ambani's Jio World Drive – which opened in 2021 with a roster of luxury brands making their debut in the country – or single-brand stores. The Collective, Aditya Birla Fashion & Retail's multi-brand offering, for instance, is growing in scale, and recently opened three new stores, bringing its total number to 40 across India.

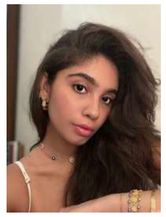
Adding to the mix is a slew of international brands entering our shores. Swiss watch imports grew nearly 30% in the first three months of 2025. Brands such as Breitling opened new boutiques in Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune and Gurugram, while Frank Mueller has plans to expand in Mumbai. "Today's luxury retail is about immersion, not just inventory. Store formats – whether standalone or mall-based – are being designed to create a high-touch, narrative-driven experience," says Pranav Saboo, MD & CEO, Ethos Limited. "At Ethos, we've adopted a hybrid model. Our mono-brand boutiques are housed in luxury malls to capture footfall, while our large-format experiential spaces like City of Time in Gurugram, allow for deeper engagement. Interestingly, we're seeing hefty-ticket purchases even in mall stores, provided the brand story and experience align with consumer expectations."

Beauty isn't far behind

Long gone are the days when prestige beauty products – part of celebrities' skincare routines, from actor Jennifer Lopez (a La Mer fan) to musician Taylor Swift (Chanel and Charlotte Tilbury) – were covetously purchased by Indians while on holiday. Today, Reliance-owned Tira Beauty, which debuted in 2023 to focus on high-end beauty, has opened 17 stores across India, while Nykaa announced plans for 350 stores by the end of the year.

At the launch of the sprawling Tira store at Palladium two months ago, women across age groups were testing YSL lipsticks, Estée Lauder and La Mer skincare, Prada perfumes and K-beauty offerings while sipping on cocktails and Champagne. "Having a big store like this in the heart of Mumbai to browse in and test products, with good sales staff is helpful. Plus, it's fun to do it with friends," says Anushree Sardesai, 24, a content creator and senior stylist at *Hello!* magazine. "I'm a big fan of French brand Caudalie's beauty elixir and

INDIA'S LUXURY BOOM: VIA RETAIL PLAYGROUNDS AND WHATSAPP CHATS



The in-store experience

In January, House of Rose, which sells brands such as Bulgari, Chopard, and Frank Muller, apart from its own jewellery, opened its new outpost in the historically significant Ballard Estate in South Mumbai. The luxurious store elevates the retail experience — from the nine large museum-style arched windows showcasing bespoke three-dimensional art installations created by contemporary Indian artists, inspired by the luxury brands sold at the store, to a bespoke bar and dining space for clients. Customers can enjoy curated four course meals and special cocktails, wander into richly decorated private rooms to understand gemstones and view unique jewellery that retails anywhere from a few lakhs to upwards of a crore.

"The future lies in curated, immersive spaces," explains Karan Vaidya, vice president of marketing and retail at House of Rose. "Our clientele is not just shopping for jewellery or watches — they're seeking a memory, a story, a celebration." The brand plans to open two or three more experiential stores across India by next year.

Khetan of The House of Things says that her pivot to a physical gallery in Udaipur, where the company is based, was a natural progression and an "experiment" before venturing into Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad or Hyderabad, where their primary client base resides. She says the new store has already sold out its entire inventory twice since it opened mid-March.

(More about the retail experience on page 8)

used to wait for someone to visit France to get it. Now, the brands that I like to buy are at my doorstep and I don't have to deal with import hassles and duty."

Beauty is growing at a 10% rate year-over-year, according to a 2024 McKinsey report, and is projected to hit $38 billion in the next three years. With a much younger population attuned to the latest global beauty trends and the growth of social media apps such as Instagram, looking good has never been more important. The much-awaited entry of Paris-based upmarket department store chain, Galeries Lafayette – where well-heeled travellers often make plans to spend a day browsing high fashion and beauty – reported to open in Mumbai's historic Horniman Circle area later this year, will further test luxury retail's buoyancy.

Don't overlook small towns

Meanwhile, the growth in luxury retail spending is no longer generated from the big cities alone – not surprising in a country with an online penetration of 52%, according to the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and Kantor. Tata Cliq Luxury reported 55% of its online sales came from non-metro cities such as Mysuru and Panchkula last year. In fact, at the release of a new luxury report, 'Thinking Beyond The Cart: Elevating Luxury E-Commerce' at a Mumbai gathering in January, its CEO Gopal Asthana told guests that the working population in smaller towns is "earning well and actively seeking out luxury experiences and goods".

Rathod of Le Mill shares that he "recently sold a Chloe Kerala 25 shoulder bag [which retails upwards of ₹1.6 lakh] to someone living in Rourkela on WhatsApp, while last week, it was an Alaïa top [that starts around ₹70,000] to a client in Chandigarh". According to him, the store regularly gets orders from Raipur, Rishikesh and Ludhiana either via Instagram or WhatsApp, which are then serviced via video calls and store tours.

The Indian consumer is no longer a peripheral player; they're central to global brand strategies today. Brands are crafting timepieces specifically for this market, embedding both cultural nuance and exclusivity. Take the Jacob & Co. India Edition, for instance — a bold piece that features intricate plaques depicting India Gate, Taj Mahal, Qutub Minar, and the Ayodhya Ram Mandir on the dial. Other brands have also followed suit, such as Raymond Weil's Ganges Edition and Frederique Constant's India-exclusive model

PRANAV SABOO
MD & CEO, Ethos Limited

From beauty to home decor

Interestingly, luxury retail is also growing across categories – in metros and elsewhere. While jewellery and fashion have always been important segments, now home décor and beauty are growing, too. "It becomes natural for the Indian customer to want to shop in India where they have more options, attention to detail, and the ability to customise," says Pavitra Rajaram, who curates the luxury offerings at Nilaya Anthology. "A lot of our customers want to take a piece home and try it. And you can't do that if the sofa is sitting in Italy."

Foster, of Jaipur Rugs, echoes this. He notes that people are prioritising spending on their homes like never before. "Creating a beautiful home is more important today than a luxury car purchase or leisure travel. At Jaipur Rugs, for example, we're seeing an appetite for new collections by Gurjeet Singh, Tatiana de Nicolay and Richard Hutten – pieces sell before they are anywhere near the showroom."

Home interiors is projected to grow to $71 billion by 2033, according to research firm IMARC, driven by the 140 million consumer base that has discretionary spending power. "If you think of tier 2 and 3 cities, this is the best time to be in this business because I don't see things slowing down for home and interiors," says Astha Khaitan, co-founder of Udaipur-based furniture gallery House of Things.

Wait, don't rejoice

Despite all the growth, Ravi Thakran, chairman of investment firm Turmeric Capital and formerly head of LVMH-owned L Capital in Asia believes the enthusiasm for rapidly expanding luxury retail ought to be tempered. At the BoF VOICES conference last November in the U.K., seen as the Davos-equivalent for the fashion world, I noticed conference attendees discussing China's slowdown and global economic headwinds. One recurring theme in many private conversations was the bright spot posed by India, where people talked about how luxury brands that had a strong narrative and were committed to the market would do well. Thakran, however, speaking at VOICES, was of the opinion that "India is now growing faster than China. But when it comes to the luxury market – talk of any brand, be it Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Louis Vuitton, Cartier – India is less than 1% of sales. The country's stupendous growth is right in front of us, but the bulk of that growth is led by a very young population with a very low per capita income". He adds that, "If you are an aspirational player, go to India today. In luxury, you still have to work [at gaining the market you need in the long term]."

His point: though Indians are spending on brands, it is for a smaller retail value price; consumers are still in growth mode. But western brands are increasingly coming to the country because of the *potential* for the value of the basket size (number of items a customer purchases in a single transaction) to grow.

Designers such as Payal Singhal agree. "Yes, the richest 2% in India is booming, given the enormous wealth creation that's never happened before. But if you look at mid-luxury, which is where we come in, the market is struggling," she says candidly. "There is inflation, people are losing jobs." A widely reported story of economic data shared by Saurabh Mukherjea, founder of Marcellus Investment Managers, indicated that middle class income only increased at 0.4% over the past decade, while inflation had eroded purchasing power by 50%. Those making more than ₹1 crore a year, meanwhile, are growing.

Singhal, who used to have stores in New York and New Jersey, and celebrated her eponymous brand's 25th anniversary last year, has seen the ups and downs of the retail business. "Brands like ours are either pivoting to higher segments to tap into that luxury 2% market, or lower, for mass appeal. Obviously, I decided to go higher, but I still wonder, what piece of the pie is everyone getting and how much will that 2% keep buying?"

The writer is a Mumbai-based journalist and author.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

TRIBUTE [1952-2025]

VALMIK THAPAR AND THE GOLDEN LIGHT

The conservationist remained in awe of tigers till the very end, his passion and tireless work changing our understanding of the big cat forever

David Davidar

He could have been carved from a granite crag of Ranthambhore, the place he delighted in. A mountain of a man, full-bearded, with a voice like thunder, Valmik Thapar could seem intimidating but was actually gentle and courteous. I enjoyed working with him on several of his books, and not one of my colleagues ever had an unkind word to say about him. That said, he was happiest in the wild, and didn't much care for the social circuit of Delhi, his home city. He wasn't one for small talk, preferring to use his voice, as with all the other faculties and resources he could muster, in service of the beloved tigers he had been obsessed with for 50 years.

Valmik was the son of the distinguished public intellectuals Raj and Romesh Thapar, who started the influential magazine, *Seminar*. The Thapars were friends with many important politicians and industrialists, but did not hesitate to hold them to account when they erred. Valmik inherited the fearlessness of his parents and often took on the wealthy and powerful when they stood in the way of his determination to save wild tigers from extinction.

Transforming Ranthambhore

Over more than 40 books (including the last one he ever wrote, *The Mysterious World Of Tigers* – with his usual meticulousness, he finalised the proofs from his hospital bed, a few days before he passed away from cancer on May 31) and documentaries, he described in detail how he was drawn into the world of tigers.

Dedicated to the cause Valmik Thapar often took on the wealthy and powerful when they stood in the way of his determination to save wild tigers from extinction. (V. SUDERSHAN)

At the age of 23, he felt tired and disillusioned by the purposelessness of his life in Delhi. In early 1976, he decided to visit Ranthambhore in Rajasthan on the off chance he might see a tiger or two – there was no real thought behind this visit except the desire to flee the city and the ennui he felt there.

When he disembarked at Sawai Madhopur, the train station from where he would have to make his way to Ranthambhore National Park, he wasn't much impressed by what he saw. A dirty small town in the Indian hinterland, indistinguishable from the other dirty small towns dotted all over the country, it seemed highly improbable that he was going to find any tigers there. Nevertheless, he figured he might as well get on with it. Hiring a horse carriage, he went in search of Fateh Singh Rathore, the warden of the park, who would go on to become his tiger guru.

At the time that Valmik first began visiting Ranthambhore, it was almost impossible to see tigers. To start with, there were very few of them around – 13 or 14 at the outside. These animals rarely showed themselves, mainly because of the constant human activity within the park. Almost single-handedly, Rathore fought to save Ranthambhore's tigers. He resettled more than a dozen villages within the core area, watched over the tigers to ensure they weren't disturbed, went after poachers at considerable risk to his own life, lobbied governments and bureaucrats, raised funds, and more.

In Valmik, he found a willing *chela* (disciple) and a tremendous ally. Through their efforts, along with those of a few other kindred spirits, and a host of dedicated forest officials, Ranthambhore is today a shining example of tiger conservation. What began as 400 sq. km. of parkland has grown to 1,700 sq. km. And, there are almost 100 tigers in Ranthambhore and sightings are common.

Emotional engagement

Although self-taught, Valmik was a first-rate naturalist, his field observations over the decades considerably expanding our understanding of the magnificent big cat. But what set him apart from other dedicated naturalists was the way in which he disseminated his passion for tigers. Anyone who has read his books and watched his movies can see that devotion come shining through. He would talk unabashedly about the tears that rolled down his cheeks when he saw tiny cubs playing with their mother, Laxmi; he would mention the awe he felt when he saw Genghis, the master hunter, who ruled the area of Ranthambhore's lakes, first demonstrate the art of hunting prey in the water; and he wouldn't shy away from confessing his love for a special tiger he named Noon.

In his new book, he writes: "She was a tiger who filled up my senses... Fateh teased me... that I had fallen in love with this tigress... Many scientist friends warned me to keep detached and not humanise tigers, but in truth, I was delighted with my emotional engagement with Noon. It deepened my understanding of the mysterious world of tigers."

One of the things Valmik cherished was walking with tigers, especially in the early mornings. In his words, "As the sun rises, the golden light slides off the tiger's body. It's a magnificent spectacle." As I write this tribute, I see him striding through that radiance, watching for all eternity over wave upon wave of Ranthambhore's tigers.

What set apart Valmik Thapar from other dedicated naturalists was the way in which he disseminated his passion for tigers. Anyone who has read his books and watched his movies can see that devotion come shining through

The writer is a publisher and author.

(GETTY IMAGES)

POP-A-RAZZI

Age of the lesbian cop

LGBTQIA+ characters may be all over OTT, but there is a difference between being visible and being seen

Pride month means rainbow emojis galore. And these days web series seem to be the new place to show Pride. LGBTQIA+ characters are all over the OTT platform.

"Everyone is putting in a lesbian cop," laughs Sridhar Rangayan, filmmaker and director of the KASHISH Mumbai International Queer Film Festival. "The lesbian cop is the new trope."

If OTT series like *Aarya* and *Paataal Lok* gave us the gay cops, the lesbians are popping up in series such as *Dabba Cartel* and *Inspector Rishi*. The lesbian cop might just be the new "gay best friend".

Sure, it's better than the old days when Anupam Kher put on an orange-pink mohawk and camped it up as the villainous, simpering, handsy Pinku in the film *Mast Kalandar* (1991). It was one of the first representations of queerness Rangayan had seen on Indian screen. "That was horrible," he says. "I didn't dress like him. I didn't make a fool of myself like him."

Lesbian cops undoubtedly make for better representation than Pinkus. Representation is certainly important but is it the end goal?

"There was a time when just visibility was a struggle," says novelist Santanu Bhattacharya whose latest book, *The Deviants*, follows three generations of gay men in one family. "Now I need a deeper understanding. I don't want that lesbian cop."

Representation matters

Years ago, I used to edit a South Asian LGBTQIA+ magazine called *Trikone*. As we put one issue to bed, I would worry whether we'd find enough material that was both queer and South Asian to fill the next issue. At that time, I would have been grateful for Indian lesbian cops even as side characters.

In the 90s, *Trikone* did an issue on new South Asian queer titles. Short of models, the board members lay on the carpet holding copies of the few books around – like Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, a gay coming-of-age story set against the backdrop of the civil war in Sri Lanka and Rakesh Ratti's anthology, *A Lotus of Another Colour*. We called it a "blossoming of South Asian gay and lesbian voices in literature", but in reality the options were pretty sparse. Some were not even *desi*.

John Irving's *Son of the Circus* snuck into the round-up because it had gay and transgender characters in a rambling novel set in Mumbai. The list even included Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* thanks to a "tantalising whiff of homosexual romance buried deep" in the magnum opus. Shobhaa De's collection of essays, *Shooting from the Hip*, made the cut because she had one on being a "fag hag". All in all, it covered barely two pages. Nevertheless, the article optimistically hoped readers would flood the magazine with letters saying "How could you leave out...?" No flood happened.

More than just tokenism

That same issue carried a profile of Selvadurai who said he wrote *Funny Boy* because he wanted to "record for posterity, and for now as well, our lives", to say gay people existed in Sri Lanka, because "that is so seldom recorded in any significant way".

That visibility remains important. But now we must also understand that there is a difference between being visible and being seen. Bhattacharya says being seen is about "engaging with the interiority of these characters". The lesbian cop needs a back story. She should be there because she matters to the story, not to make some studio or director feel woke. Otherwise, she remains nothing more than a novelty factor.

Rangayan has been making films since *The Pink Mirror* in 2003. Despite the proliferation, "blossoming" if you will, of queer characters in popular culture, it's still not easier to raise funds for a film that has queer lives in the spotlight. Rangayan still crowd-funds and says no matter how family-friendly he makes his films, shorn of all sex and violence, he has to argue against an A-certificate every time. Just because it has gay characters, he says.

At the same time, the cool cachet exists as well. In his book *The Urban Elite v Union of India*, Supreme Court lawyer Rohin Bhatt mentions another lawyer who quips, "I want to do LGBT cases and become famous." The coverage LGBTQIA+ cases like the same-sex marriage case receive, especially in English-language media, can create the optical illusion where we think that jumping on the rainbow is a shortcut to fame and recognition.

Perhaps it is. But one suspects it's more so for the ally than for the queer persons themselves. Delhi advocate Saurabh Kirpal's openness about being gay became a red flag (or pink flag?) when the Supreme Court recommended him for judgeship. That still hasn't happened. And it certainly hasn't made it easier for someone like Rangayan to make films.

But hey, at least we have lots of lesbian cops.

***Sandip Roy**, the author of* Don't Let Him Know, *likes to let everyone know about his opinions, whether asked or not.*

GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

TRICKTIONARY EPISODE 12

FEELING 50-50

Is there a word for the uniquely Indian disposition of feeling optimistic and pessimistic at the same time?

Hello readers! How are you? I hope you have not forgotten the official twin mottos of this column:

Motto one: Life is short. Use it well.

Motto two: Therefore do not watch Indian TV news for even one minute.

Friends, last week, there was some disheartening news about a very young bureaucrat. This fellow, who had only joined the civil service a few years ago, had been apprehended by the authorities in the process of accepting a bribe.

The 'steal' frame of the Republic and so on and so forth.

The whole thing reminded me of an incident that happened a quarter of a century ago, when this writer was but a youth in college. It is a brief story. We will shortly come back to the main thrust of this column – linguistic confabulation.

So one day, a distant relative of mine decided to retire from his business in the Middle East and return to his ancestral village in Kerala. Today this village is a bustling town. But back in those days, it was very much a villatic place. Little tea shop in the corner. Neighbours secretly trying to move fences and accost property. Coconuts falling on children. Cows in the barbershop. That kind of thing.

So this guy came back and decided that he was going to dedicate his life to the people. And he would do this by standing as a candidate in the Panchayat elections. His platform was incorruptiblity, and he said he would join any of the local parties if they abided by his "clean" manifesto. The parties rushed to his house immediately. This guy was well-loved, and was prepared to self-finance his campaign. The perfect candidate.

Eventually, he chose one party. And the campaigning began. And he and his party swept to power.

At the time, I told my grandfather: "Wow, what a great man. I am very optimistic for this village."

My grandfather said: "Nope."

Immediately after the election, his party trooped back to his house for an emergency meeting. "Hello guy," they said, "we need to talk about incorruptibility a little bit. Just a minor trifle. No big deal. But basically we would like to bring back corruption in a limited manner. For the betterment of the people."

Their point was as follows: 'Look guy, you went to the Gulf and made money. We don't have any money. We spent all our lives doing politics. Now finally we are in power. Unless you let us take a little bit of commission on the side, our families will suffer. We will only take a little bit. But otherwise we will be fully clean. It is a fair request.'

He said, fine.

I told my grandfather: "Oh no."

My grandfather said: "Yep."

(My grandfather used a grand total of 300 words in his whole life. Around 150 of which were "Nadia Moidu". A fine use of limited resources.)

Dear readers, how many times have we experienced this very same roller-coaster of emotions?

Young whippersnapper enters the arena. Threatens to shake things up. To destroy the status quo. To uplift the masses. To invigorate the discourse.

And immediately, you think to yourself: "What a refreshing development! I am feeling so optimistic for this person... but also for the country as a whole. A new dawn is upon us!"

But you also think: "However, what if a few hours after the new dawn, there is a vigilance raid because of refreshing development in the person's mattress due to note bundle? Better to be a little bit careful. Just in case of absolute shenanigans."

Readers, there is as yet no word in the English language that captures this quintessentially Indian predicament. I propose, therefore, the word 'nope-timism'.

Example sentence: "The new CEO announced he would eliminate all office waste and introduce radical transparency, but Julie felt a tiny bit nope-timistic when she saw him take the coffee machine home, including two litres of milk."

I am confident that this new word will help us navigate public life with greater calm and balance. I am sure of it. Okay, fine. I am nope-timistic.

Nope-timism
/noʊpˈtɪmɪzəm/
noun
Definition: The uniquely Indian emotional state of simultaneous optimism and pessimism experienced when witnessing someone's promise to bring positive change, characterised by hope that things might actually improve, coupled with resigned expectation that they probably won't.

__Sidin Vadukut__ is head of talent at Clarisights. He lives in London and is currently working on a new novel.

GOREN BRIDGE

Dropping the ball

North-South vulnerable, East deals

Bob Jones

South in today's deal was Keith Hanson, of Boca Raton, Florida. Hanson is one of America's leading bridge teachers and is also an outstanding player. North's double would not have been everyone's choice, and it gave Hanson a problem. Hanson might have passed the double or bid three no trump, but he chose the winning bid of four hearts.

East won the opening spade lead with his ace and led a spade to Hanson's king. Hanson drew trumps in three rounds, ending in his hand, and led a low club. West had shown nothing to justify his bid, so Hanson was pretty sure that West held the ace of clubs. Dummy's queen won the trick and Hanson led another club. When East played the jack, Hanson played low from his hand and let East win the trick. East had to lead a diamond or give declarer a ruff-sluff and Hanson would make his contract either way. East dropped the ball by not unblocking his jack of clubs under the queen. West could then win the second club and shift to a diamond. Should East have found this unblocking play? Yes! It was a play that could not lose and might gain, making it the correct play.

NORTH
♠ Q 10
♡ Q 9 4 2
◇ K J 3
♣ Q 8 5 3

WEST
♠ 8 3 2
♡ 10 8 5
◇ 9 8 4 2
♣ A 10 6

EAST
♠ A J 9 7 6 4
♡ 7 3
◇ Q 10 5
♣ J 4

SOUTH
♠ K 5
♡ A K J 6
◇ A 7 6
♣ K 9 7 2

The bidding:

EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
2♠	Dbl	3♠	Dbl
Pass	4♡	All pass	

Opening lead: Three of ♠

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

What has June 15 ever given us?

Bob Dylan recorded a song on June 15, 1965, that transformed him from a folk musician to a rock star. (GETTY IMAGES)

Berty Ashley

1 On this date in 763 BC, the Assyrians recorded an event in their history books, which allowed researchers to fix the chronology of Mesopotamian history. They record it as a 'Shamash akallu', which, when translated, means 'distorted sun'. What incredible event had they witnessed?

2 According to legend, on June 15, 1219, a red lamb-skin banner with a white cross fell from the sky during the Battle of Lyndanisse in Estonia. The soldiers were inspired by this and went on to defeat the Baltics. This then became the 'Dannebrog', the oldest national flag in the world. Which country flies this flag?

3 On June 15, 1667, French physician Jean-Baptiste Denys performed a medical procedure for the first time in history. He treated a 15-year-old boy who had uncontrollable fevers by introducing something he had taken from a lamb. There was no allergic reaction due to the small amount used. What was this the very instance of in medicine?

4 On June 15, 1752, this gentleman and his son stepped out during a storm and flew a kite. It flew on a silk string and had a house key connected to a Leyden jar. During the storm, he saw the jar getting charged and electric sparks, thereby proving that lightning was a form of electricity. Who was this brave researcher?

5 On June 15, 1844, Charles Goodyear received a patent for a process to make rubber pliable and waterproof, making it the most efficient compound for tires. Since the process needed heat and sulphur to work, he named it after the Roman god of Fire. What process is this?

6 On June 15, 1878, English photographer Eadweard Muybridge took a series of photographs to prove a point to the governor of California. He took a sequence of photographs and then projected them together, forming the basis of motion pictures. What animal did he show actually had all four feet of the ground mid-run?

7 Born this date in 1911, the Reverend Wilbert Awdry went on to create 'The Railway Series'. Forty-two books about anthropomorphic vehicles that lived on the fictional island of Sodor. Based on real-life events, the stories became hugely popular, with one of the characters even getting his own TV series. Which character became the world famous?

8 On June 15, 1959, this archipelago was made Ecuador's first national park. The government banned the capture of any endemic species, many of which had played a vital role in the theory of Evolution. Which islands are these, known for their giant tortoises?

9 On June 15, 1965, singer Bob Dylan recorded his song "Like a ____ ___". It was voted #1 in *Rolling Stone* magazine's '500 Greatest Songs of All Time'. The song transformed Dylan from a folk musician to a rock star. What is the title, which is inspired by a proverb about constantly moving?

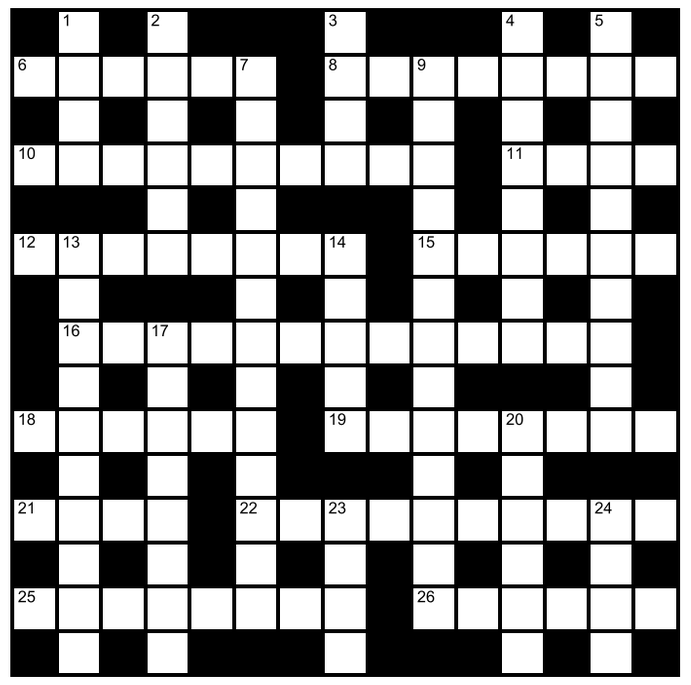
10 On June 15, 2022, Microsoft finally retired its ubiquitous web browser after 26 years. Although classic, it had become outdated and the butt of many memes and jokes, especially about the speed of operation. What iconic browser was this which was replaced by Microsoft Edge?

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. Solar eclipse
2. Denmark
3. Blood transfusion
4. Benjamin Franklin
5. Vulcanization
6. Horse
7. *Thomas the Tank Engine*
8. Galapagos Islands
9. *Rolling Stone*
10. Internet Explorer

THE HINDU SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO.8 (Set by Vidwan)



Across

6 Land most insignificant shot (6)
8 Modern North-Africans going west to find some space for media (8)
10 Quality article on weak king, tart and Church of England (5,5)
11 Aware of some corrupt officers (2,2)
12 Helping cops? Very old form of escaping! (8)
15 A character in a story, say that leans towards the Right (6)
16 Movie maker shaping her to campaign (13)
18 End of sleeve about to be the point of detachment (3-3)
19 Media hovering around popular conservative ruler (8)
21 This stone can be used to make hospital (4)
22 Trendy food shop's supply, mostly lacks in taste (10)
25 Attractive and aggressive badminton players? (8)
26 Without money, fellow fails and hurts (6)

Down

1 POTUS runs away from confrontation (4)
2 Music player at bar with island spirit (6)
3 Most eager about opening of non-vegetarian joint (4)
4 Commotion created by sibling, you and sound of laughter! (8)
5 As per Spooner, Rob struggles to find the stage (10)
7 Probe IIM staff about initial ordeal of a new employee (7,2,4)
9 Chinese tree, small peg and good choice of whiskey basically (7,6)
13 Seductress entraps copper wearing uniform and judge to get something that clears the air! (6,4)
14 Dog comes back donning alien dress (3-2)
17 Plan some new organic growth (8)
20 Mess is hollow CSK getting into forced change of leadership (6)
23 No one declines King's table (4)
24 Oddly this day is good (4)

SOLUTION NO.7

	A	D	V	E	R	T	I	S	E	M	E	N	T	
C		E		R		H		T		O		O		B
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Rites and wrongs

Taboos surrounding menstruation make women feel inferior; it's time to get rid of them

Y. Mercy Famila
mercyfamila@gmail.com

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

In April, a Class 8 student was made to write her annual examination outside the classroom in a private school near Pollachi in Coimbatore district just because she was on her period. It's most shocking that this happened in Tamil Nadu, one of the most developed States that consistently scores highly in health indices. The school authorities denied the girl child the right to take her exams inside the classroom. What does this violation tell about us as a society?

The true purpose of education is to ignite minds, dispel ignorance, and challenge harmful myths. People who play key roles in society, especially educators, should set an example using their influence to spread awareness against superstitions and wrongful practices. But here, the girl was humiliated before her peers simply for experiencing a natural biological function.

This sends a damaging message that menstruation is something impure, and that a menstruating girl should be segregated. It was not just an act of exclusion. It told her, subtly but surely, that her body was a problem. That to be a girl, and to become a woman, is to be burdened with shame. It raises urgent questions: is menstruation impure, and why should a girl be treated differently after she attains puberty?

Even today in many places, when a girl gets her first period, it is celebrated with grandeur. The celebration of a girl's entry into womanhood is often marked by her first menstruation (menarche), which is rooted in ancient cultural, social, and religious traditions across the world. These celebrations are deeply symbolic, signifying fertility, maturity, and readiness for new roles in society. In agrarian and tribal societies, fertility (both agricultural and human) was vital for survival. Therefore, a girl's ability to menstruate was seen as a divine sign that she could now bear children, which meant she was contributing to the survival of her community.

While historical rituals around menstruation and womanhood may have begun as community acknowledgements of maturity or spiritual power, today, many of these practices are misused or misunderstood. This leads to gender-based discrimination and control. What was once sacred is now often seen as impure or shameful. In parts of South India, the *Ritu Kala* ceremony, a celebration once, has become commercialised and socially regressive, reducing girls to marriage-ready objects.

Degraded practices

Girls, upon attaining puberty, are often told how to behave, dress, talk, walk, sleep, and even eat. Why can't a girl be the same even after her puberty? It is a natural biological change, just like any other change that happens to a growing human body. Blood is not impure; it is something vital to life itself.

In an era when women fly to space, such taboos still persist – menstruation is even today seen with shame, silence, and stigma. These practices make girls feel inferior and ashamed of their bodies. Women think that they are lesser beings than men. In many homes, under the guise of tradition, menstruating women are forbidden from family functions, using common utensils, and even coming anywhere near other family members. Girls are told not to enter kitchens or temples, and advised to stay silent, unseen, and even unclean. These restrictions not only isolate them but also creates stress in them. Some are forced to take harmful medications to delay their periods just to take part in family events.

The crime of forcing the girl child to take her exams seated on a staircase underscores the urgent need to address and dismantle the deep-seated taboos and discriminatory practices associated with menstruation in India. This is not just about one school or one child. It is about countless girls across India who internalise the idea that their physiology makes them unclean, lesser or inconvenient. When a girl is made to sit apart, denied entry, or whispered about during her periods, it is a punishment to her. Educational institutions must take proactive steps to create inclusive and supportive environments for menstruating students. Teachers must be trained to respond with sensitivity, not superstition.

With menolit studies, a pioneering interdisciplinary initiative that aims to reframe societal understandings of menstruation, menopause, and womanhood, literature, media, and education must play a role in reshaping these narratives.

Menolit studies explore how these bodily functions are narrated, celebrated, silenced, or shamed in literature and society. It reclaims the power of the first and last bleeding as not just biological facts, but cultural turning points, helping reshape the way people understand and honour womanhood across a lifetime. The rituals may not require to be erased, but their original benign intent should be reclaimed.

Let us teach girls that they are not defined by blood or biology alone, but by their minds, ambitions, and achievements.

Triggering a stimulating conversation

George Netto
gnettomunnar@rediffmail.com

It's intriguing how some topics easily trigger (and sustain) a spirited conversation better and longer than others do. Often social conversations founder and fizzle out at parties and get-togethers for want of a suitable subject. Many a conversation loses its focus and turns desultory due to digressions. However, when the topic centres on a current or controversial issue, it usually clicks as a conversation starter. Topicality does matter.

As a sure-fire conversation launcher, there's perhaps nothing like the unpredictable weather plaguing us – a popular staple that everyone likes to dissect verbally and freely. And, of course, global warming and its resultant climate change, along with their disastrous consequences, have gifted us a topic to talk (and worry about) all the time now. "Don't knock the weather," remarked American humorist Frank McKinney Hubbard insightfully. "Nine-tenths of the people couldn't start a conversation if it didn't change once in a while."

In India, cricket is, of course, a hot topic of conversation that seldom flags. To ignite a lively discussion at a get-together, all one has to do is to comment on a prominent cricketer's poor form and sit back – to be bombarded with a detailed "discourse" that would put our most eminent cricket commentators and pundits in the shade, figuratively speaking.

Then there's nothing like national politics to kick-start an animated conversation among strangers in a train compartment and get some revealing feedback; the number of people eager to voice an opinion, unsought, surprises one as much as their vehemence. Some prefer sensational social gossip about well-known personalities – the juicier the better!

And, of course, the ongoing India-Pakistan conflict (with its nuclear undertones and threats) often fuels a heated discussion. When the subject is of popular and compelling interest, people are inexorably drawn into it.

The bane of built-in obsolescence

All things are getting outdated faster than ever, forcing customers to spent on upgrading products frequently

ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

Aakash Bajpai
emailtoaakashbajpai@gmail.com

From apps to gadgets, clothing to furniture, and kitchen utensils to cosmetics, all things are getting outdated faster than ever. A linear economy driven by consumerism makes almost everything useless after some time. We need to constantly upgrade our stuff to catch up with time. If we decide not to go with the flow, we are not only left out but also judged as not "cool".

Corporations are making huge profits whereas the middle class is suffering a serious decline in savings rate due to this, probably.

Things have lost intrinsic value. The only way we associate with our products is based on their extrinsic value. We dump them as soon as they are outdated and longevity is not even a virtue any more. High-end customers want exclusivity and low-end customers want features. Exclusivity is breached by the updated version of the product hitting the market even with nominal upgrades. Features are hampered by the way things are designed. The height of commodity fetishism is that some people are closer to the market than they are to the people around them.

They say that change is the law of nature but this change is nominal and not real. I call it "treadmill motion" when we run a lot but reach nowhere. Everything is changing yet nothing is changing. Humans have advanced so far yet the suffering remains intact. Poverty, health issues, social tensions, sorrow, still exist. We solve one problem and in the process, we create new ones. In the words of Thomas Sowell, "Sometimes it seems as if there are more solutions than problems. On closer scrutiny, it turns out that many of today's problems are a result of yesterday's solutions."

Linear economy takes a toll on the environment in which we manufacture a product and discard it. Therefore, a circular economy cannot be achieved until we put an end to consumerism. Sustainable Development Goal 12 talks about responsible consumption and production, which requires waste management and waste reduction as well. The European Union has come up with policies to increase the longevity of the products within the ambit of the "right to repair". India also needs to chalk out a National Action Plan for sustainable consumption and production just like many countries have done. This would help in reducing the overall ecological footprint.

Silence in the room

For many, the idea that someone can be sad without a reason feels absurd

Anna Mariya Joseph
annamariya010@gmail.com

There is a particular kind of silence that sits heavy in Indian homes. It is the silence that knows something is wrong but does not have the courage to name it. It is the silence that grows thicker at dinner tables, in curt nods, in the brushing off of tears with a quick nod.

In our households, there is no space for sadness that lingers. One may cry when a relative dies, but crying in the middle of a regular day is treated with suspicion. The idea that someone could be sad without a visible reason feels absurd. And so, it begins, the great hiding, the act of tucking away sorrow like a shameful object, behind half-closed doors and fake smiles.

ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

Mental health is like the family secret everyone knows but refuses to say aloud. Depression is Lord Voldemort. It is He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. The fear is not of the condition itself, but of what it might imply. That something has gone wrong in the family. That we, in all our discipline and duty, have failed to raise someone who is "strong".

Ask around in any middle-class neighbourhood and you will hear the same script. "He has everything. Why would he be depressed?" "She just needs to get married, then things will settle." "Don't talk nonsense. In our time, we didn't have the luxury to be depressed."

That last one stings more than the rest. It carries the weight of generations which were told to suppress their pain, swallow their tears, and continue to walk like nothing happened. It is said with a certain pride, as if endurance is the highest form of character. And perhaps it was, once. But the problem with untreated wounds is that they fester.

What is passed down is not only land or jewellery, but also silence. The unspoken grief of our mothers, the frustrations of fathers who never learnt to say they were hurting, the quiet suffering of grandmothers who cried in kitchens and then wiped their faces before anyone noticed. Trauma is inherited, even when we don't speak of it. We do not need to pretend to have all the answers. Most of us don't. But we can begin by saying the name. Depression. Anxiety. Loneliness. Words that should not sound foreign in our homes.

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 succinctly describes the root cause of the stampede after RCB's win without actually referring to it. ('Anatomy of an IPL Fan'; June 8) We find a mention of all the ingredients that resulted in the deaths of 11 people. The blame game continues to play out.
Saurabh Sinha

One can understand the jubilation of cricket fans when the winning team is representing the country or a state, but it is surprising that the Indian Premier League, a purely commercial sports venture, has generated a loyal fan following.
I think the city or state name attached to the franchise creates an illusion of attachment among cricket fans.
Kosaraju Chandramouli

The stampede highlights the importance of planning and crowd management for large-scale events. The incident underscores the responsibility of organisers and authorities in ensuring the safety of attendees during such celebrations.
K.M.K. Murthy

The article brilliantly captured the emotional, cultural, and psychological landscape of cricket fandom in India. Virat Kohli lifting the trophy was not just a sporting moment, but a deeply symbolic event that resonated with millions across the nation.
P. Ravichandran

Freedom of speech

The views of author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o were not without controversy. He was defiant of colonialism and the hypocrisy of contemporary leaders of African nations. ('Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: a life of defiance'; June 8)
His plea for abandoning English in order to achieve true decolonisation is worth examining.
M.V. Nagavender Rao

Test of grit

Test cricket is truly the ultimate battle between bat and ball. ('Tested at 150'; June 8). Aggression — from both batsmen and bowlers — right from the start has kept the crowds enthralled. However, neutral umpires and the Decision Review System (DRS) are essential to ensure high-quality cricket and fair outcomes in Test matches.
S. Ramakrishnasayee

Storytelling matters

Each form of storytelling is unique, and it is incorrect to assume that one art form eclipses the other. ('Theatre as an antidote to loneliness'; June 8) Powerful and professional theatre artists are sure to succeed in drawing large audiences to the theatre.
Prajeet Dev B.

Tireless work

Manjula Pradeep shows how one individual can indeed make a difference. ('Manjula Pradeep's circle of care'; June 8) Her commitment and empathy are worthy of appreciation.
Anusha Pillay

Manjula Pradeep has been a source of healing to many hurt souls. May her tribe increase.
C.V. Aravind

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Encouraging liberal arts
Do not negate the relevance of STEM disciplines, but add value to them by integrating liberal arts perspectives
S.A. Thameemul Ansari

The surreal connect
Digital detoxification and empathy are highly needed in this technology-driven world
Rishidev Mahadevan

For spit-free public spaces
Start from school, let education system include and inculcate basic discipline
Hemamalini P.B.

The delightful old-world dhaba
A stop at these expansive eateries was a sojourn in culinary heaven for many
Lakshmi R. Srinivas

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Elevated design (Clockwise from right) Sabyasachi Mukherjee's maximalist store interiors; Nilaya Anthology in Mumbai; Museum of Meenakari Heritage in Jaipur; and designer Ritu Beri in front of the 35-foot Portuguese-style façade of her Goa store, Escape. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

HERITAGE MEETS HIGH-TECH

As luxury retail comes of age in India, the spaces that house them are also changing — blending craft and technology, and putting storytelling at the centre

Alisha Lad

When was the last time you walked into a brick-and-mortar store? Or needed to, with the Blinkits, Instamarts, and Amazons delivering everything to your doorstep?

But despite the digital convenience, luxury retail is enticing people to step into physical spaces by evolving beyond transactions into sensory, immersive experiences – part atelier, part theatre, part shrine to tradition.

"It's all about immersion. Today's consumer wants spaces that reveal the 'why' behind what they're taking home," says Astha Khetan, co-founder of The House of Things. Once an esteemed online platform, the brand, as of March 2025, boasts a 25,000 sq.ft. concept store in Udaipur. Here, immersive vignettes and a thoughtfully curated spatial programme invite visitors to savour the store – from celebrating the richness of *pichwai* paintings to hands-on engagement with a tactile material library boasting bone inlay to textural wallpapers.

Retail as a moodboard

The mission of highlighting quality craftsmanship and elevated design through experiential retail first bloomed in high-end pockets: New Delhi's Dhan Mill, once a warehouse hub dating back to 1978 and now a symbol of luxury boasting over 65 curated boutiques; Jaipur's trendy C Scheme and Civil Lines; and South Mumbai's Kala Ghoda, which saw entrants such as Tarun Tahliani's Ensemble as early as the 1990s.

What once remained confined to these rarefied spaces is fast becoming a mainstream retail strategy, with brands across price points and across the country embracing strategic storytelling. Every larger-than-life flagship helmed by designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee in cities such as Mumbai, Kolkata, and Hyderabad is a maximalist performance. The store's museum-like wallpapered and tapestry-lined walls are filled to the brim with *pichwais*, Tanjore paintings, vintage photography, and rare antiques. Not all of them are for sale. "It's these enriching details that make me linger in the store, it makes me want to discover more," says Reshma Bombaywala-Lezinska, a Mumbai-based jewellery designer and content creator.

Sanjay Garg's Raw Mango stores channel the brand's ethos of constant evolution into pared-down design, redefining Indian minimalism. The spaces are generally left bare, raw, with no mannequins in sight, enabling key design elements to shine – such as Garg's take on the Gandhian sofa, the Indian *baithak*, which has found its way into every outlet.

The dialogue around Mumbai's Nilaya Anthology by Asian Paints, one of India's newest immersive design landmarks, has captured worldwide attention. The concept does away with barriers, both physically and metaphysically: spaces flow into one another, and the lines between gallery, museum, store and experience blur to carve out a sensorial sanctuary. "I grew up between Chennai and Bengaluru, and I remember going to places like Sundari Silks, smelling the *mallipoo*, drinking coffee, and buying *kanjeevaram* saris," says Pavitra Rajaram, design director of Asian Paints. "I feel like we've somehow lost the experience part of shopping now. So, I wanted Anthology to be a place of storytelling."

Fashion designer Ritu Beri's Escape in Goa – with a 35-foot Portuguese-style façade in vibrant red and white – is not just a store but a sanctuary of soul and story. She recalls a tiny Parisian boutique she once visited, with Edith Piaf humming in the background. Every lovingly curated item came with a handwritten tag narrating its story. "That blend of warmth, curation, and personal touch stayed with me," she reminisces, and is something she brings to Escape.

Craft meets commerce

The global rise of experiential retail heralds technological integration – from augmented reality (Farfetch's London store linked online data to enhance the offline experience, letting users access their purchase history and favourites in real time), to the power of social media, and most recently, AI integration, enabling personalised service, hands-free shopping via voice recognition, intelligent product search, and lead generation.

But, in India, it carries unique weight: retail is a site for both consumption and conservation. For example, jewellery designer Sunita Shekhawat's Museum of Meenakari Heritage (MoMH) in Jaipur orchestrates a fascinating dive into the history of enamelling from Renaissance Europe to its arrival in India. "At the Shekhawat Haveli, our retail space, we believe that even if someone leaves without a product, they should carry with them a deep appreciation for the centuries-old craft of *meenakari* and the cultural legacy it represents," says Shekhawat. The space features four private pods for client interactions, clad in off-white *araish* lime stucco and with semi-vaulted ceilings embellished with frescoes.

Arora and his team also developed the imposing, hand-carved red sandstone facade of MoMH, which draws from Jaipur's Indo-Saracenic roots. "At the ground level, you enter a space that feels like a museum, [and is] open to the city," he explains. "This transforms the space from one where products are sold to one that disseminates knowledge – a cultural destination."

Singular design elements can also be transformative, like the rich *zardozi* ceiling at fashion brand Divani's New Delhi store, interwoven with semi-precious stones and nine tonnes of shimmering gold thread. Tarun Tahiliani's Bengaluru store, which opened doors in December 2022, draws footfalls to date for a singular wall that reinvents the trompe-l'œil: a tree-of-life wallpaper brought to life through rich couture techniques such as intricate embroidery, painstakingly crafted by *karigars* from Lucknow and New Delhi – as an ode to his unwavering commitment to craftsmanship.

The new Indian retail is as much about how something is sold as what is sold. The store is not the backdrop, it's the protagonist.

The writer is an architect-turned-journalist.

Small but luxe

Today's experiential luxury retail landscape has bifurcated into two distinct approaches: the grand spectacle of massive flagship stores and the concentrated elegance of smaller boutiques in premium enclaves like New Delhi's Khan Market and Dhan Mill, where stores such as Collektklove and AMPM prove that square footage does not dictate design impact. MuseLAB's design for sanitary ware dealer Aquant's new Mumbai showroom, for instance, is a veritable sorbet-toned wonderland with curved walls that remind you of gelato swirls, or the futuristic, Brutalist and layered world of Unconventional, the multi-designer store in Kolkata — where a large, black, floor-to-ceiling sphere becomes the focal point of the design, revealing the store slowly as you walk around it.

FROM CULT TO CULTURE

Biblical tales in the Puranas

They reveal a jumbled public memory of an earlier period when India first had contact with foreigners

The *Bhavishya Purana*, or the chronicle of the future, is the earliest Sanskrit work that reveals some familiarity with West Asian myths. While presented as a prophecy of events that will happen during Kali Yuga, it seems to have been updated over time – from 1000 CE to the late 18th century, and published around 1900. It ends with the arrival of British rule in Kolkata. Here, Queen Victoria is referred to as Viktavati.

The *Bhavishya Purana* imagines an India (Bharat-*varsha*) from the Himalayas to the sea, with the Indus or Sindhu-*desha* forming the main barrier between Arya-*desha*, land of civilised folk, and Mlecha-*desha*, land of barbarians. In Bharat-*varsha*, the four *varnas* do their duty. Sanskrit is spoken by the twice-born elites and Prakrit by the Shudras, or service-providers. Dravida-*desha* is to the south of the Vindhyas; there *varnas* tend to mix. In other local lore, Dravida-*desha* is the land without Kshatriyas, which Rishi Agastya and Rishi Parashurama organise and cultivate using the local Shudras.

Like all *Puranas*, this text speaks of creation followed by the four *yugas*. The first *yuga*, Satya, was ruled by Ikshavaku kings. The second, Dvapara, was ruled by solar kings ending with Rama of Ayodhya. Treta *yuga* was ruled by lunar kings ending with the infamous Mahabharata war. But there is a slight twist. Yayati's children are founders not just of the Pandavas, Kauravas and Yadavas, but also of the Mlecchas, who are essentially those who turn away from Vedic rites, and take refuge in Maru-*desha* (probably the Thar desert).

Mughal paintings depicting the birth of Virgin Mary; and (above) the building of Noah's ark. (WIKICOMMONS)

An Indian Adam and Eve

We are told of Satanika, the 23rd generation descendent of the Pandavas. His great grandson Kshemaka is killed by the Mlecchas. Kshemaka's son Pradyota performs a great Mlecha *yagna* where hundreds of barbarians are slaughtered. Kshemaka's son Vedavat died childless and that is when Kali Yuga actually begins.

Mlecha-Kali prays to Vishnu for the revival of the Mlecchas, and so from the god's clay are born Adama and Hayvavati. In Persian, Eve is called Hawa. Adama's name is linked to the restraint (*dama*) of his senses and devotion to Vishnu. They live 'east of Pradana' – a name that seems like a combination of Paradise and Eden.

East of Eden is a common Christian metaphor for transgressors, like Adam's son Cain who kills his brother Abel. Adam goes to the Udumbara (fig) tree in search of his wife, where the serpent of Kaliyuga offers fruit on a plate made of leaves. Here, Hayavavati, like a 'good' Indian wife, feeds the husband first, even though eating this fruit is forbidden. Since the rules are broken, the two are cast out. Their children are the Mlecchas.

Then comes the story of Nyuha (Noah), who is advised by Vishnu to build a boat (of exact Biblical specifications) in seven days to survive a flood, which will mark the onset of Kaliyuga. Besides his relatives, Nyuha rescues 80,000 *munis* (silent sages) and all living creatures. The sages venerate Vishnu's *maya*, as well as numerous Tantrik goddesses, before the rains stop and the ship lands between two Himalayan peaks, Arac and Sisira.

Unable to speak proper Sanskrit, Nyuha communicates in reverse (right-to-left, like Semitic script) and renames his sons Sima, Sama and Bhava as Sima (Shem), Hama (Ham) and Yakuta (Japhteh). Saraswati curses them that their language will be low, but their numbers will be high, and they will populate much of the earth.

Of Jesus and Muhammad

Musa or Moses' teaching inspires the Mlecchas. But he is countered by Rishi Kashyapa who travels to Egypt and spreads the Vedic doctrine. He brings back a few Mlecchas who transform, under Rishi Kanva's guidance, into Shudras and Vaishyas. Their descendants populate parts of Haryana (Prithu-*desha*), Rajasthan (Rajaputra-*puram*) and Magadha. Significantly, in 800 CE, Multan was known as Kashyapapura, and it was here that *Devala-smriti*, a *dharma-shastra*, was written by local Brahmins to purify those said to be contaminated by contact with Arabs.

In the Dark Age, the Vedic order was re-established first by Vikramaditya, then by Shalivahana and finally by Bhoja, the king who ruled Malwa in 1000 CE. Vikramaditya encounters Jesus (Isamasiha) while Shalivahana and his poet, Kalidasa, encounter Muhammad (Mahamada).

All this reveals a jumbled public memory in the 1800s of an earlier period when India first had contact with foreigners, between 300 BCE and 500 CE. Their arrival marked the end of the old Vedic Age that forced Brahmins of Yamuna-Ganga doab to reimagine Hinduism through Puranic lore, and migrate to new lands in search of new patrons.

Most fascinating is how the stories of the *Bible* were retold. Information about them could have come to Brahmin storytellers via Christian sailors or even Persian and Arab traders. We get a glimpse of this in the Mughal paintings depicting Biblical themes.

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