

# magazine



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## LIVING WITH EXTREME WEATHER

With our cities and towns becoming increasingly vulnerable to nature's vagaries, now is the time to climate-proof lives and livelihoods by making informed choices, improving policymaking, and implementing behavioural changes

Ritwika Mitra

**W**ith his sweat-drenched T-shirt stuck to his body, Anup Majhi, 37, pauses for a moment beneath the AC blowers in the bus parked in Kolkata's Esplanade area. A small-time salesman selling pills and potions, Majhi has been hopping on and off buses plying on the 180-km stretch between Esplanade and Digha for the past 26 years.

"Two tablets during the day and two at night, and you will be rid of indigestion or gas," he promises his customers. In the roughly 10 minutes he spends on the bus, he manages to sell a bottle of pills. On a busy day, Majhi makes a profit of ₹3,000. The sole earning member in his family of four, he has never taken beyond a few days off from work at a stretch. Last month, for the first time, Majhi took a whole month off. The reason: to avoid exhaustion due to the extreme heat. "The moment I would step out of the AC bus, my skin would start burning. I kept falling ill. I incurred a major loss taking a month off. But I have the rest of my life to earn money. If I keep getting sick, there is no point going to work," he says. He was lucky his family supported him. "They were insistent that I should not go out in this heat."

From March 1 to June 18 this year, 110 people died due to heatstroke in India, according to data from the Health Ministry. In several places, including New Delhi, maximum

temperatures touched nearly 50 degrees Celsius, a record high for the month of June. The capital has banned work on construction sites between noon and 3 p.m., and several hospitals have opened heat stroke wards. The 2023-24 El Nino has been one of the five strongest on record resulting in above-normal temperatures almost everywhere, making 2023 the warmest year on record.

Informal sector workers such as Majhi, who make up 90% of India's workforce, are the most susceptible to such climate-related emergencies. According to a World Bank study, India might account for nearly 43% of global job losses from heat stress-associated productivity declines by 2030. The ripple effect from weather-related loss of livelihood is bound to spread far and wide, with people across socio-economic strata being affected over time.

### Safety nets needed

The Central government's Climate Vulnerability Assessment report for 2019-20 had pointed out that all States in India are significantly climate vulnerable. How then can we climate-proof the economy? This will require transforming livelihood sectors and preparing for multi-hazardous conditions rather than single hazards/events, observes Chandni Singh, senior researcher at Indian Institute for Human Settlements and lead author of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) most recent climate report. "This will involve planning

for where we work and under what conditions, climate-proofing certain infrastructure and at-risk sectors, providing safety nets for contract labour and insurance incentives for the most exposed," she says.

For Om Prakash Dubey, a cab driver based in Kolkata, driving has become a chore over the past few months. "I cannot bear the humidity this year. When I'm ferrying passengers and the AC is switched on, it is bearable. I'm trying to cut down on my driving hours, and have my meals on time. My health has deteriorated this year due to the extreme heat. But what can I do?" says the 53-year-old.

Sanjay Lodhi from Uttar Pradesh works in Gujarat's Changodar making number plates of cars for 12 hours a day. He tells me over phone that he is returning to his village in Unnao after suffering severe heat exhaustion this month. He was hospitalised for four days due to dehydration. His views echo Majhi's: if he is healthy, he can work in the months ahead. "My colleagues at the factory are also falling sick. It is in my interest that I go back home till the weather changes. I am not returning for another two months at least," he says.

Research shows the cascading effect of climate crisis on mental health as vulnerable groups face the direct and indirect consequences of extreme weather events in their day-to-day lives. According to health economist Barun Kanjilal, who has extensively worked in the climate-vulnerable Sundarbans, climate shocks, especially when

they hit a local community repeatedly and unpredictably, directly affect the livelihood security of the people. "This usually leads to a severe disruption of the societal network. The deep sense of livelihood and societal insecurity is an excellent breeding ground for mental health problems among people of all age groups," he says.

A 2022 IPCC report too had documented that climate change is a threat to people's mental health and psychological well-being. The scope of manifestations range from emotional distress to anxiety, depression, grief and suicidal behaviour. A World Health Organization (WHO) policy brief recommends solutions such as governments integrating climate considerations with mental health programmes, developing community-based approaches to reduce vulnerabilities, and closing the gap in funding when it comes to mental health and psychosocial support.

Kanjilal says a combination of long-term and short-term strategies should be put in place. Long-term strategies can focus on ensuring economic security by compensating for livelihood loss, a trigger for mental health problems. In the short term, a community-based health programme should be introduced for early detection of

mental health issues by trained community members, followed by a referral system for medical intervention.

**Meanwhile in 2023**  
A report by the Delhi-based think tank Centre for Science and Environment pointed out that while the year 2023 broke global warming records, India suffered extreme weather events on 318 days in the year. The weather events claimed over 3,200 lives, affecting 2.21 million hectare of crop area, and also resulting in the death of over 1.2 lakh animals.

With April to June being unbearably hot this year, and higher temperatures and wildfires being reported from hilly regions across Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir too, lives everywhere have been grossly affected.

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**In the moment** Actors Emory Cohen and Saoirse Ronan in the 2015 movie adaptation of Colm Tóibín's novel *Brooklyn*; and (below) the author. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND GETTY IMAGES)

## IT BEGINS WITH A BETRAYAL

The much-awaited sequel to *Brooklyn* works marvellously with Irish novelist Colm Tóibín ticking all the boxes

**Sudipta Datta**  
sudipta.datta@thehindu.co.in

**S**equeils can be tricky, because however good the book is, it is always compared to the original. Mention the great Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe and his debut novel *Things Fall Apart* has top-of-the-mind recall, not the sequel, *No Longer at Ease*.

Sometimes, a sequel is written after a long interval, like Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments*, which appeared 34 years after her dystopian classic *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). It's a lovely coincidence, of course, if they work as companion pieces, and in the case of Atwood, it does. Like it also does in Elizabeth Strout's Lucy Barton novels.

Writers usually do follow-up novels if they know they can access different characters in the original and embellish their stories. Colm Tóibín decided to write *Long Island*, the sequel to his celebrated novel, *Brooklyn*, published 15 years ago, when an image came to his mind.

A new novel by a master of contemporary Irish fiction is a gift. The 69-year-old Tóibín, shortlisted for the Booker Prize thrice, has ruled the literary world with his 11 novels, essays, poems and short stories. The sequel to *Brooklyn* works marvellously because Tóibín ticks all the boxes – it's a story with upheavals and quiet joys, and new things to say, the characters have been mined further to give them layers of interiority, and the beautiful prose ensures the narrative never sags. And while it's not imperative to read *Brooklyn* to appreciate *Long Island* as it is a great standalone novel, the predecessor completes it.

**In the aftermath**  
We are not giving away spoilers, because *Long Island* starts with a big bang and it is this terrifying premise on which the whole story revolves. Eilis Lacey, married to Tony Fiorello for two decades, is seemingly happy in their Long Island home with two children, Rosella and Larry, till an Irishman

comes knocking and drops a bombshell. Eilis's husband, a "very good plumber", has had an affair with the stranger's wife; she is pregnant and he threatens to drop off the newborn at the Lacey-Fiorello home.

Actions have consequences, and the rest of the novel traces the aftermath. What will Eilis do? She may have immigrated to the U.S. in the 1950s from Ireland, but she is still an outsider in the 1970s, and has built her life around domesticity. She has no peer support group, no one to turn to, unlike her husband Tony who has built a house on a plot where the rest of his family, his two brothers and his parents, also have homes.

Eilis decides to visit Enniscorthy, where her mother lives and is about to celebrate her 80th birthday. This is the town that Tóibín grew up in, and readers will get more atmospheric details of an Irish town of the 70s with its bars, quaint shops and homes without telephones or refrigerators than of the Long Island of the title.

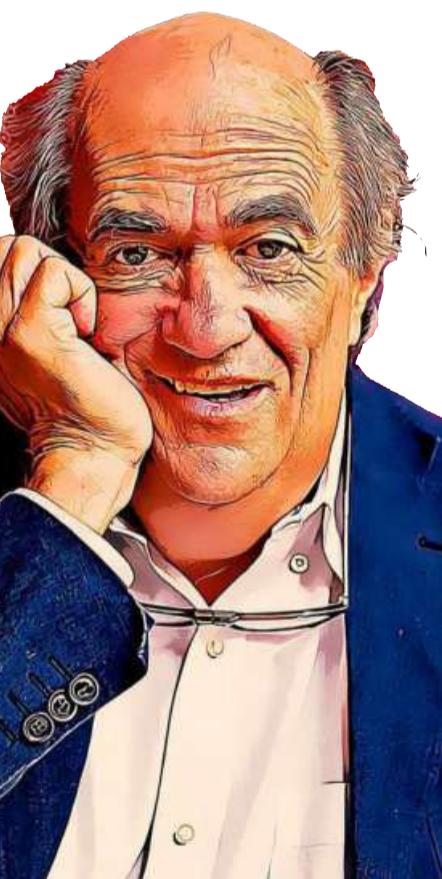
Will Eilis and Farrell be together? Tóibín's eloquent storytelling doesn't quite include settling things for either Eilis or the other characters. Readers will yearn for a third novel, though Tóibín isn't really a fan of series writing, unless a compelling image crops up.

**Back to base**  
In *Brooklyn*, Eilis had gone home from New York to be with her mother after her sister Rose passed away suddenly. Tony, the Italian she gave her heart to, in a fit of desperation and certain she would not return, asks her to marry him – and they do, quietly. Back home in Ireland, Eilis keeps the marriage a secret from her mother and friends, and that "made

every day she had spent in America a sort of fantasy, something she could not match with the time she was spending at home". She meets an Irishman, Jim Farrell, who will inherit a bar, and thereby hangs many a tale. Soon, "the idea that she would leave all of this – the rooms of the house once more familiar and warm and comforting – and go back to Brooklyn and not return for a long time again frightened her".

But Eilis does go back, and *Long Island* picks up the story decades later, with Farrell, now getting a lot of attention, who wishes "he had been with her [Eilis] all the years, but there was nothing could be done about it now".

Will Eilis and Farrell be together? Tóibín's eloquent storytelling doesn't quite include settling things for either Eilis or the other characters. Readers will yearn for a third novel, though Tóibín isn't really a fan of series writing, unless a compelling image crops up.

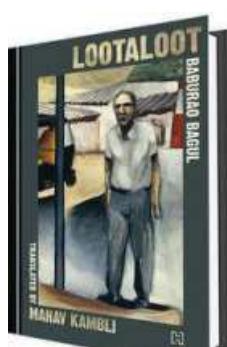


## BROWSER

### Lootaloot

Baburao Bagul,  
trs Manav Kamble  
Hachette India  
₹499

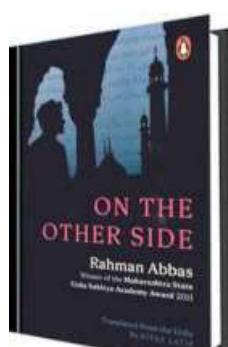
Through 11 stories of systemic exploitation and poverty, the author dives into the lives of ordinary Dalits rendered invisible by society. There's rage and rebellion at the turn of every page as everyday reality comes into sharp focus.



### On the Other Side

Rahman Abbas, trs Riyaz Latif  
Penguin  
₹499

When an author sets out to write about another's incomplete passion project, unveiling volumes of diary entries and more, it also unfolds deeper conflicts of patriarchy, caste, religion and love, in this novel expertly translated from the Urdu original.



## PRIDE MONTH 2024

In setting out to capture the relationship between closeted men, Saikat Majumdar exposes their inability to convey their innermost feelings

## Disruptive desire and the Indian male



**Joshua Muyiwa**

**H**aving grown up queer in the 90s, I've looked on with envy at the ease between heterosexual men. As usual, we've got an ugly word – bromance – to name the texture of these male friendships. As queer, we will always be the juju in every room that viscerally reminds everyone of sexual desire and deviance. They might not be entirely wrong; having been – like lionesses in the Serengeti – stealthy and secretive, it's hard for us to turn it off. They're right that we are always watching but wrong that it is always sexual. But, every outward expression of ours goes through a process fraught with smoothing away the edges; a handshake, a hug, any humanity with another body is tense.

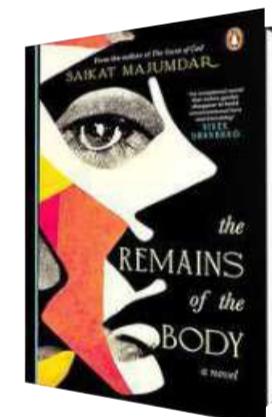
In Saikat Majumdar's latest novel, *The Remains of the Body*, this is the kind of tension he sets out to capture. From the first sentence, we are swimming (and seeing) the world through the protagonist Kaustav's inner monologue. We see the apple of his eye, Avik, floating in a pool at his home in La Jolla, a neighbourhood in San Diego. Like Kaustav, the reader – too was startled by Sunetra's voice, a few lines into the first page. Quite quickly, the book reveals itself to be about the trio. Avik and Sunetra are married to each other. Avik and Kaustav are *chaddi* buddies. (Strangely, later, this affectionate phrase, a testament to male

friendships born in childhood, is used literally, when Kaustav wonders if Sunetra cares about Avik and him having "shared underwear as teenagers") Kaustav and Sunetra are friends because of their common enemy, or is it lover – what's the difference, really?

In an authorial twist, Majumdar seems to side-step the obvious; and therefore, Kaustav is straight. Instead, the novel positions us to see his desire towards Avik as the kind I've always assumed straight men feel for each other. Within the novel, their time spent together isn't ever enough for Kaustav. It is framed as the potential to be something more if their physical intimacy was unlocked.

### View from the outside

Other observations make their cameos into this landscape of homo (social or sexual?) desire between Avik and Kaustav. There's Avik and Sunetra's "quiet dance of marriage",



**The Remains of the Body**  
Saikat Majumdar  
Penguin  
₹499

### Destination love

While Majumdar's Kaustav ably observes Sunetra, he doesn't flesh her out enough. She is someone "whose angularity could hurt and kill you with desire", who has "elegant girliness", and is a "little girl playing at being big, wearing her mom's clothes". She's a foil for Kaustav to imagine he would be a better partner to the "big baby" Avik. She's the stand-in body for Kaustav and Avik to have finally had sex. But, even post-coital, Kaustav and Sunetra remain two cars using two different roads to reach the same destination of Avik. One thinking they've got the short end of the stick; the other knowing they actually have.

Within its pages, Majumdar's *The Remains of the Body* does speak to the homo (social and sexual) nature of the Indian man and its particular patriarchy. It speaks to heterosexual relationships, where wives keep the friendships fed. Arranging their husband's social calendar; making sure like a plant, he spends enough time in sunlight. It speaks to the inability of Indian men to find a language to express their desires that don't always sound like a diktat. It addresses Indian men weaponising their silences. But, it doesn't illuminate the ways for us – Indian men, both straight and queer – to find ourselves outside of these shames.

*The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based poet and writer.*

## Queer romance is booming

**Ayushi Saxena**

**T**here is no dearth of romance novels in the market – it is in fact one of the highest-selling genres in commercial fiction globally. Up until a decade ago, queer love stories may have been hard to come by in the market, but today, there are all manners of romance novels, covering the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, being published. Here is a short selection:

**Leeward** by Katie Daysh (2023)

A satisfyingly slow-burn romance set in the 19th century amid the

Napoleonic Wars, with a strong dose of mayhem, intrigue and piracy on the high seas.

### You Should be So Lucky

by Cat Sebastian (2024)  
The not-so-shockingly homophobic sports industry of the 1960s is the setting for this uplifting romance between a star baseball player stuck in his worst slump and a reporter who wants to interview him. A definite must-read.

**Happy Endings** by Minita Sanghvi (2022)

A fairytale romance with all its trappings, this is the story of two beautiful and strong women, Krishi and Mahek, who have to

navigate the glamourous yet treacherous world of Bollywood to get to their happily-ever-after.

### One Night Only

by Saumya Vohra (2023)  
This book about love, sexuality and female bonding will probably make you want to take a trip with your friends. The bisexual protagonist portrayed with nuance and sensitivity is a bonus.

**Mrs. Martin's Incomparable Adventure** by Courtney Milan (2019)

What a time to be a reader, when romance isn't just for the young. Mrs. Martin is 73 years old and ends up meeting Violetta, who's a

youthful 69. The romance that follows is enjoyable, funny and touching too.

*The writer is a consulting editor who has worked on several award-winning and bestselling children's books.*

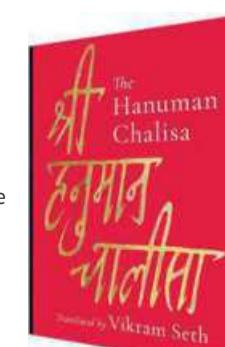


Scan the QR code to discover more titles from the queer romance genre on magazine.thehindu.com

### The Hanuman Chalisa

Vikram Seth  
Speaking Tiger  
₹399

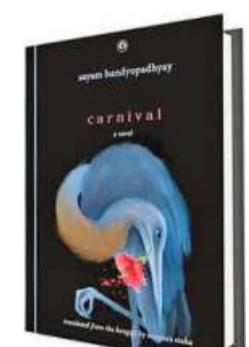
Seth's masterly translation of Tulsidas' verses is an ode to the hymn memorised and recited by scores of Hindu devotees. Released as a bilingual edition with the original Awadhi text, the book also features title calligraphy by Seth.



### Carnival

Sayam Bandyopadhyay,  
trs Arunava Sinha  
Aleph  
₹499

In the streets of Calcutta, a writer follows the life of Rajaram Deb, a man in pursuit of immeasurable ecstasy, to finish his novel. With the past and present interconnecting, the novel presents the mysteries of an ancient city.



# Fractured identity

A rare handbook that successfully explores the complex geopolitical dynamics of South Asia



In the pits Rohingya women at Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh shout slogans at a protest rally. (AP)

Rajiv Bhatia

The six blind men of the proverbial story touching an elephant and describing it partially fail in the task assigned to them, but they succeed in conveying its complexity. In contrast, the 25 scholars belonging to different disciplines, carefully chosen by the two editors, Adluri Subramanyam Raju and R. Srinivasan, of *The Routledge Handbook of South Asia Region, Security and Connectivity*, have succeeded on both fronts. They convincingly analyse the bewildering diversity, size and scale of the challenges of South Asia, helping us to grasp its essential reality, even though it is one of the most complex regions of the world. The handbook is a rare treasure for those interested in deciphering the history, ethnic identities, colonial legacy, political economy, environmental risks, and geopolitical dynamics of South Asia.

Stretching west to east from the Iran-Afghanistan frontier to the India-Myanmar border and north to south from the Himalayan mountains to the Indian Ocean, South Asia is home to one-sixth of humankind. Of the eight countries that constitute it, India has the largest population in the world. South Asia's salvation and mutual interest lie in the path of cooperation and integration rather than confrontation and divisiveness. If this objective reality is so easy to grasp and articulate, why does the region remain one of the least integrated regions of the world?

The answers lie in the combined wisdom offered by this book. Divided into five parts, the introduction and 24 chapters, it delves into the nature of South Asia as a region; its political, social and security systems; its key economic facets with a focus on commerce and connectivity; human security issues covering climate change, water resources, energy security and potential for sustainable development; and the role and position of South Asia in a multipolar world. The last part offers a critical comparison of experiments in regional integration in the region and



**The Routledge Handbook of South Asia Region, Security and Connectivity**  
Edited by Adluri Subramanyam Raju and R. Srinivasan  
Routledge  
₹1,356 (Amazon)

elsewhere (e.g., EU and ASEAN) as well as a penetrating analysis of the approaches adopted by the U.S. and China in dealing with South Asian states.

## Three key takeaways

Several important conclusions emerge from this well-researched volume, and three need to be highlighted.

One, the region has been moulded by a colonial legacy that left it with "intense bloodshed" apparently inspired by religious divides even though the populace shared "more commonalities in culture than the dissimilarities based on religion." And yet ethnic diversities persist in hampering the growth of "the composite new national identities."

Two, South Asia, which marched on the path of socialist experiment in its search for social justice for decades, experienced the winds of change brought by globalisation in the 1990s. As a result, the region changed direction to step into the era of economic liberalisation. The sustained economic growth of India and Bangladesh in the past three decades gives credence to the view that real economic cooperation at the regional level has "the potential to place South Asia as a major economic powerhouse in the world."

Three, the region faces many diverse challenges, alongside its unique and characteristic similarities. Learning from Europe and Southeast Asia, South Asia should – and can – work to attain "constructive regionalism." This requires enlightened leadership not just in one or two states but throughout the length and breadth of the region. That, I am afraid, is a tall order because politics often trumps idealism.

This work covers a vast canvas, breaking new ground and offering valuable insights. Perusing it is not for the fainthearted, but persistence will prove rewarding.

*The reviewer is a former ambassador, columnist and author, besides being a Distinguished Fellow at Gateway House.*

Urvashi Butalia

Nico Slate's biography of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay brings her vividly and elegantly to life. Empathetic, non-judgmental, admiring, carefully critical and at times almost breathless in trying to keep up with the speed and intensity of Kamaladevi's life, Slate weaves together a story that is both old and new. In doing so, he reopens interesting key questions about biography writing.

I approached *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay: The Art of Freedom* with curiosity. Despite the fact that mainstream history, and indeed mainstream historians are, by and large, yet to recognise Kamaladevi's many contributions to what one might call the making of modern India, she has been much written about, and indeed she herself was a prolific writer. So, the archive that is available to the biographer is rich, and variously populated. There are her own writings, a number of biographies of her, collections of her papers edited by eminent scholars; then there's the other archive, of official papers and documents, or letters, records. There are photos of her travels, the institutions she set up, the speeches she gave, newspaper reports at home and abroad, and there is a vast circle of people, many still with us, who knew her and worked with her. With much of this in the public domain, the reader may well ask: what more is there to say?

The question though, as Slate's biography demonstrates, is not so much about what 'more' there is to say, or even what is there to say that is new (although there is some of that in this story), but really what you choose to tell, and how you tell it.

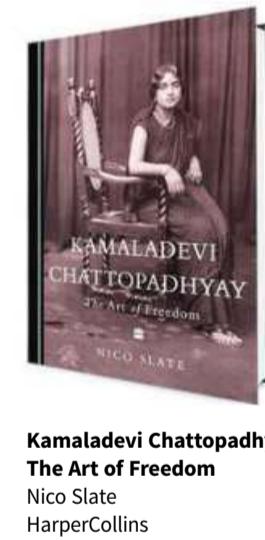
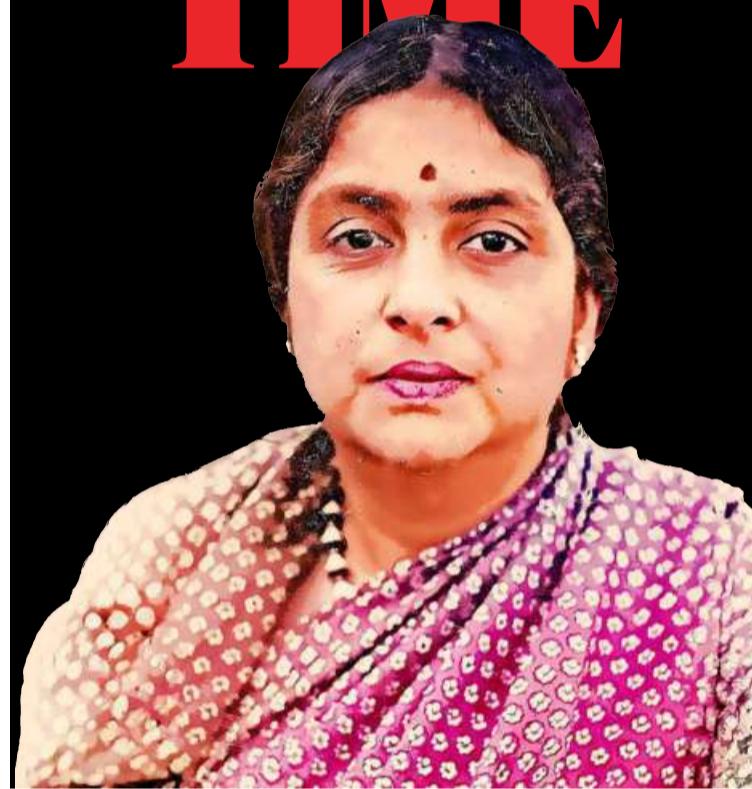
## A city for the displaced

I was delighted that Slate begins his story with one of my favourite incidents in Kamaladevi's life, the setting up, despite considerable opposition, of a planned city to house the thousands of displaced Partition refugees who flooded Delhi. The city of Faridabad was a daring and visionary experiment led by a woman (and her team) that testified to being able to think, in a moment of complete upheaval, of what is needed for rehabilitation in the long term.

Indeed, this is what also marks

Nico Slate's biography of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, a woman who imagined a future for her country, is a story that is both old and new

# AHEAD OF HER TIME



**Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay:  
The Art of Freedom**  
Nico Slate  
HarperCollins  
₹799

Slate's narrative as distinct. Even as he describes Kamaladevi's intense involvement in issues of the time, whether it is Gandhi's campaigns, or the pull of politics, or her many writings, her travels in India and abroad, her strong views on inequality and racial discrimination, or her commitment to art, culture, theatre, craft, there is always something that lifts the involvement in the here and now and informs it with a vision of the future. Here was a woman who, for all her faults and weaknesses, which the author gives us a good dose of, did not hesitate to imagine a future for the country whose battle for

freedom she was so integrally a part of.

## Multi-faceted personality

Another of Slate's particular contributions to the writing of this life is his attempt to define what 'freedom' meant to her: not just the freeing of India from the shackles of the British, but the freeing of India from itself, from the many hierarchies it carried within, from the inequalities that were rife, from the patriarchies that were deep.

The Kamaladevi whose portrait Slate draws, emerges as a many faceted, complex and often contradictory person who engaged with all of these. Born to privilege, she developed a critique of class and caste discrimination in Indian society early on, which stayed with her as she transformed into a socialist and a nationalist. Fiercely private, politically committed, strongly nationalist and yet with an acute sense of the need to address class, caste and gender discrimination within India, Kamaladevi also remained outspoken (sometimes at considerable cost to herself) and true to her beliefs. This, and so much more, made her one of the most unusual women of our time.

## Minor quibble

Perhaps the one – minor – quibble I have is when Slate offers a gentle critique, or seems to be mystified by, Kamaladevi suggesting that women take up embroidery. He seems somewhat surprised that this confident, outgoing woman, with such a rich history of arguing for the rights of women (and others) is exhorting women to take up this homely task. Would it not be just as interesting to speculate that embroidery can be both creative and subversive for those who don't have many avenues for self-expression?

But this is a quibble, and doesn't take away from the value of this book. And I'm willing to let it go for the many other details Slate includes – the tearing up of saris to make the flag, the invading of the Bombay stock exchange to sell salt, making a home in which her husband's ex-lover lives alongside her – and so much more in the public domain that made Kamaladevi the woman she was.

*The reviewer is a writer, historian, publisher.*

# The face of science

How Soumya Swaminathan rose to the highest levels in her field



Ramya Kannan

ramya.kannan@thehindu.co.in

If the birth of Christ was the significant event that determined the counting of years in the past, in the modern world, it is probably COVID. The world as we know it will, at some point of time, be split into Before COVID, and After COVID epochs. It is no surprise that when profiling one of the key leaders who led the battle against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, this new temporal duality asserts itself with ease. No better place to start, actually.

At the heart of *At the Wheel of Research* is an attempt to capture the multifarious personality of Soumya Swaminathan, who much of the world became acquainted with, while she was at the WHO, helming it as Chief Scientist during the pandemic. In the BC part of the narrative, captured intricately here, Dr. Soumya was always famous in her neck of the woods, in the scientific circles in India,

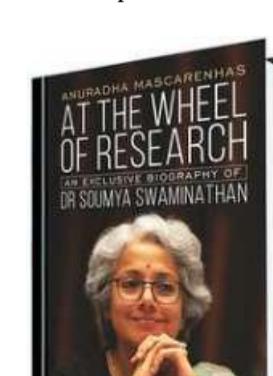
**Total devotion** Soumya Swaminathan with her father M.S. Swaminathan. (K.V. SRINIVASAN)

having pushed boundaries, and glass ceilings; and standing for ethical, yet compassionate care. Some of us have definitely been absorbed as she grew up, ensconced in the liberal and progressive, scientific atmosphere of a home built by her parents – renowned agricultural scientist and father of the Green Revolution M.S. Swaminathan and educationist Mina Swaminathan. Clearly, she has gone much further since, her steely composure and ability to empathise with people complimenting her capacity for reason, and her faith in science standing her in good stead.

## Providing a context

A journalist, Anuradha Mascarenhas employs the tools of the trade, records the significant events, and providing the contexts. She's working with a wealth of information and an inspiring

life with several decades of achievements, and while that's good material, it can also be overwhelming. Dr. Soumya's life and works are lessons in scholarship, yes, but also hard work, persistence, weathering the rough rides, and sterling leadership. The author is not



**At the Wheel of Research:  
An Exclusive Biography  
of Dr. Soumya  
Swaminathan**  
Anuradha Mascarenhas  
Bloomsbury  
₹599

fazed though, she manages to bring to readers a nearly scientific account of a woman who rose to the highest levels in science.

Dr. Soumya Swaminathan was the face of science, of reason, for many in the world, during the dark, dark, days of COVID. As we sat quivering in our homes, her posts on social media and her interviews to television channels were the steady force. Striking out with science and for science, while at the WHO, with her impeccable communication, and explanations of complex scientific terms, undeterred by trolling armies of anti-vaxxers, she guided the world back to sanity. She gave advice on protocols, best practices, and broke down the nearly daily advances in research and technology for better understanding. A life that must indeed be chronicled, never mind that Dr. Soumya herself first wondered what the point of a biography might be. In the interests of science itself, aren't we glad she had a change of heart?

Delhi residents in the midst of a water crisis. (AFP)



#### DISASTERS RISING

- More than 75% of Indian districts, which are home to over 638 million people, are extreme climate event hotspots.
- Post-2005, at least 55 or more districts witnessed extreme flood events year-on-year, exposing 97.51 million people annually. The frequency of associated flood events such as landslides, heavy rainfall, hailstorms, thunderstorms, and cloudbursts surged by over 20 times between 1970 and 2019.
- In the last decade alone, cyclones hit 258 districts.
- The 'State of India Environment 2024' report reveals that last year, the country experienced extreme weather events on a staggering 318 out of 365 days, impacting all states and territories.
- Of all the destructive weather phenomena, heavy rains, floods, and landslides were the most frequent, occurring on 208 days. 2023 also witnessed 49 heatwaves, 29 cold waves, and 9 cloudbursts.

— A 2020 CEEW report and a 2024 CSE report

CONTINUED FROM  
» PAGE 1

"This affects the local population in more than one way. Forest fires damage the surrounding grasslands on which a lot of people are dependent, and the biodiversity of the area is also threatened. Transportation systems and tourism take a massive hit too, which in turn affects local livelihoods," says Rohit Magotra, deputy director at Integrated Research & Action for Development, a New Delhi-based think tank.

In March 2024, UN Tourism launched a policy guidance for national tourism administrations to assist governments in developing climate action policies and initiatives to support low-carbon transition for tourism. It also provided examples from around the world on how to implement climate-enabling policies.

**Dealing with unpredictability**  
According to Subimal Ghosh, a professor at Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT-B), India

needs to focus on both adaptation and mitigation strategies. "In fact, I would say adaptation is more important. Currently, there are very limited adaptation strategies in place at the policy and implementation levels."

When it comes to water, food, health, transportation or the infrastructure sector, decisions should be taken based on the weather forecast. "If any rigorous outdoor work or construction is being planned, we must check the forecast for the day or week. We have to become weather-smart. A mechanism must be designed to deal with unpredictable weather conditions," adds Ghosh.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) says artificial intelligence, drones, Earth observation, advanced computing, the Internet of Things and virtual and augmented reality are six technologies critical to climate adaptation. According to director Mrutyunjay Mohapatra in an interview to PTI this April, the India Meteorological Department currently uses AI in a limited way, but plans to enhance models and techniques

## LIVING WITH EXTREME WEATHER

significantly in the next five years. He acknowledged the need for

household-level information to provide sector-specific inputs in agriculture, health, urban planning, hydrology and environment.

Senior researcher Singh says that early warning systems must be strengthened to improve usability of advisories, and to make them more accessible to people. She adds that space must be earmarked for building blue-green infrastructure, and a budget kept aside in urban planning. In addition, a range of adaptive strategies need to be adopted for the most vulnerable in crowded urban spaces.

To this end, grassroots organisation Mahila Housing Trust, which works with women in 10 cities across India, has implemented many small-scale climate resilient initiatives at the homes of its members, such as using reflective paint, installing bamboo roofing, and targeted cool-roof programmes in vulnerable settlements.

The Compendium of Best

Practices on Climate Action from Indian States reports that the role of regional and tailored initiatives is essential in achieving India's national goal to address climate change. A WEF report details how local communities are adapting to climate



crisis, including harvesting floodwater for agriculture, cropping traditional varieties to overcome agrarian crisis, and raising awareness around mangrove conservation in Mumbai, among others.

According to the IPCC Sixth

Assessment Report (October 2015 to July 2023), incremental adaptation alone will not be enough for Asia, which is one of the most vulnerable to climate change: transformational change is the key. Interventions such as 'climate-smart agriculture' (for

instance, precision irrigation, drip irrigation, collecting rainwater) as seen in South and Southeast Asian countries, or changing labour laws to reduce exposure to heat as seen in West Asia, would be the way forward, the report says. The biggest challenges that Asia will face under climate crisis are around water and food insecurity, poverty and inequality, and increased frequency and severity of extreme events, the report adds.

While climate crisis is threatening

lives and livelihoods globally, all hope is not lost. Small-scale efforts, informed choices, improved sectoral policymaking, and implementing global, national and regional policies with sustained behavioural changes of local population can slow the crisis. Low carbon lifestyles such as saving energy at home, changing sources of energy, switching to electric vehicles, are among small-scale solutions that can go a long way in reducing emissions.

The writer is an independent journalist.

**KASARAGOD'S CLOUDBURSTS AND PULINKARI**  
Sprouted cashew nuts and mushrooms that carpet the hills after a thunderstorm find their way into special curries and stir-fries in Kerala

Thulasi Kakkar  
thulasidas.pv@thehindu.co.in

**J**ust as it has colour and scent, the monsoon has taste. The cashew orchards would be strewn with leftover nuts from the summer; most of which would have sprouted. They are gathered and used whole in the *korattu* curry, a traditional gravy made with dry roasted coconut and black pepper. Some of the sprouted nuts have to be carefully coaxed out of their skin and this is quite a task – it could stain and peel off the skin of the fingers.

Even if one succeeds in accurately describing the taste of this dish, how can one experience its true essence without the brooding rain that pours over the arid and vast cashew orchards of Kasaragod?

**Think corn, not corn**  
From the start of the Southwest monsoon till the 15th of the month of Karkidakam (mid-July),



leafy dishes are not made or consumed. The leaves, they say, turn toxic and 'impure'. But taro is cooked, in the form of a *pulinkari*. This thin, tangy curry is made with the corm (stem) of the taro and garnished with the monsoon!

Not all corms can be cooked; the most favoured is the colocasia. The corms are plucked, cleaned, cut and

cooked with a dash of turmeric and salt, before being added to a potent concoction of ground coconut, buttermilk and bird's eye chillies. It is a delight to pick out the corms from the white enamel dish filled with *pulinkari* and generous serving of brown rice, and to bite into their spongy middles that melt in the mouth.

**Thunder heralds their arrival**  
If there is a thunderstorm, there is bound to be *kumal* (mushrooms). The morning after the rains, the hills would be covered in a rash of mushrooms, called '*pakumal*'. The ones that sprout in singles are the '*nilampolappan*'. Both edible varieties are picked, skinned and soaked in water. The mushrooms are cooked the same way as a *naadan* chicken curry, with dry-roasted

grated coconut. No ready-made powder mixes are used.

In a large *uruli* (traditional heavy-bottomed vessel), coriander, *parangi* (as red chillies are often referred to in Kasaragod), grated coconut, cumin, shallots, and a few pods of garlic are sautéed. This is ground to a fine paste on an *ammikkalu* (grinding stone). The mushrooms may appear tender, but they need to be cooked for a while before they turn soft.

Then come the leaves of the *thakara* (*cassia tora*) herb, which grows widely in the backyard with plentiful yellow flowers. A stir fry is made with these leaves. It is simple; just don't forget to add a sprinkle of roasted rice grains.

## GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

CHENNAI SUFFERED LOSSES OF OVER ₹40,000 CRORE IN A DECADE FROM FLOODS. THIS COULD HAVE EASILY BEEN AVOIDED IF OUR WETLANDS WERE CONSERVED.

SO, WHAT SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT'S MOST LOGICAL SOLUTION BE HEREON? HMM... WAIT. I'M THINKING...

YES! SPEND ANOTHER 40,000 CRORE TO CLEAR WETLANDS FOR A NEW AIRPORT, FOR A QUICK ESCAPE WHEN IT FLOODS AGAIN!

GENIUS!

**Thomas Zacharias**

I first stumbled upon *shevla*, or dragon stalk yam, about seven years ago while wandering through Bhaji Galli on Grant Road in Mumbai. Its otherworldly, almost alien appearance immediately caught my eye. Intrigued and curious, I decided to bring it home and try my hand at cooking it. What followed was a culinary misadventure I'll never forget.

After preparing and cooking the *shevla*, I eagerly took a bite, only to experience an intensely painful, itchy sensation that spread through my mouth and throat. Bewildered and slightly alarmed, I returned to the market the next day to seek advice from the vendor who sold it to me. With a hearty laugh, he explained that *shevla*, available only for a few short weeks during the monsoon, contains toxins that cause itching if not cooked properly. He also introduced me to *kakad*, another monsoon vegetable that neutralises these toxins when cooked together with *shevla*, making it safe and delicious to eat.

I recently shared a video about *shevla* on Instagram, recounting this encounter, and the lessons I learned. The reel went viral, amassing nearly 80,000 views, which didn't surprise me. I chose *shevla* not only to highlight its brief availability and its earthy umami rich flavour, but also because its distinctive properties and the mishap associated with it make for a great story. However, in an era where virality is necessary to grab people's attention, what about the less enigmatic vegetables? How do we ensure they receive the recognition they deserve?

**The decade of discovery**  
Ten years ago, I started the hashtag #KnowYourDesiVegetables to promote awareness and appreciation of India's incredible local produce. Many hyper-seasonal vegetables are slowly being forgotten, and the diversity on our plates is shrinking. It's ironic that while India boasts a rich array of unique vegetables, we are more familiar with imported ones like broccoli and avocado. There's a growing disconnect with the everyday vegetables available in



**Elusive** (Clockwise from below) Chef Thomas Zacharias with wild taro stolons in Cotigao, Goa; *shevla* picked in Palghar district; *desi* white corn; and *shevla* being prepared. (THOMAS ZACHARIAS)



#### 5 ways to begin

**Educate yourself and others:** Learn about different seasonal vegetables and share this knowledge through WhatsApp groups, social media, and in-person conversations. Each of us is an influencer in our own way, with circles of influence in our homes, social circles, and workplaces.

**Visit local markets weekly:** The vibrant colours and fresh aromas in your *mandi* offer an experience far removed from the sterile aisles of supermarkets or the convenience of instant delivery platforms.

**Have a conversation with your local vegetable vendor:** Ask them what's in season, and how to cook it. You might save yourself from an itchy predicament and uncover a delightful new dish in the process like *shevla bhaji* cooked with tiny shrimp.

**Experiment with new vegetables:** Try vegetables you haven't cooked with before. Discover the unique flavours and textures of water chestnuts, bamboo shoots and other monsoon produce local to your region.

**Support restaurants that prioritise local produce:** Restaurants such as Soam in Mumbai, The Farm in Chennai, or Sienna Store & Cafe in Kolkata.

by its distinctly vegetal flavour and spring onion-like crunch, I successfully showcased it as a salad green at The Bombay Canteen where I've previously helmed the kitchen, pairing it with red chillies, shrimp, peanuts, and a pungent *kasundi* mustard dressing.

*Avarakkai*, commonly known as broad beans, is frequently used in Tamilian cuisine during this time of the year, appearing in dishes like stir-fries, *sambhar*, and *poriyal*. In contrast, *athalakkai*, a wild vegetable from the same family as bitter gourd, is less commonly cooked. Known for its healing properties, especially for diabetic patients, *athalakkai* is delicious when pickled, cooked in a *poriyal* or *kulambu*, or dried with buttermilk and fried into *vathal*. In Assam, *shevla kaak*, or fiddlehead ferns, are a monsoon delicacy known for their tangy flavour and versatility, but *kochur loti* or *maan-kosu* (taro stolons) remain relatively unknown among today's youth.

During a recent food trip to Rajasthan, my hosts lamented that the tiny melon *kachri*, a drought-tolerant fruit once a hallmark of Rajasthani cuisine, is hardly cooked anymore. Specific varieties of commonly consumed vegetables are also becoming rare, such as the *desi* white corn being sidelined by the yellow

many of these vegetables that are hardly eaten anymore.

**Most unusual, not most**

In Maharashtra, *kantola*, a fluorescent green spiny gourd remains relatively popular, but *phodshi bhaji*, or mountain knotweed, is elusive. Inspired

T he other day I walked in on a friend's nephew – a future NEET aspirant – watching *Scam 2003: The Telgi Story*. He had a notepad on his lap.

"Are you taking notes?" I asked.  
"Just jotting down inspiring quotes, uncle."

I peered over his shoulder and caught a line he had scribbled, "*Sab mein aur mere mein bahut farak hain. Main khiladi aur tu...*". Below that: "*System mein rehke khud ka system banayenge!*" Frankly, who wouldn't find such sentiments empowering? I certainly did. In a country like ours with limited opportunities even for the privileged, people like Abdul Karim Telgi and Harshad Mehta are heroes.

I was therefore concerned to read that the government is planning exam reforms, including for NEET. For all the millions of words spilled over NEET, no one will tell you the truth about it – its purpose. NEET was created to solve a specific problem: how to ensure private medical colleges fill all their seats even if their fees

are laughably grotesque for the majority of applicants. NEET solved the problem in three elegant steps.

Step 1: It created a single national pool of applicants to feed all the medical colleges in the country. Step 2: It kept the cut-offs so low that even if a student practically 'fails', he can get in if he is an HNI who can afford an MBBS course fee of ₹2-3 crore.

Step 3: To the lakhs of non-HNIs who cleared NEET with above 40% marks but couldn't get into a public-funded college, it said, 'Go to Russia'.

**Aspiring to scam**  
What is a scam anyway? It is a market-based evolutionary mechanism which ensures that only the fittest (i.e. the richest) survive. The best scams are completely legal, such as electoral bonds, demonetisation, and now NEET. To condemn them is to mislead how most Indians view scams and aspire to hoodwink the system, scamster-style.

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**Designed for the rich**  
NEET is thus a win-win. Why fix a system that is clearly working for the rich – the only section that counts in a poor country? Well, now that an exam reforms committee is here, I hope they

don't push for anything radical – like a cap on fees charged by private colleges. For what it's worth, here are some ideas they

could consider:

● Give industry status to the twin businesses of paper leaking and question paper solving so that more and more of India's talented youth can join solver gangs without fear of being harassed by law enforcement agencies.

● To weed out touts and eliminate black money, streamline the paper leak ecosystem with a centralised app – we could call it Eggjam Warrior – where the National Testing Agency (NTA) could auction a limited number of questions (not more than 75% of the questions for any given exam). Parents can bid for the questions in a transparent bidding process, with the bid winner having the option to make the payment immediately or post-counselling. This would go a long way in restoring public trust in the NTA.

● Keep the NEET cut-off for MBBS admissions permanently at zero. This will lower exam-related stress, as every aspirant who is rich enough would be secure in the knowledge that he will get a seat even if he scores minus 720 out of 720. It will also level the playing field, as only the rich will aspire to become doctors.

● Sign an agreement with Russia under which India would get an additional 10 billion barrels of crude oil free in exchange for sending qualified NEET aspirants to Russian medical colleges and providing lucrative WFH to Russian hackers.

● Where the exam is offline and paper-based, save students the trouble of travelling long distances to select centres – such as from Odisha to Godhra, etc. – by tying up with Zomato or Dunzo for home-delivery of pre-paid question papers.

● Clear the confusion over the awarding of grace marks by releasing a standardised rate card: I to 10 marks (₹1 lakh); II to 15 marks (₹5 lakh); III to 200 marks (₹2 crore), and so on.

All these changes, if implemented, will usher in greater transparency and protect the sanctity and integrity of the exam.

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

## STALKING THE WILD

Lessons from a celebrated chef on embracing the elusive desi monsoon vegetable

our local markets, and it's crucial to address this. Monsoon vegetables are not only flavourful but are packed with specific nutrients that help maintain health and protect against common monsoon ailments. Travelling through 25 states across India over the last decade, I've come across so

**Garima Gupta**

Artist and researcher, Mumbai

I moved to Bombay late September of 2012 and everyone warned me of the awful October heat.

I braced myself for the worst. But October decided to spare me that year; it rained every evening! Tucked in the lane flanked by a Portuguese church on one end and

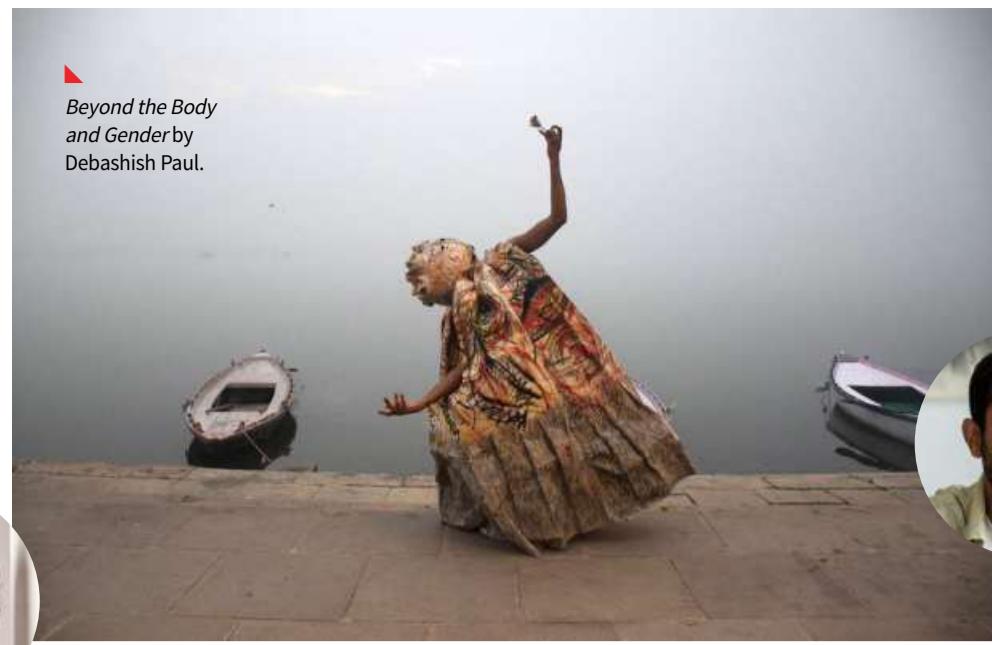
Siddhivinayak on the other, I watched people walk in either direction to their place of worship in pouring rain. Older couples hand in hand, wet crows that hung upside down from electric cables, lush green rain trees. Had it not been for that monsoon, I may have never learnt to love Bombay.

• **Good and bad:** I am an August born and the memory of the monsoon starting with a roar around my birthday is deeply embedded.

Sometimes I have to stop and remind myself that untimely rains are wrecking standing crops and causing damage. But then we as a people have also abolished all possibilities of joy because guilt and shame are dominating our thoughts. We don't pull up our authorities when things fall apart, but will learn to kill our only chance of joy.

• **Rainy day favourites:** I love the Bollywood songs from the 1970s and 80s, where the protagonists are enjoying the rains. There's something about that simple joy.

From Our Conspiring Hosts, a series of paintings inspired by the Amazon rainforest after a storm.

*Beyond the Body and Gender* by Debashish Paul.**Debashish Paul**

Performance artist, Varanasi

In Banaras, when the water climbs, we head to the Nepali *mandir* on Tulsi Ghat, which is located at a height. You can see the whole valley move. When I came to Banaras for my Masters in 2019, the monsoon had just begun. On my first evening here, I found two young boys conducting the *aarti* at Tulsi Ghat, and I was infatuated with one of them. I'd visit daily for six months just to see him; I'd watch the way his body moved and transformed. That became the inspiration for my first performance work, *Beyond the Body and Gender*.• **Rainy day favourites:** I have a deep appreciation for Rabindra Sangeet. In Tagore's songs, such as 'Aai jhorer raate', 'Megher Pore Meghe Jomechhe', and others, I can vividly see my village, in the Nadia district of West Bengal, where we'd make boats out of banana leaves and fish in the streets when the rains came. In the monsoon songs of Tagore, you feel as if you're soaring in the sky and smelling the rain.**Sheetal Mallar**

Photographer and artist, Mumbai

After these brutal summers, I find the monsoon really romantic. The city is so chaotic, and this season is cleansing in so many ways. For photography, monsoon helps you create a mood. The light is more beautiful, the colour palette changes. Moody, melancholic feelings – the season's really emotive. But I also find myself doing a lot of my drawings and paintings in the monsoon, for which I feel I need to go more inwards.

• **Rainy day favourites:** I love to swim in the rain, and go for long walks – I own two pairs of gum boots. Songs like Shubha Mudgal's 'Ab Ke Saavan' and Billie Holiday's 'Stormy Weather' sound sweeter. And it's the time to feast on bhajjiya and samosas.

# PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST IN THE RAINS

**Rabindra Sangeet and Bollywood songs to train rides and art. Four creators share monsoon-drenched memories and inspirations**

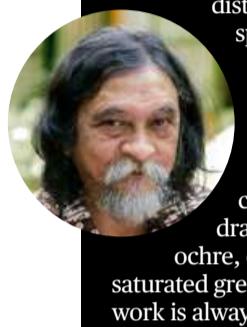
Nidhi Gupta

Rains have always sparked artistic imagination. Vincent Van Gogh's rain lashed over empty farmland in intense, slanted lines; miniature artists in the Mughal and Rajput traditions drew dark clouds over lush green fields in which Krishna and his *gopis* danced; and in a meta commentary on individuality, René Magritte poured his own bowler-hatted self from the sky in *Golconda*. The arrival of the monsoon can turn us all into pluviophiles, but perhaps it affects artists more than the rest of us. We asked four artists from across India what the season means to them.

**Orijit Sen**

Artist and graphic designer, Goa

One of my most vivid memories is travelling on the now defunct metre-gauge train that used to run between Vasco da Gama station and Miraj Junction during the height of the monsoons. I stood at the doorway of my carriage as it crossed a bridge halfway up the swollen Dudhsagar Falls. Even at a distance, I could feel the fine spray. In the time it took us to cross the bridge, I was drenched from head to toe!

• **Fresh eyes:** As an artist, I experience the monsoons as a transformative season. The colours of landscape change dramatically from shades of ochre, olive and brown, to deep, saturated greens. I find the palette in my work is always influenced by this.• **Works that inspire:** One of my favourite painters is Nainsukh of Guler. A painting of his shows a woman in an orange *odhani* running, as lightning flashes. The entire composition is full of energy and drama.

The writer is an independent journalist based in Mumbai, writing on culture, lifestyle and technology.

**GOREN BRIDGE****Bob Jones**

## Seeking information

**Both vulnerable, South deals**

The auction and the final contract in today's deal were routine, but the play was a step above.

The opening spade lead went to East's ace and East returned a spade to South's king. There were 12 easy tricks if the missing clubs split 3-2, so declarer gave some thought to what might be done should one of the opponents have four clubs to the jack. Many players would cash

the ace and queen of clubs, thinking that they could only pick up a poor club split if West had the length. This declarer took his time before playing any clubs.

South started by cashing the queen of spades, noting that West started with five spades. The ace, king, and queen of diamonds revealed that West also started with five diamonds. South led a heart to dummy's ace and continued with the king of hearts. When West followed to two hearts, his original club

**NORTH**  
♠ 8 6 3  
♥ A K Q  
♦ J 5 3  
♣ K 10 6 4

**WEST**  
♠ J 10 9 7 4  
♥ J 4  
♦ 10 7 6 4 2  
♣ 7

**EAST**  
♠ A 2  
♥ 9 8 7 6 2  
♦ 9 8  
♣ J 9 5 2

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

The bidding:  
**SOUTH** 2NT  
**WEST** Pass  
**NORTH** 6NT  
**EAST** All pass

Opening lead: Jack of ♠

holding was, at most, a singleton. South cashed dummy's king of clubs and continued with the 10, intending to run it if East played low. East, however, covered with the jack, so declarer crossed back to

dummy with the queen of hearts and finessed East for the nine of clubs. Nicely played! South had done well to cash his high diamonds before the high hearts, but he knew that he might need a late entry to dummy.

**QUIZ**

## Easy like Sunday morning

**What has June 30 ever given us?****Berty Ashley**

1 On this day in 1860, the legendary Oxford debate took place at the Oxford University Museum after the publication of a seminal paper. It is where Bishop Samuel Wilberforce asked Thomas Huxley whether either of his grandparents descended from monkeys. To which Huxley replied that he would not be ashamed about that, but would be, to be connected to a man who obscures the truth. What was this debate about, the first of many?

2 On this day in 1894, this iconic bridge across the Thames opened in London. At that time, it was the largest and most complex bascule bridge. It is, however, routinely mistaken to be the 'London Bridge', made famous by the nursery rhyme. It gets its name from the fortress present nearby. Which iconic bridge is this found in postcards and insta stories?

3 On this day in 1898, the Winton Motor Carriage Company published an ad in *Scientific American* using the headline "dispense with a horse". What was this the very first ad of?

4 On this day in 1936, Margaret Mitchell's novel was published. Set during the civil war, it follows the life of a spoilt daughter of a rich plantation owner. It was a bestseller, crossing 30 million copies. In 1939, it was adapted into a movie under the same name, and it went on to win



Leading by design What was Swedish billionaire Ingvar Kamprad known for? (REUTERS)

an Oscar for best picture. What is the title of the book?

5 On this day in 1937, London introduced a new telephone number – 999. This came about as a response to a fire in a house in 1935, in which five women were killed. This was the very first number of what kind of service?

6 June 30, 1938, was the first appearance of this character in DC Comics' Action Comics Series issue #1, the most valuable comic book in the world. Developed by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, this character in the book

can leap 1/8 of a mile, outrun a train and carry a 20-storey building. This was the debut of which character?

7 Born this day in 1969, this person is considered one of the greatest attacking batsmen and all-rounder of all time. He is currently the only player to score over 10,000 runs and capture more than 300 wickets in ODI cricket. His explosive style led to his country winning the 1996 Cricket World Cup and a school conspiracy theory that he had a spring in his bat. Who was this batsman?

8 On this day in 1972, an extra second was added to the Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) system. This was done to accommodate the difference caused by the slowdown of Earth's rotation. By what name is this second known, a reference to another addition that happens once every four years?

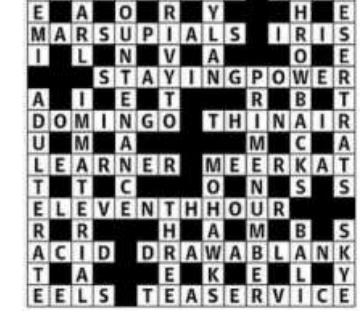
9 On this day in 1973, passengers aboard a flight intercepted the path of a total solar eclipse over Mauritania and follows the moon's shadow. They were able to experience the longest total eclipse observation of 74 minutes. Using which supersonic commercial flight were they able to achieve this?

10 On this day in 2016, Ingvar Kamprad opened the very first museum at the premises of the very first store he opened in Älmhult, Sweden. Known world over for its ready-to-assemble furniture, this company is now the world's largest furniture retailer. Named after the initials of his name, the farm and village where he was born, what company is this?

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

ANSWERS  
1. Evolution 2. Tower Bridge 3. First automobile ad 4. Gone with the Wind 5. Supermax 6. Supreme 7. Concorde 8. The leap second 9. International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 10. IKEA

- 3 Drink the writer raised, it honours a family (5)  
5 Looked back on scripture lessons: cool! (11)  
6 Copy badly executed procedure (9)  
7 Part of Croatian city on high (5,2)  
8 Hunts, in scrubs (6)  
12 Casting out money and Red Book (11)  
15 Punch a tenor, getting personal in area with many restaurants (9)  
16 Those intoning M-A-G-I-C? (8)  
17 Grandeur that is retrograde, Everyman's a tragic relic of former times (7)  
18 Perfect, working out pain (7)  
19 Ancient Greece's artisanal trinkets' expensive stones, primarily? (6)  
22 Bird that's seen on building site (5)

**SOLUTION NO. 3312**



# The immortal lines

Great poems stand the test of time, with generations down the line going back to them again and again to explain the quirkiness and wonders of the world

**Sudha Devi Nayak**

sudhaevelnayak@yahoo.com

To understand the human condition, we go back to memorable lines from poets which have stood the test of time with their truth and relevance. Any situation or event can trigger in us a sense of *deja vu*, and lines that lie in the synapses of memory spring to mind.

While we are familiar with the titans of literature, there are many less-renowned authors whose lines we quote without being aware of them, their names not up for a quick recall.

Thomas Gray, the precursor of the Romantics, has written one of the most-loved, oft-quoted poems in the English language, *Elegy written in a country churchyard*, full of wistful melancholy and a reflection on the transience of life.

The lines "Full many a gem of purest ray serene/The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear..." tell us of unacknowledged genius in obscure corners, those who lived faithfully quiet lives and rest in unvisited tombs. The line "The paths of glory lead but to the

grave" is a gentle reminder of our mortality.

Shakespeare, the ultimate wordsmith, had immortal lines on every conceivable vicissitude of life and dominated his age and time, his contemporaries largely living in his shadow. Yet, when we need to describe the mesmerising beauty of a woman, we turn to Christopher Marlowe's "mighty line", "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships and burned the topless towers of Ilium... Oh thou art fairer than the evening air clad in the beauty of a thousand stars". These lines bestow bounteous praise with an overwhelming emotion on an object of beauty.

## Movers and shakers

Then there is *Ode* by Arthur O'Shaughnessy in which a chorus of artists, poets and dreamers, "the movers and shakers of this world", envision a new world heralding a change in the existing order. Many may have lost the battle but the vision endures in its glorious effort.

William Johnson Cory, a schoolmaster at Eton threw light on the enduring legacy of friendship and loss: "They told me Heraclitus, they told me you were dead/ They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter

tears to shed/ I wept as I remembered how often you and I/ have tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky".

Heraclitus was an ancient Greek poet on whose death his friend Callimachus wrote an elegy. Cory's is its English version. Grief often brings us to this poem.

Edwin Markham, an American poet, inspired by the painting of Jean Francois Millet, wrote *Man with the Hoe* on the plight of the peasant, a sad miserable figure burdened with work, with little empathy from his fellow beings. "The emptiness of ages in his face/ and on his back the burden of the world". The most telling line in the poem is "Time's tragedy is in that aching stoop".

The poet's anguished cry is an invocation to the world: "Oh masters, lords and rulers in all lands/ How will the future reckon with this man/ How answer his brute question in that hour/ when whirlwinds of rebellion are let loose?" At once an appeal and interrogation of the world's conscience, it addresses itself even today to the humanitarian crises looming large around us.

The poem was called by philosopher, peace activist and novelist Jay William Hudson "the battle cry of the next thousand years".

The famous nursery rhyme *Twinkle, twinkle little star* by Jane Wyman, handed down generations, has gladdened the hearts of countless children. The poem runs through four stanzas, though the first is the most memorable.

The little star epitomises the Socratic wonder of every child at the mystery of the universe. The poem has lent itself to several adaptations, translations, musical scores and even a parody by the Mad Hatter in *Alice in Wonderland*.

So much for these lines that have been canonised by the hearts and voices of countless people.

## + Nurturing a patch of green

**Tanvi Soni**

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Out of the countless things that one can do at leisure every day, I chose urban gardening. In my make-do garden and usefully constrained utility balcony, I welcomed the first few members of what I had hoped would flourish into a large family. And I was quite excited to share my home with the most colourful collection of succulents, flowers, ferns and more such.

The first momentous occasion in my green adventure came on the day when the first flower blossomed in the hot, humid air. And though it looked a little frazzled than I had expected, I still cherish it as it was the first plant that I was parenting.

However, the bashful flower, trying to smile through the bud-less branches, would soon find itself arrested by my unrestrained apprehensions. Its morning would begin with a nutritious cocktail of vegetable remnants religiously soaked in water every night, a rich helping of dried tea leaves, and a daily shower of home-made fungicide. Every day, I would douse it with love and yet another home-made social media-recommended concoction to help it bloom faster and fuller.

Soon my commitment towards what I was cultivating as my new hobby would be ruthlessly tested. Heatwaves would scorch the soil, and the only new shoots growing relentlessly tall would be of a certain unidentified weed that would be plucked and torn away weeks later. Slimy stealthy caterpillars would voraciously feed on the leaves and flowers.

However, one day, the sunlight bounced off a hitherto unseen shiny green leaf shivering behind the dark big one. I could not ignore the rekindling that the reflecting sun rays had sparked in me. Every morning, I would walk in with a jug of water and cautious optimism. A few days later, the plant that I had shifted into shade showed signs of resurgence. The brown leaves dried off, and new shoots emerged. The earthy fragrance of its wet soil became a harbinger of its renewed health. And so, the adventure continues.

## The fellowship of the dark hall

Collective enjoyment of a film in a cinema has its advantages

**Pranathi Narain**

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Watching a movie from the comfort of home has its advantages. The popcorn comes quick and fast from the kitchen without the hassle of waiting in long queues, and no rushed visits to the food kiosk and washroom during the interval.

At a simple press of the play button, the star-studded cast of the streaming movie patiently waits for you to refill your snack bowl before exploding into action again. But there is no



doubt that some parts of the film-watching experience in cinemas simply can't be replicated, no matter how big your home theatre is or how

diverse your streaming platforms are.

During a recent visit to a cinema, the trailers flooded the screen before the film could begin. For some unearthly reason, much to the chagrin of the viewers, the trailers stretched to nearly half an hour. I observed in amusement that only in a cinema can the audience truly unite, as was illustrated by a loud chorus of "About time!" by the disgruntled viewers when the film started to roll at last. A similar bond is formed during those scattered peals of laughter at on-screen jokes, those collective rebukes when someone's phone rings in the middle of the film, or even a good-natured, witty reply to a dialogue which earns appreciative laughter from the entire hall.

Another instance I witnessed recently that was a testament to the solidarity of the audience was the collective applause that resounded through the theatre at the end of a movie. Some viewers even shed tears at the ordeal the main character had gone through in the desert throughout the duration of the film. The audience felt obliged to congratulate the man on screen for surviving an arduous journey, whether or not he acknowledges the applause. One viewer begins a slow clap, and within seconds, the hall is engulfed in roaring applause as lights turn on.

What strikes me as truly fascinating is the fact that within the bright, sound-proof interiors of the cinema, we are simply people jostling to find seats and spilling popcorn in the aisles in our rush, strangers of unknown backgrounds.

But as the room fades to black, a blanket of anonymity descends upon the room.

## Tuning into classical music

Good compositions allow room for creativity and improvisation

**Adithi A.**

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"People love what other people are passionate about." I had grossly underestimated the extent to which such passion might cause a transformation in one.

Joining the underrated and niche classical arts club in university, I immediately found my haven.

The people were introverted much like me and shared a common appreciation for culture and tradition. They were extremely devoted to, and

passionate about, classical music and dance. Having learnt Carnatic music since the age of eight, I was expected to be a decent enough vocalist, that is, had I not treated music completely as a hobby, and confined my practice sessions to the 15-minute drive to my music class.

**Deeper problem**  
But there was also a deeper problem. Though I respected classical music, I was not exposed to the brilliance and dynamic nature of the art form. It seemed archaic, rigid and quite often, distant.

In college, my first



experience in the club was a live Carnatic concert by Ramkrishnan Murthy. It was my first concert, and it blew my mind. I obsessively recorded videos and shared them with my mother and sister. I was amazed by

beauty of the compositions, their presentation, and how there was room for creativity and improvisation. The club hosted jamming sessions, called *Baithaks*, which allowed me to admire classical music in its entirety.

My perception was completely overturned as I listened in awe to instruments such as the harmonium, tabla, flute, violin and sitar blending harmoniously with the honey-sweet, crystal-clear voices of some of the most talented singers. I immensely enjoyed having elaborate discussions about the nature of Ragas or anecdotes about composers.

My lifestyle has changed since my induction into the club. I now hunt for classical concerts in my city.



## FEEDBACK

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

### Cover story

Hosting mega events like the Olympics is like handling a double-edged sword with both favourable and unfavourable consequences.

(Countdown to Paris 2024; June 23)

The degradation in the socio-economic and environmental spheres at the national level will be blurred by the temporary surge in the tourism sector and local economies. India

should work on sustainable implementation procedures not only to fulfil the dream of hosting the 2036 Olympics but also to provide a roadmap for future hosts.

**M.V. Nagavender Rao**

Peaceful organising of the Paris Olympics itself is a real challenge. To think of sports as a unifying force is meaningless at the moment. The need of the hour is leaders with a universal vision and wisdom to save human lives.

**M.V. Nagavender Rao**

Political interference in the selection of the players and lesser patronage given to games like hockey, compared to cricket, are some of the main reasons for our relative poor performance in other sporting areas. If the government is willing, we can definitely create a large bank of world class athletes.

**Anna Mary Yvonne**

### Women's safety

In the interview with Brinda Karat, it is concerning that there has been a widespread trend of crimes and assaults against women in India. ('Rights, interrupted'; June 23)

Women's safety should be prioritised rather than used for political gains.

**K. Pradeep**

### Sport and life

Sport and life are like

facing mirrors, reflecting each other. That's a profound observation.

Both arenas teach us about handling success and failure, pushing our limits, and constantly striving for improvement.

**K.M. Murthy**

### Olympics 2036

Would be a great opportunity for India to showcase that it is no

more a land of snake charmers but has hundreds of talented youngsters to showcase sportsmanship. It would

**Monita Sutherland**



## MORE ON THE WEB

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

### Avatars of today

Wondered if they have the power to harm and heal? What if they can make up for someone gone forever and fix lives?

**Alka Jain**

### The reader-book kinship

In the vast expanse of life, where companionship is often fleeting, books stand as timeless allies

**Sandra Joseph**

### Humour for the soul

Laugh away the inevitable stresses and tensions

**P.G. Mathew**

### Guide, not take control

Overprotected children, shielded from failure, struggle to deal with life's challenges

**K. Suresh Babu**

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PRIDE MONTH 2024

# 'I HATE THE WORD REPRESENTATION'

Why queer joy needs space on Indian screens and cursory LGBTQIA+ mentions might reek of charity

Jaydeep Sarkar

**S**ridevi and Madhuri Dixit in the 90s defined queer. As someone recently told me, the best definition of being queer is 'when you can be your absolute authentic self without having to fit the prescribed morals of society'. A lot of the cinema of the 90s saw women celebrating their bodies and their sexuality, without ever giving away their agency. Madhuri and Sridevi were the closest I came to seeing desire being celebrated.

I'm always asked the question: 'Is your next story a queer story?' I feel it's an unfair and unimaginative question. It can be a cis het (cisgender heterosexual) love story and still be a queer film because I look at life, desire and relationships outside of society's binaries.

The minute you try to box people, you are doing them a disservice. The reductionist label undermines my other identities – I'm also a Bengali filmmaker, a Mumbai-based filmmaker. I've made *Nayantara's Necklace*, which is about two women bonding over many idle afternoons and talking about their desire for the men in their lives. It is the politics of desire, whether queer or straight, that interests me the most.

**Realities of a hyper-capitalist world**  
I hate the word 'representation' because it reeks of charity. It suggests that in a largely straight world a few stray mentions should be enough to acknowledge our existence. You see a lot of token queer characters in mainstream shows and films today. But show after show, they either die in the end, or they kill people, or are just comic tropes. It has reduced us to victims, villains or clowns. It's symptomatic of the fact that these filmmakers see us as the 'other'.

I remember watching a show last year, at the end of which a gay man kills his lover and then dies

immediately after. That sensational end was celebrated by critics. The audience, however, learned nothing about the couple – not their pain, their loneliness, or even what drove them to the act, except that 'the world is cruel to them'. The gays came in just to fill a plot hole in a cis het narrative.

A lot of people may feel that the representation box has been ticked with these roles, but who has it actually helped? It's not going to help a queer person who is hoping to find the strength to come out.

What's missing in our shows is queer joy. Humour and subversion are so much a part of our history and our lives, and it's hardly made it to



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**Cis het men, for the longest time**, have held the pen that has written our history. It's time for the pen to be passed around. Everyone should get a chance, especially the most marginalised in the LGBTQIA+ community. I haven't seen too many films made by trans filmmakers, and I haven't met any intersex DoPs or editors. It's when all their stories start entering the lexicon that truly remarkable cinema will begin to emerge

JAYDEEP SARKAR



**Confident voices** (Clockwise from top left) Karla Sofia Gascón in *Emily Perez*; Sridevi in *Mr. India*; Konkona Sen and Tillotama Shome in *Nayantara's Necklace*; Vijay Sethupathi in *Super Deluxe*; Daniella Mendonca in *Rainbow Rishta*; and filmmaker Jaydeep Sarkar.

how to sell queer stories. We live in a hyper-capitalist world and queer films will get made only if they get viewers. I wonder when an Indian trans actor will be celebrated on a global stage, like Karla Sofia Gascón, who won the Cannes Best Actress award for *Emily Perez*.

There is some great independent queer cinema being made, but when will mainstream Hindi cinema have its own *Kaathal*, backed by a big star like Mammootty – a film that takes you close to the queer experience with empathy and grace. Or *Super Deluxe*, where Vijay Sethupathi played a trans woman. We urgently need this churning, to tell queer stories confidently and at par with other mainstream cinema, and sell tickets and provoke conversations in living rooms.

I have encountered a lot more quephobia in Bandra than I did in Daniella Mendonca's Bhayandar. The suburb is full of small-scale industries run out of people's homes. In a neighbourhood where people live hard lives, every little joy is precious. So when Daniella, a transwoman, decided to marry Joel, a cis het man, all of Bhayandar came out to celebrate. Morality remains the bane of the middle class.

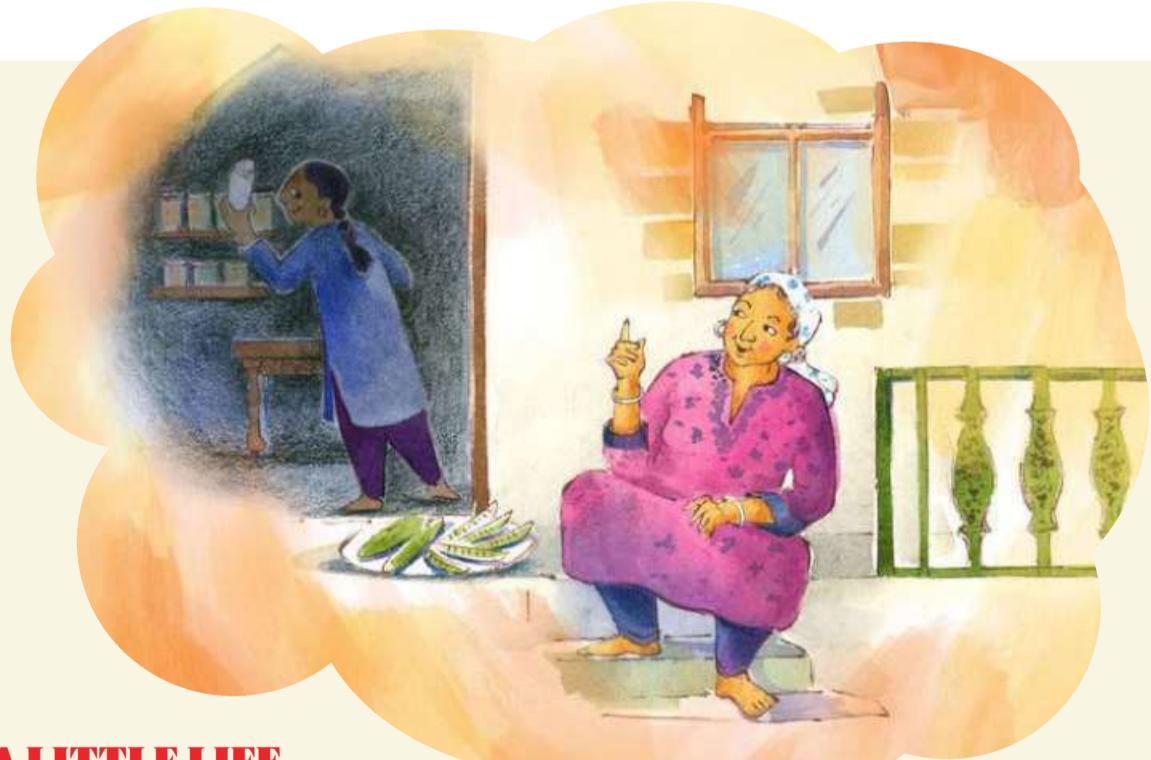
I've experienced this in my own life, too. I had never allowed myself to dream of a *sasural*, of the kind I had seen in the movies of Sooraj Barjatya, growing up. But then I met my partner, and later his family based in Jamshedpur. My mother-in-law is my role model. I've seen her walk into rooms and shatter every prejudice with her confident support and love. I have seen people feel diminished by their own biases, when they encounter someone as empathetic as her.

**Are we on the right path?**  
Quantitatively, there are more gay characters on screen now. While they are not being ridiculed, they are definitely being patronised and stereotyped. We are nowhere close to where we should be. However, I feel it's all a continuum, and we are taking the right turns.

The campy films have happened, the trauma plots have happened, now queer joy must come in. We need to be more irreverent, fearless, and cheeky to make queer cinema that will have an impact.

*The writer is a Mumbai-based filmmaker.*

— As told to Surya Praphulla Kumar



A LITTLE LIFE

## Spells and a reluctant bride

**Women are more than capable of saving themselves, says Phuphee. They don't need magic, maybe just a helping hand**

to make any woman happy. No, he did not need help in finding a lady. He had already found one and that was where he needed help. The lady in question was a young widow of 36. She had two sons. Her husband had died unexpectedly a few years ago, and she had so far refused all offers of marriage.

'You want me to talk to her on your behalf?' asked Phuphee.

'No,' he said. He had tried that

many times and she had flatly refused. 'I see,' Phuphee replied. 'I guess there isn't anything else I can do then.'

'There is,' he said rather excitedly. 'Can you put a spell on her so she marries me?'

Phuphee closed her eyes for a few seconds and then said, 'You want me to cast a spell on her, even though she has repeatedly rejected your offer of marriage?'

'Yes,' he stated, slightly out of breath. I could see Phuphee cross her brows and purse her lips.

'Leave it with me, I will see what can be done,' she said.

Once he left, I asked her, 'Why does he want to marry her if she doesn't want to marry him?'

'Because he is a man and his sense of entitlement overshadows any common sense he ought to have,' she replied.



### Who can make a queer film?

It's imperative that queer people tell their stories. But do only queer people need to tell queer stories? No. I don't think you need to be an alien to make *ET*. Straight filmmakers who are empathetic and who understand marginalisation can also tell beautiful queer stories. There have been enough examples of that. In India, I feel *Kapoor & Sons* got queer loneliness really well, and *Baahai Do* had a lightness to it. It had a message but it was the closest we've come to a gay rom-com.

### We need more stories from small towns

When I made *Rainbow Rishta*, I was very clear that I wanted it to be diverse – not only in terms of orientation and gender, but also geography. So, I looked for stories in small towns. What I discovered there was very ironic; small town India is far more progressive than metropolitan India.

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I've experienced this in my own life, too. I had never allowed myself to dream of a *sasural*, of the kind I had seen in the movies of Sooraj Barjatya, growing up. But then I met my partner, and later his family based in Jamshedpur. My mother-in-law is my role model. I've seen her walk into rooms and shatter every prejudice with her confident support and love. I have seen people feel diminished by their own biases, when they encounter someone as empathetic as her.

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— As told to Surya Praphulla Kumar

That evening, Phuphee went to see the lady and returned just in time for dinner. After dinner, I asked her what the woman had said. She had told Phuphee that her husband, whom she loved very dearly, had been an honourable man and a wonderful husband.

A week later Hassan *saab* was back. 'There is a huge obstacle in your way,' Phuphee told him. 'The reason the lady is not agreeing is because your enemies have put a spell on her.'

He looked relieved and then his nostrils flared up. 'I knew her refusal could not have had anything to do with me,' he said, running his fingers through the three strands of hair that clung desperately to his scalp.

'There is a way out. The spell is strong but it can be broken. Every Thursday, you must go to Makhdoom *saab*'s shrine and offer a chicken. You must do this for at least 39 Thursdays,' she told him.

'But that is a long time,' he stammered.

'I know. The other solution is, of course, you could just leave it,' she said, her eyes twinkling ever so slightly.

'I will start straight away. I will leave for Srinagar first thing tomorrow morning,' he said and left soon after.

When I returned a few months later, I asked Phuphee if he had been going to Makhdoom *saab*'s to make the offering. She laughed. He had indeed been going like clockwork.

I was a little annoyed at Phuphee. Why hadn't she turned him into a frog or a goat yet? She could not just let him get away

with this. Would he be able to force the lady to marry him?

'You look worried,' she said. I told her how I felt. 'At times, I would like to turn some people into frogs and goats, but that would soothe only my irritation. As a peer, I have come to understand that sometimes just offering help is enough. Most people, and especially women, are excellent at finding solutions to their problems.'

'When I went to see the lady, she did not ask me to turn Hassan *saab* into a frog, she just wished she could have some time to think of a way out of this situation. While Hassan *saab* is away in Srinagar, she can think without distractions,' she explained.

'Do you remember, my *gaash* [light of my eyes], when you were little, you were afraid of going into a dark room alone. But instead of going with you everywhere, sometimes I would talk to you from another room until you did whatever it was you had to. You didn't need me there, you just needed to know I was, if the occasion arose.'

I was a little taken aback by what she said, but she was right. Sometimes in life knowing someone has your back is enough, as most of the time we are more than capable of saving ourselves. Phuphee's advice, just like her cooking, was simple but it always restored your soul.

**Saba Maljoor**, a Kashmiri living in England, spends her scant free time contemplating life's vagaries.

