



magazine

backpage

How architecture can help 'build' communities

GO TO » PAGE 8

INSIDE

A new book tracks the folk deities of Tamil Nadu

GO TO » PAGE 4

LITERARY REVIEW

A moving account of the Naipaul family

GO TO » PAGE 3

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Neha Mehrotra

Just five years ago, Elon Musk was tweeting how “nobody ever changed the world on 40 hours a week”, suggesting a work week of 80-100 hours. “Pain level increases exponentially above 80,” he warned. The young workforce responded with cheer and admiration – after all, they were part of a millennials-fuelled hustle culture punctuated by #ThankGodIt’sMonday hashtags.

Things are different in the post-pandemic world. Today’s youth, the infamous Gen Z, don’t react kindly to 77-year-old billionaires or anyone else telling them to work 70-hour weeks. Their priorities are different, to say the least: they don’t want to be 9 to 5 “corporate mazdoors”; they’ll avoid working overtime unless “the world is falling apart”; they’ll talk to the director of the company as casually as they do a co-worker; they all seem to have side-hustles, or at least side-dreams that they nurture in anticipation of future fruition. All in all, there’s a sense of limitless possibilities. As one Gen Zer put it, there are so many choices that it’s paralysing because “we could be so many things right now”.

The flip side, however, is that the retention rate for Gen Z employees tends to be quite poor. Most stay on at companies anywhere between one and five years – the number often being closer to one. This generation is also the most susceptible to ‘corporate despair’ (videos of youngsters screaming in panic rooms, for instance, are doing the rounds on social media). According to data from LinkedIn, 94% of Gen Z professionals are considering a job switch in 2024. Their top priority, the platform found, is work-life balance, with 20% listing it as their main career goal and 36% leaving their current jobs for it.

It’s important to acknowledge, as many of these Gen Z professionals do, that they are part of a relatively privileged minority. Even as unemployment among the rest of India’s youth is rampant, almost touching 46%, with every new day bringing news of job cuts and digital disruptions – like Reliance Industries reportedly cutting 42,000 jobs in FY 2024 – this select group of highly educated youngsters float above it all. Their parents, beneficiaries of India’s steadily growing GDP over the last 20 years, have acquired sufficient wealth and security that their children can now afford to demand better, raise the bar higher, and if not met, quit jobs that don’t suit them.

Employers, for their part, are having a hard time dealing with this new, ‘high-maintenance’ generation. Very few are equipped for these fresh-from-college graduates talking about mental health, toxic work culture, and choice of pronouns.

Clash of the generations

Part of the “COVID-batch”, Nadia Khatib’s college years were spent online. Amid Zoom classes and Google Meet study sessions, the 24-year-old started creating food videos and offering restaurant reviews and recommendations on Instagram. Before she knew it, she had become a social media influencer for all things Goa. Her job as a social media marketing associate at MindShift Interactive, a digital marketing and branding agency, was an extension of this – and it was great. The job was remote, the company was filled with Gen Z employees, and Khatib’s boss was open to creative ideas, even when it involved luxury clientele such as Taj who usually have strict, staid brand guidelines. The company also had no problem with Khatib being a ‘creator’ on the side. “There were so many days that I worked from an event with my laptop,” she recalls.

Eighteen months later, she moved to a different marketing company (the workload not aligning with her health), but this time around, her experience was very different. She was the only Gen Zer there, the rest being millennials. There was a lot of micro-managing and doing things the long way. “Gen Z, we like to close our work as efficiently as possible. But I find that millennials will have doubts, will rethink things, and end up doubling the work,” she says. (On the contrary, Khatib’s former boss, Marilyn Pinto, 31, believes Gen Zers tend to overthink, especially since, for many, it is their first job.)

She also felt like she was judged for drawing boundaries: not working late,

This ‘high-maintenance’ generation speaks up for self-reliance, isn’t okay with inflexible work environments, and wants to retire by 35. There’s a lot that corporates can learn from them too: from transparency to pay equality

GEN Z: BREAKING THE 9 TO 5



They all want to retire by 35. Even before they’ve walked into their first job, they have their financial planner on board with them. SIPs, mutual funds, everything is in place

NAYLA PANDIT
A millennial boss working at a multinational



If you look at Gen Z as compared to Gen Y or X, they expect a lot of communication, recognition, and respect for how they’ve done their work. They’re also big on authenticity

SHVETA RAINA
Founder and CEO, Talerang

not working on weekends. But why should she? “They only pay us for work hours and I have a life beyond work.” For now, she’s managed to squeeze her content creation and freelancing projects into the weekend, but she’s looking for a switch, preferably to a Gen Z-heavy company.

Others are more jaded. In Bengaluru, Bani S.* has worked at three different start-ups in the last few years spanning a variety of sectors, all of which have had a “crazy pace” of work – “My output was what two people would have produced anywhere else”. But one of them was the worst. “It was the most toxic job that I’ve ever had, and I didn’t last more than six months,” says the 24-year-old, describing it as a “*daftar* from the 90s, where to prove your loyalty to the company, you had to sit in front of the boss from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.”, apart from working Saturdays, sometimes Sundays, and always being available. “It felt like such a fundamental difference. The things they considered important, that level of micromanagement, I just didn’t get it,” she says. She soon moved to a new company, and her expectations this time were more modest. “All I’m looking for is flexibility. If you give me more control over my time and the same deliverables, I’m okay with it.”

Focus on money and growth

Bosses, sitting on the opposite end of the spectrum, come with their own perspective. Nayla Pandit, 37, has worked at an American multinational technology company for eight years, and has encountered her fair share of Gen Zers. From her experience, they want two things: money and accelerated growth. “There are freshers from IIT, BITS, and NIT who join with insanely high packages, like ₹18-₹19 lakh per annum – it’s almost as much as I’m getting paid after all these years. And within three months, they’re talking about appraisals and asking for promotions,” she says.

The company does its best to retain them, but often can’t keep up with their expectations. Pandit divulged that they hired 40 freshers in 2019; of them, 38 have left. Some leave for better packages elsewhere, but she’s also seen a few quitting the corporate grind altogether to do “whacky” things: start restaurants, and, in one case, join the Padukone Academy to become a professional badminton player.

Even the ones who end up staying are clear that they’re doing it just for the money. “They all want to retire by 35,”

she says. This requires avid financial planning, and Gen Zers seem on board. According to a recent *Financial Times* article, the last few years have seen a frenzied enthusiasm for trading among the country’s Gen Z cohort, courtesy cheap brokerage, and a band of ‘influencers’. The benchmark Nifty 50 index of large Indian companies has doubled over the last five years, beating Japan’s resurgent Nikkei 225 and even America’s S&P 500. Looking at today’s employed youngsters, Pandit can see why. “Even before they’ve walked into their first job, they have their financial planner on board with them. SIPs, mutual funds, everything is in place,” she jokes, a stark difference from her own generation (millennials) who never had that level of financial literacy.

Her company has recently taken to discouraging employees from hiring freshers, in favour of someone with two to three years of experience. They want someone well-versed with the ins and outs of corporate culture. Most significantly, one often has to pay a fresher as much as someone with two to three years of experience. It’s no wonder that job listings have now started specifying requirements for “freshers with 2-3 years of experience”. How someone with three years of experience qualifies as a ‘fresher’, or what real freshers with zero experience are to do, remains to be seen. Even the BITS graduate Pandit hired this year has a year’s experience, and in spite of it, has been hired on a contractual basis.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 4



WHEN CHILDREN MAKE HISTORY

Menaka Raman

What do you remember about your school history lessons? I recall a litany of dates, names, acts and wars. Poorly reproduced black-and-white photos and line drawings of kings and queens. It was something to be endured rather than enjoyed.

It wasn't till I read *The Diary of Anne Frank* in Class VIII that I actually had an emotional reaction to a historical event. Perhaps it was reading about the experiences of a girl not much older than myself that left such a big impression on me.

It's easy to forget that children bear witness to, and participate in, the making of history, when all we read about are the heads of states, generals and policies that shaped the times. It was this sentiment that inspired Sayoni Basu, co-founder of Duckbill Books, to envision *Songs of Freedom*, a historical fiction series for young readers that tells the story of India's Independence struggle through the eyes and experiences of children. Since the series launched in 2022, eight books have been published, each set in geographically diverse locations, from Mumbai to Manikoil, and Aizawl to Kolkata, spanning a time period from 1900 to 1942.

"The freedom movement was when the idea of India was shaped, and where we, the people, truly determined the future we wanted. Even today, we deserve to shape our future. It's important for children to learn about acts of resistance and the power they hold to make change," says Basu, an avid reader of historical fiction and non-fiction herself.

Sayoni Basu knew that the absence of unbiased history books that talk of people, based on hard facts, called for a special historical fiction series, 'Songs of Freedom'

Music as revolution

These acts of resistance and change-making are small but powerful in Shruthi Rao's *A Melody in Mysore*, released last month. It is 1932 and 12-year-old Leela is being raised by her Aiji (grandmother) in the well-governed, prosperous Mysore kingdom, free of British interference, under the rule of the Wodeyars. Leela hears snippets of information about Gandhi and the independence movement sweeping through the country from her Shivappa Meshtru and whispered conversations at home, but she is desperate to know more.

Her wishes come true when she meets Malathi Akka who moves into the neighbourhood, and exposes her to new ideas, poetry and music, through a gramophone. Rao's story explores the role of music as a medium through which ideas of freedom and revolution were subversively spread, hidden between the lines of religious songs and poetry. Rao highlights how little deeds or as the book calls them, *alilu seva*, often go unnoticed but are of great importance. "Every time people speak of the freedom struggle, I can't help but think of all those who worked tirelessly, who

kept the movement alive with their tiny actions, whose names we will never know. Many of these people were women. Unknown, unacknowledged. My story is a tribute to all of them," Rao says.

This inclusion of the role of common people in the freedom struggle resonates with young readers. Ten-year-old Bengaluru boy Ninad Kamath, who loves *The Chowpatty Cooking Club* (2022) by Lubaina Bandukwala, shares: "Our history books only talk about the main events and leaders. I love how children and the smaller events are covered in this series."

While the books are in no way intended to impart learning, I can't help but think of all the things they have taught *me*. Swati Sengupta's *A Rebellion in Ranchi*, also released last month, is set in 1915 and looks at how the Oraons, suppressed by land-owning Zamindars and the British, join the Tana Bhagat movement and attempt to adhere to non-violence even as violence is unleashed around them. I found it fascinating that the Adivasis believed German Baba – none other than the German Kaiser himself – would help them defeat the British. The stories were

possibly brought to the region by German missionaries.

View from the Northeast

What struck me the most about the books in this series is the many layers of narrative woven together.

In Hannah Lalhlanpuii's *Postcard from the Lushai Brigade* (2023), 13-year-old Bawiha is living a seemingly idyllic life with his mother, grandmother and older brother Kima. Set in 1942, Lalhlanpuii centres the book around the formation of an independent brigade to fight on the side of the British against an imminent Japanese invasion. Each of the characters in the book offers readers a different point-of-view on

Memory keepers

Authors (top to bottom) Lesley D. Biswas, Shruthi Rao and Hannah Lalhlanpuii; and (above) children dressed as freedom fighters for Independence Day celebration in a Chennai school.

(SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & ANI)

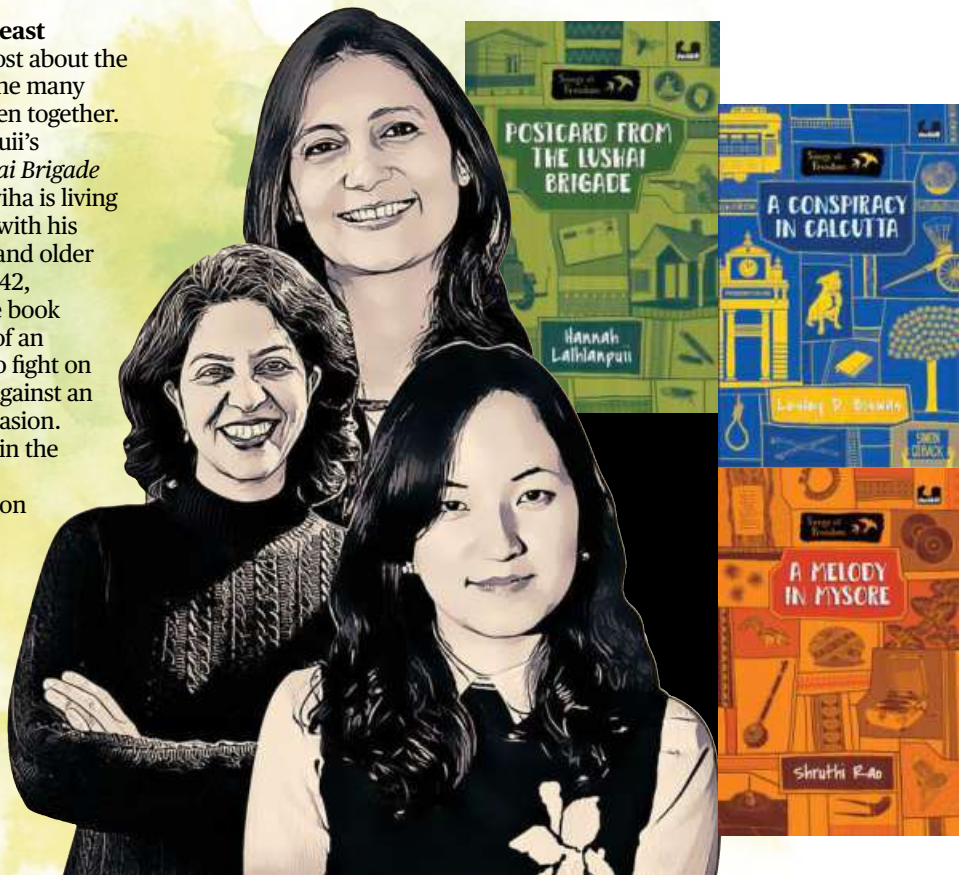


The freedom movement was when the idea of India was shaped, and where we, the people, truly determined the future we wanted. It's important for children to learn about acts of resistance and the power they hold to make change.

SAYONI BASU
Co-founder, Duckbill Books

the events unfolding before them: Bawiha's grandmother mourns the erasure of local customs and culture under British rule. Kima voluntarily signs up to join the Lushai Brigade even as he speaks of Gandhi's chosen weapon of non-violence. And then there is Bawiha himself, whose coming-of-age is complex and beautifully portrayed.

Lalhlanpuii has always wanted to write about the social and cultural impact of colonialism on the everyday lives of common people, something she feels is rarely discussed and written about. "We still have a long way to go when it comes to the Northeast, be it historical writing or children's literature. It is crucial to incorporate this history into the mainstream curriculum to bridge the cultural divide that exists."



2024 BOOKER PRIZE-LONGLISTED

Facing up to tyranny

Hisham Matar's *My Friends*, about three young Libyans in exile, sees him responding to history and politics more violently than he ever had before

Pranavi Sharma

I have lost friends, some by death... others by sheer inability to cross the street," wrote Virginia Woolf in 1931, and if there is one book that embodies this quote, it is Hisham Matar's *My Friends*, longlisted for this year's Booker Prize. Friendships are most certainly an 'education similar to literature'. A field that requires its own forensic study.

My Friends spans 30 years, from 1980 to the Libyan revolution of 2011, told within a two-hour-long walk across London undertaken by the protagonist, Khaled. The story begins with the end – two friends part and the reader does not know why. As one further wades through the waters, it is revealed that Khaled's relationship with his friend

is not an ordinary one. In 1980, when Khaled was still in Libya, living with his parents, a story was narrated on radio by a journalist as an apparent sign of protest against Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Killings, assassinations and abduction were routine and exiled Libyans were not exempt from the tyrant's surveillance.

The said story was by a young Libyan writer called Hosam Zowa, who was then studying in Trinity College, Dublin. Titled 'The Given and the Taken', it was a bizarre tale of a man being eaten alive by his cat until he 'was nothing but his head and torso'. Deeply moved, Khaled could never shake off the feeling this allegory had cast on him. Exactly three years later, he moves to the University of Edinburgh, London, to study English literature. And it isn't until years later in Paris

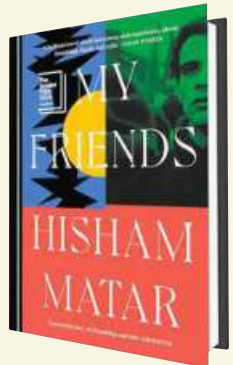


that he actually meets Hosam and thus begins the chronicle of their profound friendship.

Expectations from an artist

It is rumoured that Picasso was busy having his coffee somewhere in France while World War I raged on in the background. Hosam's character juggles with the presupposed idea of a reactionary artist and on top of that, a courageous one in the face of tyranny. While being ordinary human beings living in the shadows of their own predicament, it is expected that an artist be an exemplary force in times of crises.

Mustafa, another dear friend of Hosam's who arrives in London at about the same time, is disappointed when Hosam is



My Friends
Hisham Matar
Viking
₹799



unable to speak up against the dictator when given a platform. Ideologies are often always at loggerheads in the novel. Khaled himself admits about his friendship with Mustafa

Bygone times Young Libyans join a military parade commemorating the 13th anniversary of the uprising that toppled Muammar Gaddafi's regime, in February 2024; (below) author Hisham Matar. (GETTY IMAGES)

and Hosam: "I was convinced that my two friends represented two separate and irreconcilable parts of my life that I had somehow to keep in balance, and that if it were not for me, they would never see each other."

Upon reaching London, each of them, like "hopeful fishermen, cast their net wide". London as a setting becomes both an abstract 'bottomless well' and the material reality in which events unfold. It is also Khaled's walking companion and has sometimes a gory life of its own. *My Friends* is as much a story of exiled humans as it is about the anguish of prematurely disillusioned young men coming of age. The characters are continuously scrutinised for having too much courage or shamed for relegating things to fate. The author manages to keep the reader in the proverbial shoes of Khaled as he is consumed by the idea of his only two friends turning

into men of action while he watches from the sidelines, forever exiled.

Keeping the past alive

Having penned down his lived experience in his Pulitzer-winning 2017 memoir *The Return*, Matar comes out as an 'exemplary sufferer' with this book. *My Friends* might just be one of Matar's best attempts at impersonality. He responds to history and politics more violently than he has in any of his other works. Also remarkable about this book is its treatment of women, who despite being secondary characters, do not come off as mere appendages, and are given sovereign space on the page.

As both of Khaled's friends join the Libyan front, the prose flows from one century to the next owning up to its unconscious languidness. Khaled recounts that Joseph Conrad, when he first got to England, burned his father's papers. Libyans never leave home, even when they are exiled. It is an accomplishment, according to Khaled, to forget one's father. The collective resilience of Libyans and their ability to live simultaneously in two extremes, comes (as Hosam's mother later reveals) from a place "where hate and affection, bewilderment and clarity, are braided so tightly that they form an unbreakable cord, a rope fit to lift an entire nation".

The reviewer is an independent journalist based in Delhi.

400, not out

Brian Lara tells a candid story about his cricketing life in the West Indies and beyond

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
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Cricket’s left-handed batters either fall into the larger stereotype of elegance or the smaller cliché suffused with grit. However, Brian Lara is much more than these languid poetry or dull prose definitions that shadowed his fellow practitioners.

Lara could bruise the strongest and wiliest of attacks, with dazzling shots, and equally he could drop anchor for long as evident in the gargantuan scores he totted up: 501 n.o. for Warwickshire against Durham in 1994, 400 n.o. (Test’s cricket’s highest individual yield) for the West Indies against England in 2004; and the 375 against England back in 1994. Sachin Tendulkar owns a mountain range of batting records but the staggering peaks belong to Lara.

The diminutive magician from Trinidad and Tobago tells a candid story with assistance from sports writer Phil Walker in Lara, *The England Chronicles*. The book offers an insight into his childhood, his ambitions of playing for the West Indies, his batting highs, the captaincy woes, those dark phases, the England duels, besides giving readers a microscopic look at cricket in the magical Caribbean islands.

Honest memoir
What shines through is Lara’s self-awareness and he brings that same honesty in describing West Indian cricket. “I am someone who, if you don’t get me first, then I am in charge of everything,” he writes. At one point, he pens these scathing lines: “I was meant to keep the West Indies on top of the world and I couldn’t do it. We won a couple of things, I broke a couple of records, but I failed at my main purpose.”

This is a legend, who caught the tail-end of the glory days of Vivian Richards and company, and also served as a bridge to the subsequent generation headlined by Chris Gayle. Lara, silken runs and sensitive heart, and a recipient of some tough-love from Richards, also had some run-ins with Richie Richardson and Curtly Ambrose.

Importantly, the genius has a wider gaze evident while he ruminates over what Carl Hooper and Ian Bishop could have achieved considering the talent they possessed. Lara sees all, and this tome reflects this wonderful quality.

Brian Lara
(GETTY IMAGES)



INTERVIEW

CLASH OF MEMORIES

Different castes remember the violence at Bhima Koregaon and the reasons for it differently

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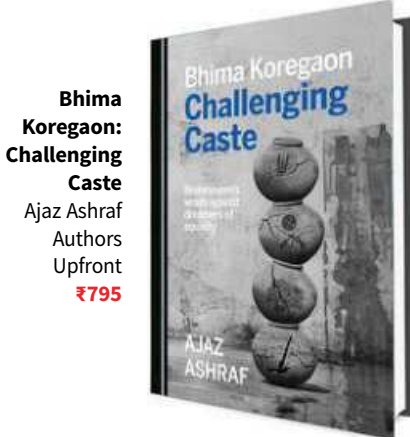
In *Bhima Koregaon: Challenging Caste*, senior journalist Ajaz Ashraf relooks the events that led to the Bhima Koregaon violence on January 1, 2018. Ashraf sees the incident as a clash between two worldviews, one striving to flatten the social hierarchy and the other perpetuating it, as he says in this interview.

Question: You recreate the Bhima Koregaon violence from varying points of view. How difficult was it to write this book?

Answer: The difficulty arises from different castes remembering a shared past differently. For instance, Dalits celebrate the 1818 Battle of Bhima Koregaon as they believe the British Indian Army’s victory over the Peshwa liberated them from his oppressive Brahminical rule. Mahar soldiers played a significant role in the battle. But this belief is a myth, it is argued, for the British fought the Peshwa to expand their empire, not to liberate the Dalits.

Now, consider this: in 1786, the Peshwa rejected the demand of Konkan’s Mahars that Brahmin priests should conduct their marriages. Their quest for equality was suppressed. Wouldn’t they have been relieved, if not delighted, at the demise of the Peshwa rule 32 years later?

In Kurosawa’s *Rashomon*, eyewitnesses to a murder provide remarkably different accounts of it. This is as true of the accounts of four police officers and two Dalits I used to reconstruct the January 1, 2018, violence at Bhima Koregaon. The officers did not hear the insulting, provocative slogans the two Dalits did regarding their community. Whose



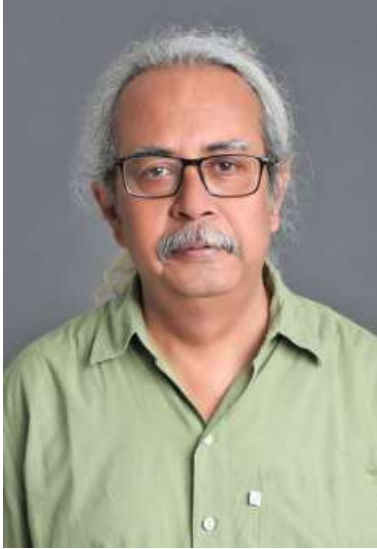
narrative is authentic? The violence, to me, seemed scripted against Dalits. ‘Seemed’, don’t miss that.

Q: When did Bhima Koregaon become a site of annual pilgrimage?
A: The tradition of Dalits gathering at Bhima Koregaon is popularly ascribed to B.R. Ambedkar, who visited the village on January 1, 1927. January 1 is the day the Peshwa was defeated in

1818. But Ambedkar was taken there by Dalit leader Shivram Kamble, who had been assembling community members every New Year’s Day for some years before 1927. It was Kamble’s method of reminding the British about the contributions of Mahar soldiers in the Battle of Bhima Koregaon, and persuade the colonial power to reverse its 1892 policy of not recruiting them for the Army. However, it was from the 1980s that thousands upon thousands of Dalits began visiting Bhima Koregaon. The celebration today invokes the memory of 1818 to inspire Dalits to fight caste oppression.

Q: Can you tell us about the trigger for the violence?
A: On the night of December 28-29, 2017, Dalits erected a board outside the precincts of the samadhi of Chatrapati Sambhaji, located at Vadhu Budruk, a village three kms from Bhima Koregaon. The board recalled that after Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, on March 11, 1689, ordered the execution and dismemberment of Chhatrapati

Lesser ground (Clockwise from left) Dalits sitting by wall paintings of Ambedkar and Periyar, both famous for their fight against discrimination; Ajaz Ashraf; and a gathering at Bhima Koregaon war memorial in Pune. (GETTY IMAGES, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND PTI)



Sambhaji, his body pieces were scattered. The board claimed that Govind Gopal, a Mahar of Vadhu Budruk, collected the pieces of his body, stitched them together, and cremated him.

Maratha residents of Vadhu Budruk, on December 29 morning, uprooted the board, and desecrated the samadhi of Govind Gopal, also located in the same village. They said the board was propagating wrong history, claiming it was a Shivale-Patil couple, Maratha by caste, who had cremated Chhatrapati Sambhaji. This is mentioned in another board at the samadhi, but it was erected only in 2015, after an existing board was removed.

The pre-2015 board credited the entire village with cremating Chhatrapati Sambhaji, and his son Chhatrapati Shahu I for building the samadhi. The pre-2015 board named Govind Gopal as one of the “three servants” of the samadhi, and said it was “significant” that he belonged to the Mahar caste. The 2015 board, erected allegedly by Milind Ekbote’s outfit, omitted the reference to Govind Gopal, an obvious attempt to efface him from popular memory, from history.

The news of the desecration of Govind Gopal’s samadhi went viral on social media. Seven Marathas were arrested. The mounting tension between the two castes was exploited to foment violence on January 1.

But the fight over history continues: the Bhima Koregaon Commission of Inquiry was presented a copy of a purportedly British era document that claimed Chhatrapati Sambhaji was cremated by Bapuji Shivale and Padmavati, the Shivale couple. I found several discrepancies in this document. In contrast, there are official documents testifying to Govind Gopal’s links to Chhatrapati Sambhaji’s samadhi, but none supporting the claim that he cremated him. On balance, Govind Gopal has a stronger link to the history of Chhatrapati Sambhaji than Vadhu Budruk’s Shivales.

Q: After the 2018 incident, has the commemoration of the Battle of Bhima Koregaon stopped?
A: It remains an annual affair, and will continue to be so because Dalits, by remembering Bhima Koregaon, lay claim to history, of being not just hapless untouchables but having played a significant role in the demise of the Peshwa’s Brahminical rule.

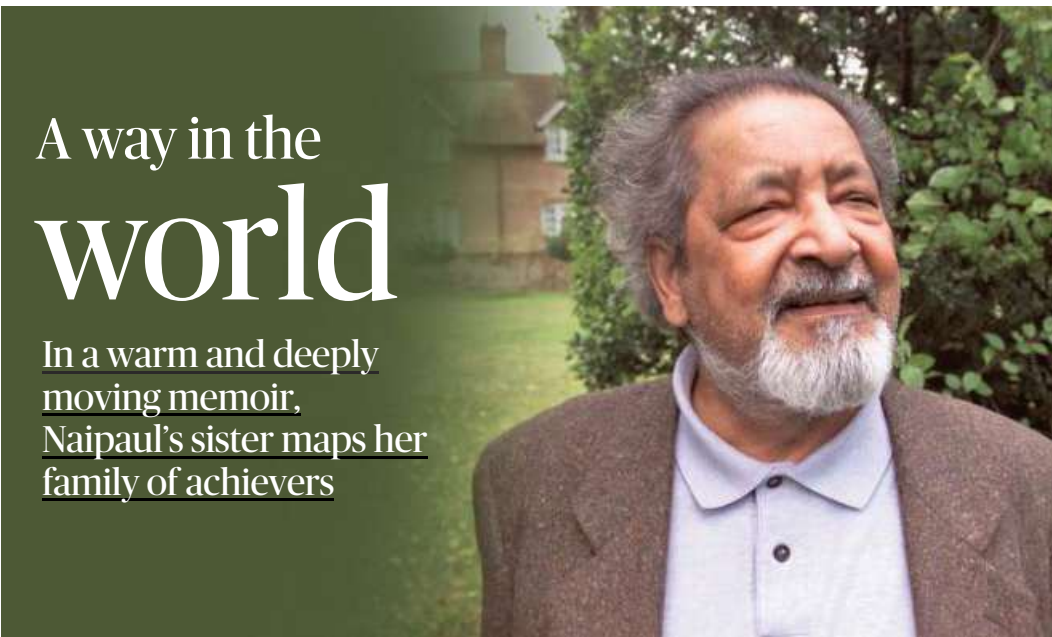
Mini Kapoor

A family memoir about the Naipauls has to have as one running thread the extraordinary, if immensely complicated, life and career of V.S. ‘Vidia’ Naipaul. How could it not. In fact, as this warm, wise, candid, deeply moving book, *The Naipauls of Nepal Street*, by his sister Savi Naipaul Akal explains, there could be no other Naipauls alluded to – their father Seepersad was the only one in his family to change the family name ‘Nyepal’ to ‘Naipaul’.

Vidia was the second of Seepersad and Droapatie’s seven children; Savi is the fifth. Vidia would, as we know, establish himself early in life as a leading writer globally, and win the Nobel Prize. His writing drew on his geographical and family heritage. His ancestors had come to Trinidad as indentured workers from what is now eastern Uttar Pradesh. His father had made his way in

the world by seeking as much education as he could, and relying on family connections, to become a journalist and to secure for his family the stability of an income and solid home (26 Nepal Street). To their children Seepersad and Droapatie imparted the ambition of becoming their truest selves by getting to the best schools they possibly could, always a tough exercise in colonial Trinidad, and working through a series of examinations to win scholarships and admission to institutions of higher education. As Savi writes, “Passing certain examinations had an almost sacred significance in our lives.”

A responsible chronicler
And so it came to be that among this family of achievers, each one of them, Vidia went off to Oxford on an “island scholarship” in 1950. A year earlier his older sister Kamla sailed for Banaras Hindu University on an Indian Government scholarship. The siblings, in turn, heeded the



A way in the world
In a warm and deeply moving memoir, Naipaul’s sister maps her family of achievers

parents’ ethic and helped each other along, financially and in other supportive ways. Savi travelled afar too for studies, and took up a career in teaching.

But to Vidia especially, Seepersad bestowed the aspiration to be a writer, and this inheritance would over the

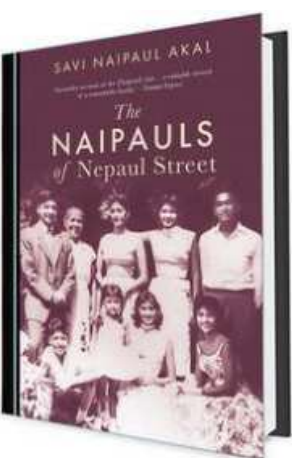
years be poignantly captured in the son’s books and the correspondence between father and son. The sixth child, Shiva, who too went on to Oxford and wrote books to much acclaim, before passing away too young, was doted on by his sisters especially, but had a fraught relationship with

V.S. Naipaul in Salisbury, England. (AP)

his older brother, and somehow never fully caught Seepersad’s focus.

Around the barebones of the family story familiar to Vidia’s readers, Savi fills in the stories of the rest of the family.

The Naipauls of Nepal Street
Savi Naipaul Akal
Speaking Tiger
₹499



The anchor for the memoir is the family’s home base in Trinidad, and their personalities come alive here (often to the exclusion of what else may have been in other parts of the world.) Seepersad comes across as a sometimes anxious, lively and artistic personality (besides reading

and writing, painting signs, gardening, making walking sticks). But at the heart of the narrative is Droapatie. “Ma had truly begun to know the world only with her marriage to Pa,” writes Savi. In time, she’d know it more as her children flourished – and later in life as she began to carve out her own routine, and travel.

Savi lightly but surely heeds the responsibilities of a chronicler – political attitudes, little joys as well as hurtful slights are conveyed without privileging any one member’s experience only because of his/her celebrity. Quieter acts of caring are recounted. And the bafflement at, for example, revelations about Vidia in Patrick French’s biography is not glossed over. Savi has been late to come to public attention as a writer in this family of writers, and, in her own right, she has written this family memoir and social history with an open heart.

The reviewer is a Delhi-based journalist and critic.

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

Can Gen Z and
corporates play well?

This gap, between Gen Zers and the companies they work for, is real. A few organisations are trying to bridge it, working with young professionals to get them job-ready while simultaneously training corporates on how to deal with, and retain, their Gen Z workforce. Shveta Raina's Talerang is one of them.

A Harvard Business School graduate and former McKinsey employee, Raina has experienced first-hand how university doesn't prepare you for the corporate grind. At Talerang, they start students off with an assessment to gauge how job-ready they are. Depending on the results, they are provided training in a set of hard and soft skills followed by mentorship. "If you look at Gen Z as compared to Gen Y or X, they expect a lot of communication, recognition, and respect for how they've done their work. They're also big on authenticity. Whereas corporates are used to keeping things very black and white," says Raina. So, on the one hand, Talerang works with young graduates to temper their expectations, and on the other, they work with corporates on how to get Gen Z adjusted into their organisation.

"The most effective way of doing this, Raina has found, is through internships. "All initial teething issues get brought up at this stage, and we can work through them." After every internship, Talerang gives students feedback on what the company said about them. "This ensures that when they get placed, they're not 'learning on the job'. They're prepared." Interestingly, the latest Union Budget has adopted a similar approach with its new internship scheme. Under this, 500 top companies in India have been encouraged to hire 2t- to

24-year-olds as interns, where the government will offer a monthly allowance of ₹5,000 for 12 months. This is expected to make the country's vast youth work-ready, paving the way for easier employment.

An employee-first ethos

In spite of all that's said of Gen Z, there are instances of them settling into organisations seamlessly. Much of this has to do with workplace culture, proving that good organisations with an employee-first ethos are more than capable of flattening generational divides. Gauri Bansal, 27, spent the first three years of her professional life working for Twitter as a product manager, and by her own admission, it "spoiled her in terms of culture, access, exposure". Organisations like these don't have a stereotypical 'Indian-company mentality', she



Saurabh Misal

Inter-generational dialogue

A recent Stanford-affiliated study, spearheaded by researcher Roberta Katz, states that Gen Z as employees are collaborative, self-reliant, and value diversity and inclusion. Katz recently told the *Stanford Report*: "Gen Z may be more likely to question rules and authority because they are so used to finding what they need on their own." But that's not to say they are always right. "Often they don't know what they need, especially in a new setting," she says, "and this is where inter-generational dialogue can be helpful. The older colleague can learn new ways of getting a job done, while the younger colleague may learn good reasons for why things have been done in a certain way."



How to motivate a
young workforce

According to Gen Zers themselves, it's the little things that count. For instance, it might be breakfast for people who start shifts early or electric foot massagers for those on their feet for long periods of time. Nadia really appreciated the weekly CPC (Chai Pe Charcha) sessions at MindShift Interactive, where the entire team got on Zoom calls to bond over games, debates and gossip; Bani enjoyed the evening cricket sessions with teammates; and still others have said they appreciated things like subsidised housing, team lunches, and employee awards. These things might seem negligible, but for Gen Zers, it's a sign that their companies care.

says, but instead, treat you like an adult. "This means that I don't have to report every single thing I'm doing to my manager. Our teams operated on a great deal of trust," says Bansal.

There were times when she was the only Gen Zer and the only woman in a room full of older men. For instance, she remembers when they were debating a safety feature that allowed women to report harassment. Bansal felt that her global counterparts were adopting a feature-first approach that put the onus of providing information on the



Gen Z, we like to close our work as efficiently as possible. But I find that millennials will have doubts, will rethink things, and end up doubling the work. They only pay us for work hours and I have a life beyond work

NADIA KHATRI
Gen Z marketing associate

woman. "If someone has just experienced harassment, it might not be the best time to ask them for a detailed report on what happened. It might end up adding to their trauma," she had noted. Suggestions like these, based on lived experience and empathy, were well-received, and more importantly, she felt like there was a space to offer them. The perks were good, too: increased medical health insurance during COVID-19, a productivity allowance (money to set up a home office), and a wellness allowance (to take up a sport or hobby). Had it not been for the massive layoffs initiated by Elon Musk when he took over Twitter, she had intended to continue there.

"I think it's important to have a culture where, if you're having a bad day, you should be able to tell your team 'I'm going to take the rest of the day off', and still be trusted to deliver once you're back," concludes Bansal.

* Names changed for privacy.

The writer is based in New Delhi.

Why work for
₹14,000 a month?

Service sectors, especially hospitality, have left Gen Zers disillusioned. According to hotel management graduate Saurabh Misal, young recruits have to work 14-hour shifts at hotels for a measly salary of ₹14,000 a month. Promotions are slow on the operational side, taking three years each to move up the ladder — from steward to captain to supervisor to executive to assistant manager. "It usually stops there. People rarely become full-fledged managers."

Misal, 26, became disenchanted during campus placements: he had applied for a management training programme at a five-star luxury hotel chain. He didn't make it beyond the fourth round of selection (of six), which comprised a one-on-one interview. As he was leaving, one of the recruiters — a fellow Maharashtra — shared that hotel chains like theirs rarely hired "dusky-skinned" candidates like him. Come graduation, though he got three offers, one of them from another five-star chain, where after a year as a trainee he'd be promoted to manager with a salary of ₹35,000, a discouraged Misal decided to leave the industry for good.

On average, attrition rates for Gen Zers in hospitality have been high, most leaving within 8-12 months for jobs in the airline and retail sectors, says Misal's friend, who wished to remain anonymous. Post-pandemic, when the rates jumped to a whopping 45%, the industry took note, with some hotels announcing a complete overhaul in workforce policies and compensation structure, including shorter shifts, quarterly incentives and a 10% hike for juniors.



Sunil Rajagopal

We are watching bats. Short-nosed fruit bats diving boldly in through the arc of faint white lamps onto a bunch of ripening *jahazi* plantains. Louise, who had been barking her head off at them, is suddenly quiet, cowering with her cool nose at the back of my knee. All I can hear are leaves. Green leaves dancing and dry leaves skating through dark silences on the street. It is hard to believe that 100 feet downhill is a bustling thoroughfare with street lights and supermarkets.

Across the road, houses stealthily twinkle up another hillside to a lonely wood perched on the crown. This is not unusual in Guwahati. The city's surging population overran accessible plain areas near the Brahmaputra before spreading into the forested hills and wetlands. Non-forest areas have exploded by 1,176% from 1976 onwards, at the expense of dense and moderate forests — resulting in habitat fragmentation, human-animal conflict, increased temperatures, massive erosion and cyclical flooding. In a sad parallel, since the early 2000s, Assam has lost 2,690 sq.km. of the Northeast, a massive 17,650 sq.km. of tree cover.

What does Louise know that I don't? She is eight and has one good

eye, but hers is a world of scent. When her family goes out, she knows when they are half a mile away. Dogs probably have a different concept of time to ours. One where all three tenses can exist at the same time. Perhaps the leopard is downwind, and his odour has wafted up to her. Perhaps he padded by an hour back, but his distinctive musk is lingering. Or perhaps there is a leopard right there in the shadows. Does she know if he is hungry or has fed? A leopard is the one creature that loves dogs more than humans do.

The unseen presence

How do I know it is a leopard? I can feel Louise's fear. She is a Naga hill

WILD IN THE CITY

LEOPARD AT MY DOORSTEP

Once thought to be elusive , the big cat is far more visible now with 65% of the population existing outside protected areas



dog, proficient at hunting things smaller than herself. A fishing cat would be out of place here. A stray sambar deer would probably excite her. Two aggressive street dogs who had taken up residence in the neighbouring lane have disappeared. So too the mutts that lazed around outside the supermarket. Two nights back, there was a soft thud near the sunshade, like a pillow falling. Our daughter, who calls anything furry a 'bow bow', has been waking in the early hours to peek out of the window to beckon to an unseen 'bow bow'.

We call ourselves *Homo sapiens*, the wise human, making up for physical weakness with reasoning. And a lack of common sense. I reason that the cat is after the dog and wary of me. It is too early for a leopard to be out and about, so near habitation. And so, I step out for a walk leaving Louise safely at home. Fifty feet later, I am frozen to the spot with the hair on the back of my neck bristling. Someone is watching me.

I cannot see much in the overgrown tangle beneath the shade of *jahazi* and *ber*. Just to be sure, I take a shot on my mobile phone with night mode on. Nothing is obvious, so I pinch the screen. And there he is, a short leap away. A grumpy spotted head buried in the grass. Nearly invisible. Nearly. Glowering at me — anything but fear in those eyes.

Thriving with humanity
Leopards are the quintessential cat; elusive, slinking around human spaces for far longer than we thought they have. They thrive in degraded habitat and rocky scrublands, along forest margins and agricultural areas; at the edge where cities eat into forests. Unfussy and surviving on a varied diet, including dogs. They are more visible now due to the speed at which things are changing. While the latest leopard survey showed a stable trend, in many places up to 65% of the population exists outside protected areas.

The thrill of seeing a big cat up close is unmatched. It makes you feel alive like nothing else. It is also immensely humbling. To be in a forest hearing the crunch of bones in their jaws or trembling in a city street under their withering glare, is a realisation that you really aren't on top of the food chain. What is he thinking? Can he smell Louise on me? Does he just want to cross the street? Will you ever know? Then the reasoning makes its appearance again. Standing a few feet from a grumpy leopard in the dark, taking photos with a mobile phone isn't the brightest thing to do. My heart is nearly bouncing out of my chest in the time it takes for my feet to get home. Louise is relieved to see me, gnawing my knee to make sure I am not a ghost.

The author is a birder and writer based in Chennai.

The fourth in a series that looks at urban spaces as havens for biodiversity and often overlooked species.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty



Guardians of the people (Clockwise from below) Offerings of *surruttu* to Muniappan; Madurai Veeran with his wives; a woman on a bier, a ritual for Mariamman; people offer footwear to Muthupattan; and devotees cutting coins to offer Vettudayar Kalliamman. (RAGHUNATHAN S.R., MOORTHY G.)



B. Kolappan
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It happened almost 35 years ago. The elders in my village had assembled to discuss a curious demand by the *samiyadi* (oracle) of the local Sudalaiamadan temple, the presiding deity of graveyards. He insisted that the village should organise a *kodai* (festival) as the deity was very particular about it. "He is not letting me sleep. If you organise the *kodai*, I will continue to perform the *pujai*," he said, and placed the keys of the sprawling graveyard, with its banyan and neem trees, before the elders.

There was an air of scepticism. Those familiar with the Vaishnavite tradition, however, accept such interactions between a god and his devotees. Legend has it that Thirukachi Nambi, one of the gurus of philosopher Ramanuja and founder of Vishishtadvaita, used to converse with Varadharaja Perumal, the presiding deity of Kancheepuram.

Offerings of elongated ears
Guardian deities are colourful characters and they share a strong bond with their devotees. In Tamil Nadu, there are folk deities with pan-regional appeal, those worshipped in a specific area, and deities of particular communities and families.

Ballads narrate their stories. They are fearsome, ferocious, and capable of punishing wrongdoers. They drink liquor, smoke cigars, and eat meat. During *kodai*, goats, roosters and pigs are sacrificed to

propitiate them. (In the southern part of the State, *padappu* is an important offering to folk deities. Sacrificed animals are cooked and offered with rice, vegetable curry, a stir-fry of drumstick leaves, *pappad*, boiled eggs and lashings of ghee.)

In Srirangam, a neighbourhood of Tiruchirappalli, Muniappan is the guardian deity of the first Vaishnavite temple (among the 108 in the area). He occupies the entrance of the *rajiagapuram* (entrance tower). Just outside the shrine is a small bowl on a makeshift stand where devotees drop *surruttu* (cigar) as an offering — praying that their problems would vanish like smoke. While in Tiruvattu, a town on the banks of the Cauvery, and a holy place for Saivaites as it houses the biggest temple of Lord Shiva, the Aazhi Ther (chariot festival) begins only after a *kodai* for Pidari, a folk goddess.



GODS WHO LOVE SURRUTTUS AND CHAPPALS

Coffee table book *Folk Deities of Tamil Nadu*, from *The Hindu* stable, delves into local customs, legends and ways of worship — from the deity of graveyards to the protector of the ill



I've always been fascinated by folk deities, and my childhood passion was strengthened by watching folk art forms such as Koothu Melam, Kaniyan Koothu, Villupattu and Thappu. Recently, I got to revisit it again while curating *Folk Deities of Tamil*

Nadu. While putting together the coffee table book, I travelled across the State for two months, and visited over 60 villages in search of local legends, and the myriad customs, traditions and ways of worship associated with them.



People's faith, I discovered, is still strong. At S. Kovilpatti, a village in Sivaganga district, men carve out a portion of their earlobe even today — as atonement for the wound one of their ancestors accidentally caused Ayyanar, a deity of prosperity who is worshipped by farmers of the wetland and rain-fed areas. They also follow the custom of elongating their earlobes by wearing weighty rings right from their childhood.

In Valangaiman near Thanjavur, devotees observe a morbid ritual. On the day of Padaikatti (coffin festival) of the local Mariamman temple, the entire village resembles a graveyard.

Scores of devotees — *kumkam* on their foreheads and bodies covered in holy ash — are carried in biers. Their toes are tied with rope, their eyes covered with sandal paste, and a coin fixed on their foreheads, as if they were dead. The ritual is performed to fulfil their vow to the deity, for giving them 'a rebirth' after a serious illness.

Threat of Sanskritisation
Tamil society worshipped heroes who laid down their lives for the common cause. *Folk Deities of Tamil Nadu* covers a few, such as Madurai Veeran, Kathavarayan, and Muthupattan, who were raised to the status of guardian deities after being killed for questioning the norms of society. Madurai Veeran, the son of a cobbler, was killed for marrying Vellaiammal, a dancer. Muthupattan, whose temple is situated near Karaiyar Dam in

Tirunelveli district, was a Brahmin who became a cobbler in pursuit of his love for the two daughters of a cobbler. He was killed on the night of his wedding by thieves. Devotees offer *chappals* to the deity, to honour his livelihood. Many deities, however, are losing their original characters, and their unique forms of worship are disappearing — not just because of the passage of time but also Sanskritisation. Old temples are being demolished and concrete structures with sanctum sanctums, *vimanas* and *gopurams* are coming up in their stead, though these aspects have no meaning in folk religion.

It is not a recent phenomenon. Long ago, ballads narrating the stories of folk deities were altered with the objective of making them an aspect of Vedic deities. "The avatar concept has furthered the Sanskritisation process. Male deities of various tribal societies were turned into Vaishnavite gods, and female deities linked with Parvathi and Lakshmi by invoking the *swaroopa* concept," says Aru. Ramanathan, former head of department of Folk Studies at Tamil University in Thanjavur.

In *Folk Deities of Tamil Nadu*, he has addressed how Theepaintha Amman at Sethiathope in Cuddalore district was elevated as an aspect of Sila. "These changes are continuously taking place, to this day."

Folk Deities of Tamil Nadu is jointly published by *The Hindu* Group and the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department.

ALLEGEDLY

Go straight to the gut

Bemoaning the degeneration of the nation? Consider a gut reset programme instead



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Are you getting stressed out over climate change? Feeling anxious every time you walk under an airport canopy, or every time your child appears for a competitive exam conducted by the NTA? Do you get panic attacks when it rains in your city, or when your daughter says she wants to study medicine? Does endemic institutional decay fill you with despair? Does idiotic enthusiasm for tyranny make you ill? If you answered 'yes' to any of the above, then I have just the solution for you: reclaiming gut health.

As per the latest medical research, an unhealthy gut is the most important effect, and cause, of stress, anxiety and depression — regardless of whether or not there are objective external triggers that might make stress and anxiety a legitimate human response. The critical determinant of a healthy gut: the 1,000 species of 'good' bacteria you are supposed to host there. These little darlings produce the enzymes that help your body absorb the nutrients in your food.

They destroy the bad bacteria in your gut. And they also reduce the risk of cancer, diabetes and sadomasochistic behaviours such as voting repeatedly for those who squeeze out your life blood and feed it to cronies.

Given these benefits, people all over the world — including 'pure' vegetarians — are gulping down millions of live organisms every day. Those who would never dream of adopting a puppy or kitten are adopting billion-strong colonies of fully-grown bacteria. Acquaintances who would constantly bemoan the degeneration of the nation are now in perpetual high spirits. Their secret: they underwent a gut reset programme.

Seeing their dramatic transformation, I also signed up for a gut reset programme with a celebrity gut microbiome specialist. It was a six-day course, and it didn't come cheap. Full disclosure: I negotiated a 15% discount in exchange for writing a column raising awareness about gut health. But frankly, I would have written this anyway, given

the public interest involved. Apart from immediate personal benefits, a healthy gut also improves air quality and combats climate change by reducing emissions of certain kinds of gases.

For the benefit of those who would like to try a gut reset without paying for a formal programme, here are the five key principles drawn from my experience:

1. Probiotic is the new antibiotic

I know that as Indians, we love antibiotics. We are so crazy about them we have them for breakfast with milk, eggs and honey. Our love for them has even rubbed off on germs (bad bacteria), which have begun to stick around in our bodies for the tasty antibiotics they know are sure to come their way. But no more of this. We live in a polarised society where everyone must pick a side — 'pro' or 'anti'. You are a pro- from now on.



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

2. Know your CFUs (not to be confused with STFU's)

Each probiotic capsule has billions of CFUs (Colony-Forming Units) — the good guys who will start setting up homes, offices and enzyme-making factories as soon as they land in your gut. Are the CFUs in your pill alive or are half of them dead? Do any of them have freeloaders (germs) lurking around? You don't want to pay good money to eat dead bacteria, or worse, bad bacteria. So make sure you get the right CFUs.

3. Don't eat junk

Live for the animals in your tummy. Every time you pick something up at the supermarket, or read a restaurant menu, ask yourself: would Mr. *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* approve?

4. Consume fermented stuff

My favourite. Gut microbiomes love it when there is regular inflow of fermented foods because they create a billion-strong confluence of happy, healthy gut microbes. It's like a bacteria visiting a foreign country and being welcomed by thousands of NR1 bacteria — it builds a fantastic atmosphere of microbial bonhomie, which is why beer, the world's top fermented drink, is so important. Me and my current best friend *Lactobacillus acidophilus* bond over beer every night, and so should you.

5. Join a gut cult

This would give you the necessary motivation to start talking about gut health with everyone you meet — an absolute must if you want to spread the good bacteria around.

One major challenge people face is that you can't see your gut bacteria, or make Reels out of them. But you can't see God either. And people do crazy things to please their gods. I've reset my gut. Now you reset yours. And then, one after another, convert all your friends.

Nandan Kamath knows what he will be doing a decade from now. That's because he set the ball rolling years ago. "I'm 47, and I have stuff to do for the next 10 years. I have no midlife crisis," he says. "In my 30s I built for that, asking myself, 'Are there things I would like to engage with in the future?'"

Kamath, a lawyer and sports entrepreneur (or sports enthusiast, as he describes himself), is also the author of *Boundary Lab: Inside the Global Experiment Called Sport*. It's one part of his larger effort to show how sports can help create an inclusive, equitable society.

A thoughtful, erudite man with a ready smile, Kamath is a trustee of Go Sports Foundation, one of the early non-profits that helped change the sporting ecosystem in India by funding elite athletes. In 2013, Kamath did the same in government, helping the youth affairs and sports ministry launch TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme) to improve India's performance in the Olympics and Paralympics. "It enabled athletes access to public funds without having to go through the sporting federations," he says. "TOPS skirted an imperfect system to fund athletes directly." The programme presently supports 323 leading athletes.

It was endeavours like these that broke the monopoly of the legendary opaque and toxic federation model of Indian sport and possibly aided athletes such as Vinesh Phogat and other wrestlers to speak up against sexual harassment by the chief of their federation in January 2023. "Historically, we've never questioned the politicisation of sports bodies and nor has the government," he says. "For the first

I don't think there's anybody thinking strategically about Indian sport. They may think that they are but is there a 30-year plan? I can guarantee you there isn't

time, the government would have regretted the politicisation of the body. It could not separate the wrestling body from itself and I think it lost a lot of public support along the way, largely because of the perceived unfairness."

Sport as a natural resource Like all of us, he watched Phogat soar – and then crash – at the Olympics. "It was a flashpoint of all the things that have happened in Indian sport," he says. "I'm not sure we care about sport, I think we care about all of the drama around it that is larger than the human achievement. The remarkable day she had was lost in the melee."

Kamath believes most of us are there to take from sport. But very few people ask how they can contribute. He talks about sport like it's a natural resource – one could describe him as a sports environmentalist. For him, sport is "public domain which needs to be protected, prevented from depletion". "Very few people ask how do we keep sports replenished," he says.

He agrees with Abhinav Bindra who recently said, "Money is not going to get you medals. It's not a



PERSON OF INTEREST NANDAN KAMATH: PLAYING THE LONG GAME

The lawyer and entrepreneur knows how to make India a sporting nation

vending machine." He's also an admirer of Neeraj Chopra who "at the peak of the productisation of celebrity keeps his authenticity in an extremely unique way".

Chopra and Bindra help answer a question Kamath often grapples with: how do you stay who you are

and not become who other people are saying is worth being? "If you're willing to play the long game, you find multiple spaces, occupy them gradually and just be yourself in all these spaces," says Kamath, who believes in working from within, gradually, rather than breaking

down the entire structure to rebuild it.

That's exactly what he's done, as a lawyer who protects the business model of sport; as a teacher at cricket academies using sports as education; as a supporter of elite athletes and as a builder of an active society through his Sports and Society Accelerator that pushes the links between physical activity and health onto government agenda. "Eventually, I hope these last two will meet where elite sports offers ambassadorship for everyone being active, and a much more active society eventually feeds into both a culture of sports and the talent pool."

Relating with success and failure Kamath always acknowledges the huge impact sport had on his life as a teenager when he joined the Karnataka state cricket team. He played seriously until he

Changemaker Nandan Kamath is a trustee of Go Sports Foundation, one of the early non-profits that helped transform the sporting ecosystem in India. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

surrendered this passion to law school. Sport helped him shed diffidence and build confidence. It exposed him to new experiences, journeys, friendships. "It built my relationship with success, relationship with failure, and those are things that aren't in common supply," he says.

He wants the same for his children, Yamini, 8, and Madhav, 5, who avidly watched the Olympics and asked for hockey sticks after seeing India play.

Parents who aspire to bring up sports lovers could learn this lesson from Kamath. "There's a lot of free play," he says. "There's equipment around. If they ask to play we play with them, but we try to reduce the amount of structure and just make sure they have a good time."

Right now, Kamath believes there's no one pulling together all the working models in Indian sport, such as the badminton and shooting academies driven largely by the efforts of former athletes or the military's efforts to nurture sports. "I don't think there's anybody thinking strategically about Indian sport," he says. "They may think that they are but is there a 30-year-plan? I can guarantee you there isn't."



Priya Ramani is a Bengaluru-based journalist and the co-founder of India Love Project on Instagram.

GOREN BRIDGE Latvian lead Neither vulnerable. North deals

Bob Jones
Today's deal is from a recent tournament in Riga, Latvia. This was a pairs competition where every trick is crucial. South has not authorised the release of his name. West, for unknown reasons, chose to lead the king of spades. We cannot imagine any reason for this lead, but perhaps our imagination is lacking.

South, of course, believed this lead to be from a short suit, probably a singleton. He won with dummy's ace and led a heart to his king. He could have cashed the ace of hearts at this point to guarantee 12 tricks. The lucky fall of the queen would give him all 13 tricks. The percentage play in hearts, however, was to finesse for the queen. There was no apparent danger, so South led the nine of clubs to dummy's king and then

NORTH		EAST	
♠ A Q J 10 2		♠ 6	
♥ 10 4 2		♥ 9 8 7	
♦ 4		♦ K Q J 10 3 2	
♣ K Q 8 4		♣ 10 6 3	
WEST		SOUTH	
♠ K 9 8 3		♠ 7 5 4	
♥ Q 6		♥ A K J 5 3	
♦ 9 7 5		♦ A 8 6	
♣ J 7 5 2		♣ A 9	

The bidding:			
NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	All pass

Opening lead: King of ♠

led a heart back to his jack. Losing to West's queen was not a surprise, but South was shocked when East ruffed the spade continuation. Declarer had been taking what he thought was the best

play for 13 tricks and wound up with only 11 tricks for a very poor score. It may be time for us to review our opening-lead strategies. Maybe if West writes a book...

QUIZ Easy like Sunday morning

What has August 25 ever given us?

Berty Ashley

1 The first Tsar and Grand Prince of all Russia for 37 years from 1547, Ivan Vasilyevich was born on this date in 1530. He was responsible for the transformation of Russia from a medieval state to a giant empire. He was given the nickname *Grozny* ('inspires fear'), but anti-Russian propaganda anglicised the nickname to portray him as an evil sadistic ruler. By what name is he known in English history?

2 On this date in 1609, this iconic person demonstrated the first version of his telescope to Venetian lawmakers showing a magnification of 8x or 9x. He sold them to merchants and sea traders, and only in November turned it on the moon. Who was this person who even makes an appearance in a song by Queen?

3 *The New York Sun* started a series of six articles, which followed the work of explorer John Herschel on August 25, 1835. He was the one who originated the Julian day system, and his father discovered Uranus. The articles declared that he had discovered life and civilisation away from Earth. Later, they admitted that it was an elaborate hoax. Where did *The Sun* say Herschel found life?

4 Hans Adolf Krebs, a German biochemist who won the Nobel Prize for discovering the citric acid cycle, was born on this day in 1900. An important metabolic sequence affecting



Creative minds Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa, also a painter, storyboarded his films as full-scale paintings. (GETTY IMAGES)

carbohydrates, proteins and fats. What does this cycle produce for the body?

5 Born this date in 1930, this Scottish gentleman first came to prominence for bodybuilding and taking part in the Mr. Universe competition. Thinking he was too old for football he took up acting. Who was this actor who became the first to portray a legendary character onscreen?

6 The iconic Japanese film *Rashomon*, directed by Akira Kurosawa, was released on this day in 1950. Amongst its many technical innovations, it was also

the first film to show a certain natural entity on screen. Till then it was believed that doing so will spoil the film. What did Kurosawa aim his camera at for the first time?

7 Taiwanese businessman Momofuku Ando introduced 'Nissin Chikin Ramen' on this date in 1958. Wanting to help post-war Japan get out of its food shortage, he perfected a flash-frying method, the product of which he marketed in cups. What did he invent that is still popular till date?

8 Tim Burton, an award-winning American

director, whose list of movies include *Corpse Bride*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Dark Shadows*, and *Sweeney Todd*, was born on August 25, 1958. He specialises in a genre that gets its name from 'non-classical' medieval architecture and is characterised by a dark colour palette, horror elements and supernatural entities. What genre is this?

9 The first version of Linux, a kernel for an operating system, was announced on this day in 1991 by software engineer Linus Torvalds. It was revolutionary as it allowed the user to modify and distribute the software free of charge. The name of this system comes from the fact that everyone has access to the source code. What are these softwares known as?

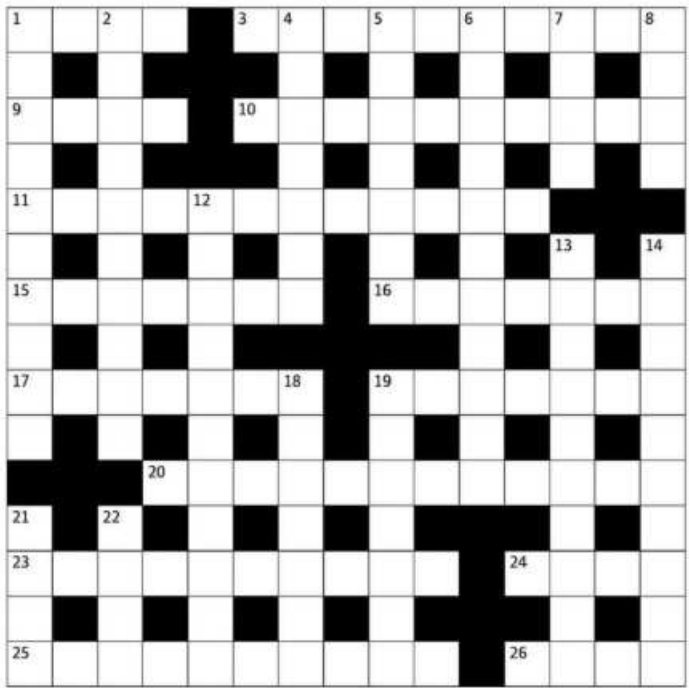
10 On August 25, 2006 naturalists Chris Atkins and Michael Taylor while exploring a National Park in California made a record-breaking discovery. They found a tree that stood 380.81 feet tall, and is (as of printing) the tallest of three trillion trees on the planet. Called 'Hyperion', what species of tree is this, which also gives its name to the National Park?

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

1. Van the Terrible
2. Gallilei
3. The Moon
4. Energy (in the form of ATP)
5. Sean Connery
6. A direct shot off the sun
7. Instant noodles
8. Gothic horror
9. Open Source
10. Redwood

Answers

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3321



- Across**
- 1 Departed at the last minute (4)
 - 3 Clairvoyancy of the Dark Ages? (10)
 - 9 Successfully wear dress that's not loud (4)
 - 10 Infernal class of exercises taking time? Son, they could be positive (5,5)
 - 11 Puts in a call to Dover? Or Rugby? (7,5)
 - 15 Ditches storage's cap; escalates, in part (7)
 - 16 Pacify with a k-kind of pudding (7)
 - 17 Encourages rising, sets off to go around North (7)
 - 19 In Oxford at the outset, intensively study flipping electrical engineer (7)
 - 20 Hotel's rather fancy – here? (6,6)
 - 23 Everyman's ... average. 'Rank'? That's too much (10)
 - 24 When nothing changes if you turn back time? (4)
 - 25 Sum like '125 x 8'? (5,5)
 - 26 Man, perhaps, in audition the writer's going to (4)

- Down**
- 1 Clear 'Hello!' misread in French city (2,8)
 - 2 Government economist in battered trenchcoat (10)
 - 4 Tells one that might be Des: About 1? (7)
 - 5 Weapon's deployed, obtaining vegetable (4,3)
 - 6 Distribute dodgy enterprises (11)
 - 7 Rear of capuchin monkey? Scruff of the

- neck (4)
- 8 Otherwise, university in London's backing English (4)
 - 12 Got arrested (11)
 - 13 Stinking drunk, old and amorous (10)
 - 14 Struggle in unpicking ancestries (10)
 - 18 Some wholesaler, *nouveau-riche*, somewhere on the Med (7)
 - 19 Revered Hindu's headgear pinched by parent (7)
 - 21 Go round with would-be fiancé's offering (4)
 - 22 Crossword setter's written up mother's novel (4)

SOLUTION NO. 3320





WHERE DESIGNS INSPIRE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Travelling exhibition *Architectures of Transition* highlights recent shifts in urban design and the spirit of collaboration between communities and architects

Durganand Balsavar

What can an earthquake in Nepal tell us about the architecture of resilience and transience? When the Gorkha quake struck Kathmandu in 2015, community acceptance for bamboo and stone buildings grew as these resolutely withstood the fierce calamity. Today, projects like the Kopila Valley School in Karnali, crafted with rammed earth walls and bamboo trusses that double up as a children's jungle gym, are challenging 'perceptions of permanence'. The Madan Puraskar Library is another example of great design with arboreal materials. It is the first large-scale public library in bamboo and earth, housing the largest archive of Nepali literature. With its large ceiling – an intricate spider web-like arch – it is now a tourist destination.

Over the last decade, South Asia has been the epicentre of incredible urban and climatic transformations. "Rapid urbanisation, shifting



demographics, and explosive population growth are reshaping the social and cultural landscape," says architect Rahul Mehrotra, who co-curated *Architectures of Transition*, a travelling exhibition that debuted recently in Chennai. This transition has set the stage for young architects to mobilise new directions of ecological and social collaborations – reviving vernacular

design, seeking alternatives like bamboo, wood, and mud, and refining local technologies to contemporary needs. The Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre in Bangladesh, for instance, reflects a rare spirit of environmental stewardship. It inspires imaginations with hybrid and multi-functional spaces (using the skills of Rohingya artisans, such as bamboo weaving



Shaping lives with buildings (Clockwise from above) Tent-cities of the Kumbh Mela; Pause Restrooms; Madan Puraskar Library; Viveda Wellness Retreat; and Kopila Valley School. (HEMANT PATIL AND CHEMI DORJE LAMA)

techniques and nipa palm leaf pallets for roofing), adapting to the ever-changing aspirations of refugee communities. "Architects play a crucial role in facilitating these transitions and responding to diverse challenges," adds Mehrotra.

Embracing the transient
Architectures of Transition invited 41 young architecture practices from across South Asia – Bhutan, Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan – united by

Lessons from the Kumbh Mela

The exhibition is part of a larger initiative, with five other components: a lectures series, publications, a conference, podcasts, and a digital archive. In Chennai, Mehrotra's talk, titled 'Research as Practice: Architecture and the City in Books', contextualised the role of research and advocacy. In conveying the potential of ephemeral constructions, he drew inspiration from the Kumbh Mela, an occasion that constructs transient tent-cities along the banks of a seasonal river. These temporary cities offer pragmatic, utilitarian insights for architects seeking to navigate the complexities of urban life. Another project is the revitalisation of the Chihilsitoon Gardens (Afghanistan), which led to the restoration of its heritage precincts using rammed earth. Mehrotra alludes to these emergent practices as providing new design alternatives, to mitigate the diminishing presence of architects in the public realm.

understanding of the needs that shape design and construction.

New forms of practice
Urban master plans often prioritise large infrastructure projects and fail to address inequities. This diminishing role of the architect in designing public realms is being bridged by patronage from NGOs – often addressing localised issues of underserved communities. "Many architectural practices are gravitating towards non-traditional organisational structures," says New York-based Thole, an architect and urban designer. "They are positioning the makers, collaborators, and a range of specialists as invaluable partners, giving them much more agency in the design process. Such collaborative frameworks allow for richer, contextually rooted designs." Bamboo Playscape in Bangladesh, for instance, has been constructed in collaboration with school children, artisans, and architects: each contributing to design ideas (for a diverse range of activities such as theatre, music and sports), thus creating a deeper sense of belonging.

The School for the Blind in Gujarat underscores the potential of architecture to empower communities: based on their functions, the classrooms have varied forms, volumes, and textures to guide the students. The Nigu Pukhu project in Nepal uses traditional construction techniques such as reinstating layers of mud and water harvesting, to restore ponds as a vital source of water, and a focal point for cultural events. "It is notable that with changing modes of communication, there's been a surge in community outreach initiatives where architects act as facilitators," states Devashree Shah, an Inclusive Design Fellow with the Institute for Human Centred Design.

Across South Asia, such sensitive interventions are pushing the boundaries of design to address unfulfilled urban needs. In Mumbai, Pause Restrooms in a striking red capture the gaze and invite people to unwind, eat, and refuel. In Sri Lanka, The Paint Shop creatively uses found and recycled materials, and modular scaffoldings, which enable it to grow or shift to another location easily. The travelling exhibition, which will lead to Bengaluru next, hopes to foster such collaborations between communities, NGOs, and architects – to generate new synergies in transient times, of unforeseen change.

The writer is the founding-principal of Artes Roots Collaborative.

When things got a little intense for Phuphee and she needed a breather, she would drop what she was doing and go for a walk. She would throw on her *keep* (upper section of a Kashmiri *burka*), grab a small basket and knife, and walk into the nearby forest. At the door, before she said goodbye, she would say, 'Zangan chem beqaraeri [my legs have anxiety]'. We would see her a couple of hours later, a little flushed but brighter and cheerful.

I have been told by other members of the family that when she got married, and started taking these 'solo' trips, her in-laws became very concerned and sent for her grandmother (her mother had passed away when she was young). It is said that Aapa told them that Tahira's spirit needed rest away from humans and that they should never think about interfering with it. And so, it was never brought up again.

Phuphee would go off and spend the time she needed with the fairies, and what made it more acceptable, though somewhat inconvenient (as everything stopped functioning when she left the house), was that she always came back with a basket full of treats. She would bring back *gucchi* mushrooms, berries, seeds, nuts and wild vegetables. One day, she brought back wild turnips.

'Sessar *gogji ranov* [let's make slow-cooked turnips with red kidney beans]'. This is a dish that takes three days to prepare. First, the kidney beans are slow-cooked



ILLUSTRATION: ZANAB TAMBAWALLA

A LITTLE LIFE

Pencil in some rest

Helping people shouldn't mean exhausting yourself, says Phuphee.
Take a walk, meet a friend, recharge your soul

for a couple of days and then the turnips are added and left to cook on the embers for another day. It is a labour of love. The result is a nourishing mixture that she would serve with hot rice.

When Phuphee made *sessar gogji* she would always use a special kind of kidney beans that she brought from a village called

Madvewadwun. She would go to this village, which was many miles away, when she needed an extended breather. It would take days for her to cover the distance. She had a close friend who lived there, an old woman said to possess strong magical powers and immense wisdom, who lived on her own.

Phuphee would spend a week with her and together they would go to the hot sulphur springs called Tatta Paani. It is said that a dip in the healing waters could cure sickly joints, two dips could cure broken bones, and three dips, a broken heart.

Her trip to Tatta Paani was never planned. She would

announce it a day before or sometimes on the morning that she was leaving. In the first year of her marriage, her mother-in-law refused to let her go, stating that her responsibility now lay in the marital home. It is said that within a couple of hours of Phuphee being forbidden to leave, clouds gathered over the village (it was mid-July) and it rained non-stop for six days. It only stopped when Phuphee's mother-in-law, having understood the source of the storm, begged her to take her trip.

I asked Phuphee once if all these stories about her were true. She simply smiled and said, 'One day you will inherit all this,' pointing to her brain and heart, 'and all will become clear to you.'

Once, I was sitting on the verandah with her, eating toasted *guchis*. I asked her how many dips she took when she visited Tatta Paani. 'Are you trying to figure out if I go for sickly joints or a broken heart?' she replied.

I smiled sheepishly, trying to hide my embarrassment at being caught in an attempt to be clever.

'I don't always go to the hot spring. Usually, I just spend time with my friend. We sit, and she cooks for me. When I am with her, I never cook or do any work. I rest. I rest my body, my mind and my soul. When I was little, I was taught to cook and clean and look after everyone else. There were times when I would feel so exhausted that I would fall asleep every few minutes. On one occasion, I nearly let the house burn down because I had fallen asleep while

cooking. It was then that Aapa told me that my soul had been emptied and I needed to refill it. She sent me to Tatta Paani to see my friend. I stayed with her for a week and when I felt that my soul was full again, I came back. Aapa told me that whenever I felt like this again, I must go,' Phuphee explained.

'So how do you know when you need to go? How do you know your soul has emptied?' I asked, a little confused.

'I love cooking and I love treating the people who seek my help. These are two things that bring my heart tremendous peace and joy, but when my soul is nearly empty, the feelings of joy and peace are replaced by those of dread and anxiety. That is when I know I need to rest. If I ignored my own calls of help, how could I ever do justice to anyone else?'

She took two cigarettes and smoked them in silence while I sat there thinking about the important lesson she had just taught me – about how it wasn't just food that nourished you, but also rest. She taught me how to recognise the signs of a soul that needed refilling and how to honour that need.

Even today, when I need a breather, I walk out the front door, whispering under my breath, 'Zangan chem beqaraeri' and disappear for a little while.

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

