



backpage
Digital artist Samyukta
Madhu's *Reincarnations*

GO TO » PAGE 8

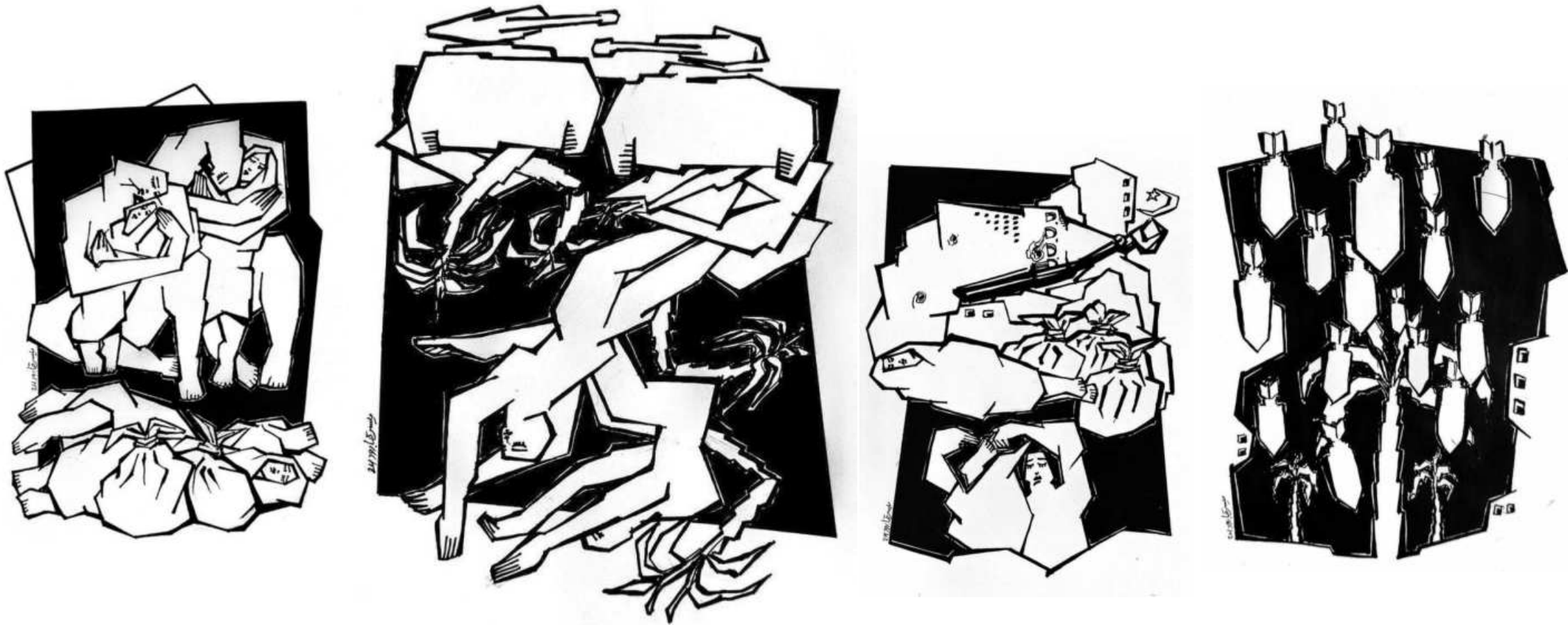
INSIDE
Remembering artist KGS in
his birth centenary year

GO TO » PAGE 4

LITERARY REVIEW
Investor Ruchir Sharma on
what ails capitalism

GO TO » PAGE 3

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ART FROM RUBBLE AND DESPAIR

Be it Gaza, Sudan or Manipur, artists in conflict zones refuse to be silenced. They are channelling their fear, anger and desperation into works of resistance

Gowri S

gowri.s@thehindu.co.in

Artist Maisara Baroud lived in Gaza city with his small family in a large family home. Every morning, he would head to the Al-Aqsa University, where he was a lecturer in the faculty of Fine Arts. He returned home and spent his evenings in his studio, in the august company of books, papers, paints, canvases, and experiments. Until October 8, 2023.

A day after the Israel-Palestine war began, his private office was destroyed when the 12-storey Al Watan tower was levelled. The very next day, Israeli airstrikes reduced his family home to rubble.

"I lost everything: a significant portion of my works, acquired pieces from artist friends, my studio with all my experiments, archives, and works accumulated over the past 30 years. I lost my tools, dozens of paintings, thousands of sketches, and an art library with over 3,000 books. I lost my small, private world, all my memories and belongings. I could save nothing," says Baroud. Life as he knew it had changed, possibly forever.

Soon after, in an attempt to reassure his friends and students that he is alive, he started posting his ink drawings on social media every day. "While rockets, shells, and the machinery of destruction have ended all my future dreams, they could not take away my passion and love for drawing," he asserts.

Aptly titled *Still Alive*, the collection – active even today – simply depicts day-to-day life in a Gaza splintered by war through



sharp and direct line drawings, even as Baroud flees from relief camp to relief camp. At the time of writing this, Baroud is displaced in Deir al-Balah, and is living in a dilapidated building with "barely any walls".

Baroud is one of many artists and creatives who steadily produce art in the face of conflict, defying real threats of censorship and life. Art that brews in conflict inevitably takes on many meanings and purposes; most often as powerful tools of resistance, awareness and documentation, and self-expression. More recently, his works were displayed on the walls of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, at the Venice Biennale (in collaboration with the Palestinian Museum in the U.S.), and at the Plaza Mora

Palace in Venice under the title *Strangers in Their Own Land*.

Songs of a conflict

Earlier this year, in Manipur, musician Akhu Chingangbam fashioned a makeshift studio at a relief camp in Phayeng, Imphal West, housing children from different ethnic backgrounds, communities and religions. They sang in unison: *Often visited in my dream/ My little hut by the hillside/ Although burnt down to ashes/ My little village by the hillside*. Released on May 3, to mark one year of the ongoing ethnic conflict in the state, the song, titled 'Chingyagi khangpokshang (Song from a relief camp)', is a poignant memory of the life that was, with a clear message of hope and trust.

"Before the crisis, Manipur was vibrant. After the pandemic, there was a palpable sense of hope, especially among the youth, with many music festivals. The past 17 months have put a complete halt on any activities," says Chingangbam, frontrunner of rock band The Imphal Talkies.

He also leads the The Native Tongue Called Peace project (started in 2015), which documents Manipur's musical legacy through children from different ethnic backgrounds, and supports an education project that helps children in relief camps to appear for their board exams. "Here [at the studio] was a group of children from various backgrounds sharing whatever little they had. This could be a model of Manipur, you know? There is an organic exchange of culture. You'll see a Kuki girl singing a Naga song or a Naga kid teaching a Meitei song. That's something we need!" The song has garnered more than 75,000 views on YouTube.

The musician sounds dejected as he speaks of his own practice. "None of us is in the mood to play, and make music now. Some musicians have even had to sell their instruments for money." Even when friends and fellow musicians moved to other cities following the crisis and a rapidly crashing gig economy, Chingangbam felt he needed to stay back. He could not abandon his various social projects. But gig invitations from artist friends in cities like Delhi and Mumbai still flow in helping him take these songs and stories outside the state.

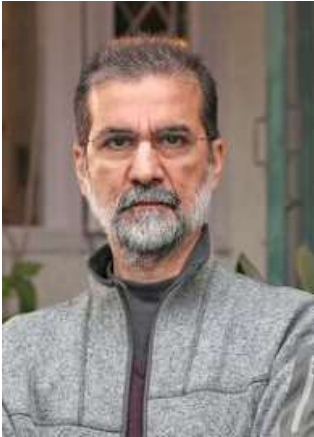
CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 4

A call to build solidarity

At the intersection of artistic practice and social responsibility sits U.S.-based Pangea World Theatre. Thesians Dipankar Mukherjee and Meena Natarajan have been working towards the cause of decolonising practices and solidarity for almost three decades now. Through social justice arts, the theatre works with multiple minority cultures in Minneapolis, and centre their work around race, class and gender. Here, mediums of performance in the form of theatre, poetry and storytelling morph to help the community in tangible ways. One such project, 'Poetry in the Windows', highlighted small businesses that were affected by the pandemic by placing poems that encouraged people to express what the community felt.

The theatre was also at the forefront of the protests that followed the murder of George Floyd in 2020, which rekindled the Black Lives Matter movement across the United States. "The whole uprising was happening right in front of us," recalls artistic director Mukherjee. "The police precinct that was burned down was just a mile away. There was no question of deliberating on what to do."

Rehabilitation and healing becomes central to the conversation surrounding art and artists from conflict zones. A medium like theatre or narrative storytelling facilitates a deeper sense of healing. This is why Pangea hosts story circles that encourage displaced artists to share personal stories. "Let us take advantage of our privilege. We have tonnes of power," says Mukherjee. "I don't have to be a Palestinian to speak against the genocide. I don't have to be a woman to speak against domestic violence. The call to build solidarity is immense now." In 2023, under Mukherjee's direction, Pangea produced *Returning to Haifa* based on the novella by Ghassan Kanafani that humanised stories of ordinary people as it explored the relationship between an Israeli family and a Palestinian couple caught in conflict.



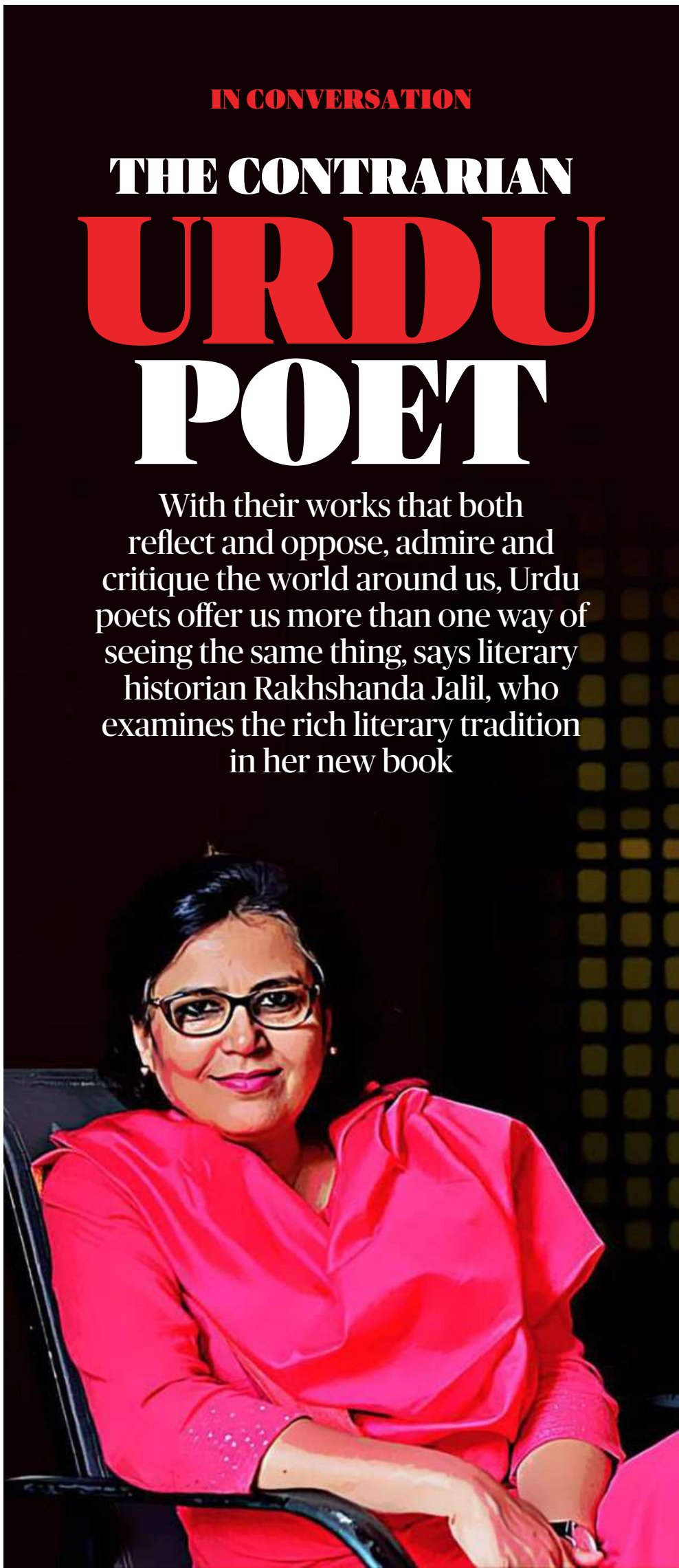
We all must share in those responsibilities. What artists are probably ordained to do is to perform the role of the avant-garde, and to find the crack in the brick wall, the chink in the armour. Open up the discourse, and look for ways of connecting old ideas and thinking up new ones

SANJAY KAK
Kashmiri documentary filmmaker and writer



Here at the studio was a group of children from various backgrounds sharing whatever little they had. This could be a model of Manipur, you know? There is an organic exchange of culture. You'll see a Kuki girl singing a Naga song or a Naga kid teaching a Meitei song. That's something we need

AKHU CHINGANGBAM
Manipuri musician and activist



Maaz Bin Bilal

Writer, translator and literary historian Rakhshanda Jalil's critical work on Urdu progressives and other writers is well-recognised as are her translations from Urdu. In her latest book, *Love in the Time of Hate: In the Mirror of Urdu* (Simon & Schuster), a collection of essays on Urdu poetry and the Indian polity, she expounds the role and significance of the Urdu poet in a fast-changing world. Edited excerpts:

Question: *At a time when Rahul Gandhi has claimed to set up a 'shop of love in a bazaar of hate', what can Urdu writing from different ages tell us that's new? Why do we need the mirror of Urdu? Can Urdu be a lamp?*

Answer: This book is not about 'party politics'. But, yes, it is a search for voices that speak of love rather than hate, inclusion rather than exclusion, commonalities rather than differences. I am not claiming that any of this is new. I am calling attention to a wealth that has been hiding in plain sight for Urdu readers for centuries; through translations and a narrative that strings

together these diverse 'pearls' on a common thread, I am simply making them accessible to English readers.

Also, poets seldom, if ever, fall victim to bigotry, prejudice and narrow mindedness; a propagandist or publicist might but not a poet. And the Urdu poet, in particular, has always been known for his/ her liberalism and eclecticism. Even in matters of religion, he/ she has always spoken for *qaumi yakjahati* and *muttahida tehzeeb* – communal harmony and the co-mingling of cultures.

Q: *Does the mirror reflect, speak, aestheticise, or critique?*

A: Yes, it does all this and more; ever the contrarian, the Urdu poet provides more than one way of seeing the same thing – be it the Taj Mahal or the monsoon. For instance, the Taj is both an enduring symbol of love and a showy exhibitionist declaration of love, an insult to the love of ordinary mortals who cannot afford an emperor's self-indulgence.

Q: *You have quoted Ursula K. Le Guin to call poets 'the realists of a larger reality'. Can you expand on this? Why is it important to listen to the poets to understand our existence as humans and Indians?*

A: Poets are not prophets. They see, feel,

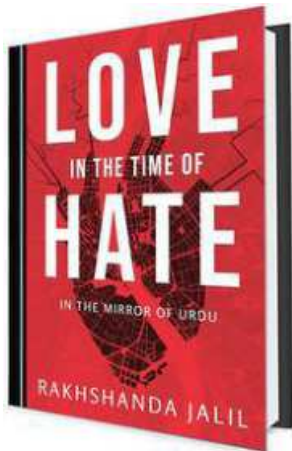
(Below) Author and historian Rakhshanda Jalil

experience what you and I do but they have a special ability to express those feelings. As Ghalib pithily said, “...*goya yeh bhi mere dil mein hai*” (...this too is in my heart). The Urdu poet has written something for every occasion, every sentiment, every impulse that flickers through the human heart. There may be plenty one disagrees with, but there is always something on nearly every subject. Nothing is beyond the pale, nothing is sacrosanct or unquestionable.

I think there comes a time in the history of nations when they need their poets most; not the politicians, nor policy-makers and publicists but the poets who are true visionaries. For, it is the poets who can remind people of the essential values that hold them together. For us in India, that time is now, lest the clamour of the strident illiberals drowns out the voices that have always pointed towards the larger reality and the greater good, and the bloody tide of unreason sweeps away the India we have known and cherished.

Q: *Your book is divided into four alliterative sections: politics, people, passions, places. What was the logic behind this structure, why are they important as matters of love and hate?*

A: I didn't set out to write 80 essays divided into four sections. The topics 'revealed' themselves to me, often prompted by real-life



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events, tremors in the seismograph that is the present-day Indian political and social milieu, sometimes jogged by the passing of a much loved pan-Indian figure such as Dilip Kumar or Lata Mangeshkar. Some were triggered by my travels, some by newspaper headlines and quite a few were written in response to small, everyday increments of change. Running through them is a common current: of love for this, my land, my India. The alliterative section heads are a happy serendipity.

Q: *You have a long career now behind you as a literary historian, critic, translator, columnist and more. How do you place this volume within your trajectory?*

A: I see it as a natural, organic coming together of all of the above and, yes, my anguish as an Indian. As I say in the introduction, I am scared, fearful, often depressed, and I find release through writing.

Q: *What's next from Rakhshanda Jalil?*

A: A biography of the poet-politician Maulana Hasrat Mohani.

Q: *What are your hopes for India and its world of letters in Urdu and English?*

A: Writing this book is an attempt to staunch the fear and depression I alluded to earlier. For, in looking back, and in looking into the mirror of Urdu, these essays also show the way forward. I hope we as a nation will be able to counter fear with inclusion, and hate with love.

The interviewer is a poet, translator, and professor at O.P. Jindal Global University.

Murder at the country club

This thriller set in colonial-era Ooty has lots of charm and a host of colourful characters

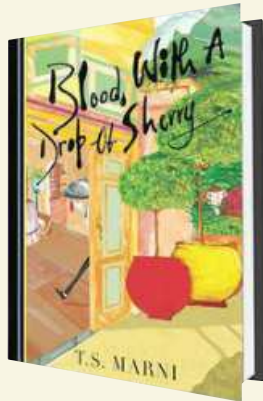
Stanley Carvalho

His debut murder mystery novel by T.S. Marni, a pseudonym for three sisters, set in the colonial-era hill station of Ooty, is a riveting read with a cleverly woven plot and some unexpected twists.

The novel begins with A.J. Panicker (AJ) returning to his hometown after 18 years in England with ambitious plans of developing his property in Ooty. Barely two days after his arrival, he decides to make his grand entrance into high society by attending the annual summer garden party at the country club. “He plunged into the vast sea of the blue-blooded”, hobnobbed with all sorts of people, enjoyed his scotch and after a merry time, retired to his room.

That evening, AJ is found dead in his room. The narrative then shifts to various residents who live in beautiful bungalows and cute cottages, all connected in some way or the other to AJ. Invariably, there's much gossip about AJ, be it at Sherry Darling and Zareen's 'Buxey Lodge' or Dimple and Miki's ‘The Dawn’ or Lady Fussington's ‘Glenealy House’.

A few days later, on the evening of the equestrian ball at the same club, a young trainee waiter, Siva, is found murdered even as the enormous party is in full swing. The mystery deepens when another attempted murder of Chinnaswamy, a club worker, takes place. The newly-appointed Superintendent of Police, Sundar Raman, swings into action with his team to investigate and catch the ‘mad murderer in town’.



Blood, With A Drop Of Sherry
T.S. Marni
Olympia Publishers
₹912.99

Sherry Darling, somehow, cannot resist the urge to sniff around and uncover the murders. Armed with clues she picks up from the club and her social circle, she lays a trap for the murderer, in league with the cops.

A racy novel with 36 short chapters and suggestive titles, there's enough suspense to keep the reader engrossed and guessing who the killer might be. The mix of colourful characters who populate the novel, their social life, idiosyncrasies and moments of levity lend a certain charm to this enchanting whodunit.

Not bad for the first-time authors who hatched the plot during a holiday when they “endured” the hilarious antics of a particularly pompous guest.

The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based independent journalist and writer.

Urban Indian woes

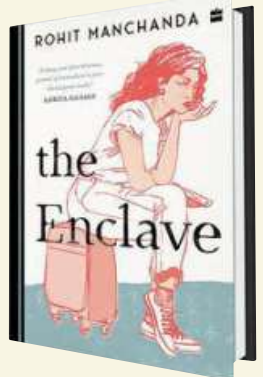
The hypocrisy and duality of city life are captured well in this lyrical novel

Percy Bharucha

A life lived in montage perhaps best sums up Rohit Manchanda's novel, *The Enclave*. It provides the reader with a curated sequence of episodes from the protagonist's life, each culminating in an emotional upheaval. Maya is a mother, a poet and a full-time employee at a centre that vaguely deals with education and policy.

Manchanda's ability to talk through everyday scenes as a form of exposition is remarkable. It's a bit akin to watching a highly stylistic director shoot an everyday person eating a hamburger. In the most commonplace of settings, Manchanda expounds contemporary notions that plague urban Indians, including the hypocrisy and duality of their milieu.

From attending a dance-drama on the Pandavas in exile, told from the perspective of the forest flora and fauna, to being told by the secretary of her housing complex that no overnight visits by unmarried persons will be permitted. It is the inhabitation of such opposite realities that has endowed Maya with a critical eye for hypocrisy, a nose that is allergic to bluffing and a healthy amount of judgment for the dramatic. The con artists that Manchanda reveals through the cast that surrounds Maya aren't of the garden variety either, and their true selves when revealed through her make for highly relatable reading. Her critique of gentrified circles that populate the upper echelons of art, management and society is not only



The Enclave
Rohit Manchanda
Fourth Estate
₹499

nuanced but also highly amusing.

Devoted to a hedonistic way of life, Maya struggles between art and sustenance, craving in some way membership into those very circles that in the light of day appear as naked as the emperor. It is this duality, this self-inflicted irony that the novel feeds on. It is her Sisyphean endeavour, sandpaper in hand to smoothen the rough edges of her life, her lovers, that gives heft to her character.

The Enclave is a lyrical read and while its plot might seem all too familiar, its prose is what sets it apart. While this might require the reader to plod through indulgent, ornate passages at times, it still makes for a highly rewarding read.

The reviewer is a freelance writer and illustrator.

BROWSER

Loka
S.B. Divya
Hachette
₹599

The second book in ‘The Alloy Era’ series traces genetically engineered posthuman Akshaya and her best friend Somya's journey to the most historic orb in the universe. While discovering the dangers of the planet, they explore love and friendship.



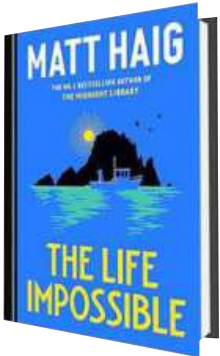
The Dust Draws Its Face on the Wind
Avinash Shrestha, trs Rohan Chhetri
Harper Perennial
₹399

Translated by award-winning poet Rohan Chhetri, this collection of poems brings together Shrestha's contemporary brand of verses imbued with his surrealist style. With influences of regional Indian poetry, these works chart a unique place for Nepali literature in the modern world.



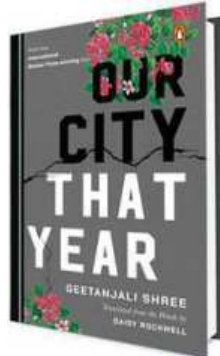
The Life Impossible
Matt Haig
Canongate
₹799

When she inherits a run-down house in Ibiza after her long-lost friend dies, retired maths teacher Grace Winters goes to the Mediterranean island with no plan and no return ticket. In her journey to learn more about her friend's life, she must first come to terms with her own past.



Our City, That Year
Geetanjali Shree, trs Daisy Rockwell
Penguin
₹699

First published in Hindi in 1998, this translation by the International Booker-winning duo is loosely based on the events leading up to the Babri Masjid demolition, told through three youngsters who find themselves suddenly engulfed by hate.



If I want equality, I will have to fight for it

Senior advocate and queer rights activist Saurabh Kirpal on why the quest for a just world must continue

Chittajit Mitra

Growing up I always wondered why we commemorate historical events on a yearly basis, like Independence Day or Gandhi's birthday. While formal education failed to develop that understanding, reading gave me a perspective on the power history and why we need to keep learning from the past to avoid repeating mistakes of the past. In his latest book, *Who is Equal?*, senior advocate and queer rights activist Saurabh Kirpal has tried to do the same by drawing inspiration from history on how we fared on the ideals of equality and why it remains a quest worth fighting for. Edited excerpts from an interview.

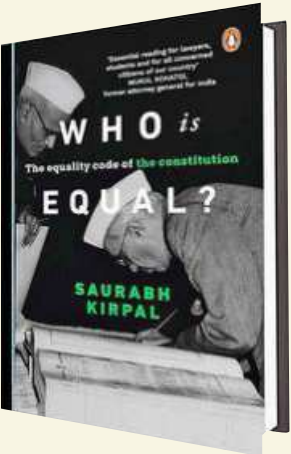
Question: In India's 78th year of Independence, do you think talking about equality is still relevant?
Answer: Certainly, talking about equality would become irrelevant when there will be no inequality. Only a person completely removed



Saurabh Kirpal (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

from the reality of India would say that there is no inequality. Forms have changed, the ways you discriminate have changed, but sadly the axes around which inequality exists has been persistently stubborn, which I talk about in my book in terms of religion, caste and gender. They're the same grounds on which discrimination happened in 1947 as it does now.

Q: After judgments like the NALSA and Section 377, some people strongly believe that equality is here. Do you believe that's the case?
A: I think privilege gives you a cushion not to be able to see discrimination on a daily basis. The removal of the tag of criminality under Section 377 only happened in 2018, not when we became independent. Equally, when the Constitution declares that everyone is equal under Article 14 or in certain directive principles, it's delusional to think that these magic words will lead to equality descending upon the polity as a whole. Not understanding the



Who is Equal?
Saurabh Kirpal
Vintage
₹699

structural imbalances that persist go beyond mere words or constitutional promises. Inequality is a reflection of structural problems that exist in society and as long as they don't disappear inequality will not.

From the perspective of a queer person, while Section 377 is gone, there is marriage inequality, and on a daily basis, people are petrified of coming out at work, because of fear of harassment or wrongful termination. They will not get apartments to rent. These are matters where the law has not even intervened and sought to give protection to people. Unless you have lived and walked in the shoes of a queer person, you don't know what discrimination truly means.

Q: What inspired you to write this book?
A: Different people try to bring about change in different ways. I'm obviously interested in fighting it because of my sexuality. But I think as a lawyer and a person who has seen injustice, not just on the grounds of sexuality, but in terms of gender, caste and religion, I feel obligated as a human being, let alone an Indian citizen, to do something about it. That's why I've written this book in relatively simple language. It highlights the issues and how the courts have dealt with it in the past, and which areas still need to be examined and how far we have come.

Q: How has your journey as an openly queer lawyer contributed to writing this book?
A: When I was much younger I didn't recognise my privilege. But as I grew older, I started recognising the layered inequalities. I understand how equality or the lack of it works in a legal system, which is not just made up of judges, but Parliament and the executive. And a legal system that is also a reflection of society at large. If there is discrimination somewhere else, the net result on the citizen is the same, right? I realised that if I want equality, I will have to fight for it.

The interviewer is an independent writer, journalist and translator based in Allahabad. They can be reached at chittajit.mitra@gmail.com



Standing together People protest against global inflation; (below) Ruchir Sharma. (GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

PURPOSEFUL CAPITALIST

Leading financial analyst and investor Ruchir Sharma on what ails capitalism and the possible cures

Varghese K. George
varghese.g@thehindu.co.in

Ruchir Sharma grew up in Delhi wondering what is wrong with socialism, but now he is grappling with what is wrong with capitalism. In his new book, *What Went Wrong With Capitalism*, he has a view, albeit not from the ringside, on how capitalism works, and when it does not.

As a Wall Street investor for decades, he is part of the cast and

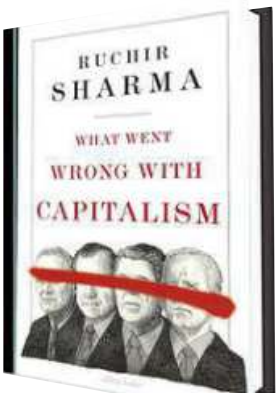
is at centrestage. Sharma traverses the two worlds of the U.S. and India, and democracy and capitalism. Strange as it might sound, Sharma writes that he is in agreement with a lot of what American Senator Bernie Sanders, who calls himself a socialist, says is wrong with capitalism. In fact, he is in agreement with many critics of capitalism, but disconnects with most of them on how to resolve its crisis.

'Soulmate of democracy'
He does not push for more state intervention as is usually argued, but points out that its own restoration will save capitalism. Sharma detests socialism as much as he does sugar because he thinks both blight human capacity. Democracy and capitalism are "soulmates," he says.

His father was a navy officer, causing a young Sharma, born in Tamil Nadu, to move across India, and then to Singapore, which turned out to be a moment of discovery for him. Singapore's rise, Sharma concluded, came from the economic freedom it accorded to its citizens, despite the political restrictions. He

developed a keen interest in reading, particularly on political and economic models, and philosophy. It was also the time the Soviet experiment was ending, and India was in liberalising mode. In 1992, by the time he was finishing school in New Delhi, Sharma had figured out enough about the world of finance to start writing a column for a business daily. He continues writing op-eds and books till date. "Capitalism is about giving people as much economic freedom as possible and socialism seems very oppressive. Socialism for me is about the government deciding for you what you should do, rather than you as an individual having the right to decide what you should do," Sharma says.

That formative thought has remained unshaken for Sharma, despite the turmoil of democracy which many scholars link to capitalism. On the contrary, it is the "socialisation of risk" and "socialism for the rich" that are unsettling the U.S., Sharma counters. Sharma's latest book was prompted when he noticed the distortions brought about by the government stimulus for the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. "Easy money and no accountability pushed capitalism into a crisis," he says. Sharma pushes back against a widely-held belief that governments are in retreat since the dawn of the Reagan-Thatcher



What Went Wrong With Capitalism
Ruchir Sharma
Allen Lane
₹999

era. On the contrary, governments have continuously expanded in recent decades, through spending and regulation. "Such government interventions unfairly protect the incumbent and create barriers for the entry of new players."

Motivated by ideas not money
Sharma, an investor who handled billion-dollar funds at Morgan Stanley earlier, is now focused on a relatively smaller fund on emerging markets. His fascination for big themes sits well with his day job which involves making investment decisions based on the political climate and policy trajectory of locations. But what motivates him are ideas, not money. It helps that both go together for Sharma. "My mouth is where my money is."
"Money buys me the freedom to do what I want," he says. He travels the world to watch films, sprints nearly every daily – his career best is 11.4 seconds for 100 metres – and keeps alcohol at bay. Most of Sharma's friends are writers, journalists, and thinkers. Sharma and a handful of his friends set out on a road journey during the Indian elections whenever they happen. He hopes to see a more capitalistic India.



Scan the QR code to watch Ruchir Sharma in conversation on magazine. thehindu.com

The power of acceptance

What winning the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar means to K. Vaishali

Nandini Bhatia

But I look able-bodied to everyone," writes K. Vaishali in her memoir, *Homeless* (2023). With these words, she opens a discourse on issues we are conditioned to be silent on – the impact of invisible and undiagnosed disabilities on a person; the shortcomings of an education system which fails to accommodate children with differences; a society's intolerance for anyone who defies prescribed norms, and

more. Vaishali, who won the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar (English), 2024, says writing with the compounding effect of dyslexia and dysgraphia was a "transformative experience".

Vaishali lived a life of alienation and dissonance till she found an outlet in writing, although it has not been easy. "To tell my story in a responsible, balanced, and engaging way, I had to recall, relive, and rethink all aspects of an abusive childhood multiple times," she admits. She has persevered,



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

nonetheless: "I wanted to illustrate how having an unstable childhood could compound the mental health effects of being queer and disabled." At the same time, Vaishali has been acutely aware that as an author she holds the "narrative power" and, hence, acknowledges the responsibility to be fair but honest.
A late diagnosis of neurodivergence was frustrating. "I've spent my whole life feeling like I didn't belong with anyone or



Homeless: Growing Up Lesbian and Dyslexic in India
K. Vaishali
Simon & Schuster
₹499

anywhere, but I didn't know why until I found these identities. Before this discovery, I was extremely guarded, keeping my childhood abuse a secret and hiding my writing from others because of a fear of judgement due to my undiagnosed

learning disorders." She wonders, in hindsight, what an early diagnosis could have meant: "Would I have still developed an anxiety disorder? An eating disorder? Would I suffer from impostor syndrome? How much more productive and easier would my life be if I had learnt to use assistive software like a screen reader early on?"

From living with the fear of the everyday to discovering and accepting herself, she has come a long way. So has her family: "My mother has made peace with it... She has been supportive from the beginning, even attending the book launch in Delhi. She has also had to engage in patient conversations with many of our extended family members who felt offended by my book." Winning the award has softened the blow.

The interviewer is an independent feature writer. Instagram: [@read.dream.repeat](https://www.instagram.com/read.dream.repeat)

K. Vaishali (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

Dissent via *samosa* packets
Art born out of crises often shape-shifts into acts of resistance. U.K.-based Bangladeshi artist Sofia Karim's idea of resistance art has risen through personal stories. "My uncle [renowned photojournalist and activist Shahidul Alam] was jailed in 2013, which was the turning point," she says. He was jailed for 107 days on charges of "provocative statements" against the Information and Communications Technology Act of Bangladesh. Alam has also been on the forefront of the coverage surrounding the recent anti-government protests that toppled Bangladesh's long-serving Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. "When I was campaigning for him, I had to engage with this community of artists and activists that has been his world. Once I connected with them, the momentum built up. I began working with solidarity groups in the U.K. that have been active for the last 30 or more years, focusing on anti-racist and anti-imperialist movements, war on terror and Islamophobia. That's when I realised that maybe art is a way to activate and vocalise some of the issues they face."



ART FROM RUBBLE AND DESPAIR



of a physical protest at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. Today, she is mobilising monetary support for the Palestine cause by offering to remodel bits and portions of homes in the U.K., the remunerations for which are used for donations. "We have done 11 or so projects, and some students have now got involved. It is also a way to bring activism into our architectural practice which is not done often," says Karim,

adding, "When you are an activist, one side of your work is very loud and direct in its messaging, and it needs to be. But most artists and activists have another side to them, where their work is a lot more quiet and inward."

Archives of lived realities
While patronage for arts is already vexed, these difficulties are compounded in areas of conflict, believes documentary filmmaker and



writer Sanjay Kak from Kashmir. "We all must share in those [responsibilities]. What artists are probably ordained to do is to perform the role of the avant-garde, and to find the crack in the brick wall, the chink in the armour. Open up the discourse, and look for ways of connecting old ideas and thinking up new ones," he says.

The filmmaker's curated book project, *Witness*, features the work of nine Kashmiri photographers (from 1986 to 2016) who stray away from the typified image of the valley that has gone through decades of unrest. "What the book also



does is provide a model for a certain kind of collective effort. It's not that the nine photographers were a group or will ever be one. But the generosity with which they shared their work for the book created a new thing, something that became visible as 'Kashmiri photography,'" says Kak. The project, published in 2017, took on the

job of an archive, with the sole aim to document the history of a conflict for posterity. In 2023, over 5,000 km away in Sudan, as intense fighting broke out in mid-April, capital city Khartoum, home to many art galleries and cultural museums, bore the brunt. Looting and vandalism were rampant. In June, Sudan National Museum was reportedly raided by the RSF fighters. Since then, there have been attempts to safeguard the cultural heritage of the nation, by artists and curators alike. In a project that identified almost 150 Sudanese artists who need rehabilitation, curators Raheim Shadad, Aza Satti and Mahsin Ismail started an online campaign to procure aid, and later sold art prints in Cairo to raise donations. Shadad also started an artists residency programme for refugees. The project helped some artists to relocate to other parts of the continent to continue their work.

Hope is not a constant emotion in stretched times. What has remained constant, however, is that even in the thick of adversities world over, artists continue to create. Back in Deir al-Balah, Baroud's lines have become simpler and

From the interstices

What sometimes goes amiss is the shared history of conflict areas that fall within geographical proximity. Bharatanatyam exponent Anita Ratnam says that there is a lot of art being created within these interstices, which is influenced by the idea of a fleeting life. "If you watch artists from Palestine or Israel or Lebanon, you can see the jagged edges in their work. Their bodies move in an accelerated frenzy and they have a very raw approach to their work. They are comfortable making audiences uncomfortable."

She recalls a performance that happened in Chennai 20 years ago. "The Israeli embassy had sent us a celebrated solo artist, Rina Schenfeld. In one performance, she wore a hat made of barbed wire with a visor. That, she said, was inspired by the barbed wire fence at the Gaza Strip." Part of her choreography had her moving in an anguished manner, without sound. Her body was emoting anguish. "That was what it seemed like when people were divided by the fence but were eager to connect. She took a political situation much older than October 7 and created a work of art."

sharper. The details, textures and colour gradients that he once turned to are now absent in his work. Instead, he uses symbols with specific meanings: crescents, arrows, tulip flowers, tents and bodies. "Determination comes from not looking back and moving forward. I have vowed to myself to continue and try to survive as much as possible. I have decided to postpone my grief," he states.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
The nation is reeling – and rightly so – in the wake of the horrific rape and murder of a female doctor trainee at R.G. Kar Medical College in Kolkata, now known as the Abbaya case. The crime took place on August 9, just a week before India's 78th Independence Day – to achieve which, many women had fought heroically. It occurred 10 days before the festival of Raksha Bandhan, when brothers vow to protect their sisters, and a few weeks before Navaratri/Durga Puja, among the country's most important religious festivals worshipping the divine feminine.

This incident, which has sparked massive protests and candlelight vigils across India and even abroad, would be terrible and shameful anywhere in the world, but it is particularly painful in a country where there is a centuries-old tradition of immortalising the power of



WHAT ARE WE TEACHING OUR CHILDREN?

In the wake of the Kolkata doctor's rape and murder, the author discusses what society needs to get right

women. Our epics, histories and religious texts provide ample proof of this. This is the country where Draupadi took men – including her husbands, elders and even the king – severely to task for not preventing her shameful disrobing in open court. The land where Sita refused to undergo an unfair 'Agni Pariksha' (trial by fire) in Ayodhya to prove her chastity; where Rani Laxmi Bai, Matangini Hazra and Kasturba died resisting the British – on the battlefield, in freedom marches, and in jail. Where

even now in thousands of homes and temples, the *Devi Mahatmya* (also known as *Chandi* or *Saptashati*) is chanted every day. And where even the curmudgeonly Manu, author of the infamous *Manusmriti*, asserts: "Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased."

But can the gods be pleased with the condition of India today, where, since the 2012 Nirbhaya case in Delhi, reported rape numbers have increased despite stricter laws? In 2012, according to Statista, reported rape cases were less

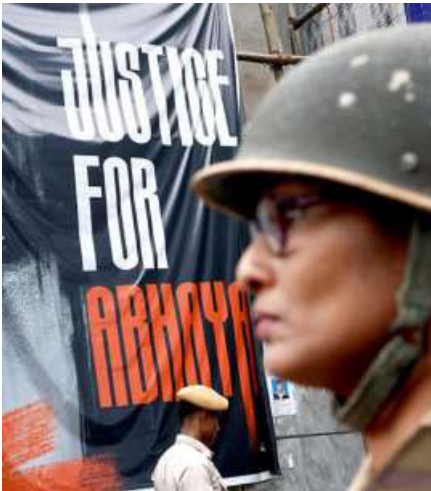
than 25,000. In 2022, a decade later, the number exceeded 31,000. If it to this we add other crimes committed against women, such as trafficking, acid throwing and murder, the annual numbers swell to almost 450,000 (National Crime Records Bureau). And only the gods know how many cases remain unreported.

New lessons
While we wait for more news from the ongoing investigation, appropriate punishment for the criminals, and tougher legislation, including laws on

workplace safety, is there something we can do?

Yes. Not 'can' but 'must'. Because though laws and their enforcement are crucial, they are clearly not enough. We must focus on appropriately educating our women – and more so, our men.

For decades, we've trained our girls and young women supremely well – but in all the wrong ways. Haven't we taught them to wear the "right" clothes, avoid "dangerous" places, and be quiet, in case they say something that might spark anger or violence?



Bold voices Over the past few weeks, protests have rocked various parts of the country, condemning the Kolkata doctor's rape and murder. (PTI, REUTERS & K.V.S. GIRI)



Haven't we told them to get home before dark, avoid mixed company, and if travelling in a cab, be sure to call a (preferably male) and stay on the phone with him until they reach home?

But now we need to teach them different things: to fight for their dreams, to stand up for themselves, report misconduct, reject victim-shaming, reclaim the night.

Even more importantly, we must educate boys and men to be respectful of all women – not just their mothers and sisters. To speak out when they hear degrading sexist jokes. To understand what consent means and how important it is. To protest when they observe

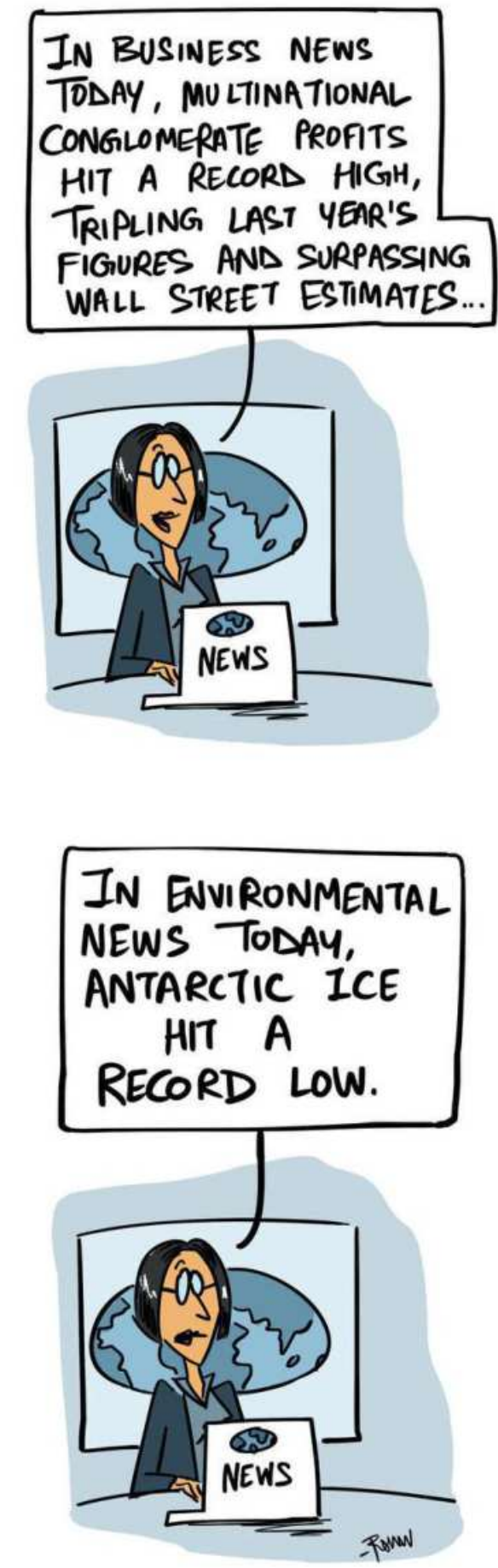
sexual harassment. To be brave enough to help a woman if they see that she is in danger. To feel the weight of the burden that women have been bearing for centuries and join hands with them to cast it off. To understand that women have the same dreams as men – and the same right to success. And to know that this success will make our country stronger.

Then, I believe, the gods will be truly pleased as they look upon India.

The writer is the author of 22 books, including The Palace of Illusions, The Forest of Enchantments, and Independence.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty



In artist K.G. Subramanyan's birth centenary year, an exhibition of his drawings from three cities portrays what it means to be an Indian in contemporary society

KGS AND HIS IDEA OF INDIA

A.S. Panneerselvam

The celebrated artist, teacher and public intellectual Kalpathi Ganapathi Subramanyan (KGS) was born in Kerala a hundred years ago. At a deeper level, his journey from Palghat to Vadodra, via Chennai, Santiniketan, Baroda and again, Santiniketan, exemplifies the best of the idea of India. From the 1997 book by academic Sunil Khilnani to the erudite dialogue between historian Romila Thapar and theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, we have a framework to understand the contours of the

idea of India. While these scholars articulate it in words, the visual language of KGS provides a graphic and pictorial reading of a nation that went through the excesses of both colonial and post-colonial regimes.

The probing question that emerges from the world of Khilnani, Thapar, Spivak and KGS is: what does it mean to be an Indian in contemporary society? I try to answer this through the aesthetic and political journey of KGS, drawing from my personal interaction with the artist and from his prodigious art, writings and lectures over the decades. I am associated with

the exhibition called *Tale of Three Cities*. These are select drawings he did in Beijing, Oxford and New York, and will be displayed at Chennai's DakshinaChitra Museum from September 7 to December 1. KGS was fondly called 'Manida' by his friends and students, and my last interaction with him was in 2012 when he had two shows in Chennai: one at the Lalit Kala Academy and another at Focus Gallery. He visited Cholamandal Artists Village, where I live, and the DakshinaChitra Museum, and interacted with both artists and the general public. A fine raconteur, he spoke about his travels across the country from

the colonial times to the present.

Early influences

The foremost quality of his work is his amazing fluidity. This comes from the fact that he was a Tamil hailing from the Palghat region of Kerala. For Tamils, it is Malayali region, and for Malayalis, it is Tamil region. He was born when the freedom struggle was gaining momentum. History documents the refuge provided by Pondicherry, which was under French control, to Aurobindo Ghose and Subramania Bharati. Mahe provided KGS a similar escape from English colonialism. Mahe today

remains a part of the Union Territory of Puducherry, but is situated well within the Malabar region of Kerala. He lived in Mahe until he was 17 and then moved to Chennai. At the beginning of his wonderful journey of curiosity, beauty, belonging and independence, he took a major decision that remained his hallmark throughout his artistic existence: he signed his works as 'Mani' in Tamil.

Most biographical references record the fact that KGS did economics at Presidency College in Chennai. His involvement in the freedom struggle led to his incarceration and he was debarred from government colleges. His interactions with D.P. Roy Choudhury, K.C.S. Paniker and S. Dhanapal gave him

the idea of joining Santiniketan, which was outside colonial administration. In 1944, he joined Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan, as a student and graduated in 1948, a year after Independence. His palimpsest of techniques, approach to art and art education draw from the benevolent mentorship of Benode Behari Mukherjee, Nandalal Bose and Ramkinkar Baij. Eminent artist Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, art historian R. Siva Kumar, and founder of The Seagull Foundation for the Arts, Naveen Kishore, have documented the multiple streams that have contributed to the artistic universe of KGS and his sphere of influence on modern Indian canvases, murals and drawings.

Not existing in silos
At Santiniketan, KGS witnessed the assimilatory and accommodative power of art when his teacher Nandalal Bose was invited to visually craft the Indian Constitution. Chennai-based

inquisitive and affirmative. His early works are, in a sense, an artistic dialogue between Gandhi and Tagore mediated through lines and colours.

His journey through various cities in the world makes one aspect clear: while particularly interested in subcontinental aesthetic moorings, he could easily weave the universal into his work in an unobtrusive manner. I had a preview of more than 100 of his drawings that will be exhibited at DakshinaChitra Museum. They capture diverse realities: the populous Beijing, an erudite Oxford and an affluent New York. These drawings give an insight into his world of cross-cultural interactions and break the narrow nationalistic silos that are erected ruthlessly by multiple forces.

About cultural education

In 2021, I was a member of a committee constituted by the State Planning Commission of Tamil Nadu to look at ways to make cultural education in the State more vibrant and effective. KGS made my task easy by addressing many of these questions in his letters. In 2008, a collection of 17 of his letters was published and these missives, in broad brush strokes, addressed the various questions confronting aesthetic pedagogy in India. His 1972 letter about upgrading the sculpture training centre at Mahabalipuram into a College of Traditional Arts, Sculpture and Architecture guided my own response half-a-century later.

In 1980, Indira Gandhi returned to power and the excesses of Emergency were already a distant nightmare for a vast majority. At that point, KGS returned to his alma mater, Santiniketan, as Professor of Painting. But, his end came in the city where he spent most of his time teaching and creating art: Vadodra, nee, Baroda.

Tale of Three Cities; September 7 to December 1; DakshinaChitra Museum, Muttukadu.

The writer is a fellow of the Raja Muthiah Research Library, Chennai.



BINGE WATCH

In a post-viral world

Why listening to this podcast on people who briefly turned into online sensations is must-have Internet education

and thus began the viral phenomenon of 'Alice the goldfish' and its Lazarus-like return from the dead. Sadly, the fish dies of its wounds (experts surmise that a bird of prey had probably dropped it onto the doctor's lawn, mid-flight) a week later, but not before the story makes it to news headlines around the world.

From the beginning, two things stand out about Loftus' approach to this story. One, this is a sociological podcast, not a true crime one, so Loftus is not majorly concerned about "what really happened" – even though

conspiracy theorists are a big part of Alice the goldfish's viral fame. Loftus says plainly, "Whatever brought Alice to Dr. Beska's lawn is between Alice and God." Two, Loftus is primarily interested in how online fame intersects with a "regular" life like Dr. Beska's.

Remember, this is a regular man with a busy day job. He isn't an influencer or 'shock jocks'. He has no locus for understanding the demands of online fame, or

indeed, the monetisation aspect of it all. This is a man who, before becoming the 'main character', posted 'swift memes and Taylor Swift content, along with some observations on the medical profession'. It is this 'clash of two worlds' that makes the episode so approachable and interesting.

Up close with tech
Sixteenth Minute is just as effective when the main event or character is inextricably linked with larger-scale patterns and business shifts in the online world. A good example of this is the episode titled 'HQ Trivia and the Quiz Daddy', about HQ Trivia, one of the fastest-growing mobile apps in the world between 2017 and 2019. The app would host increasingly difficult trivia-based multiple-choice questions – Loftus interviews the man who hosted the quiz streams and came to be known as the app's public face, 'Quiz Daddy' Scott Rogowsky. The story of Rogowsky cannot be told without his ego clashes with HQ Trivia and Vine co-founders Rus Yusupov and Colin Kroll.

What emerges in the podcast is a vivid portrait of how frenetic the worlds of technology and media were in the period 2017-2019. Technological advancements and the ill-fated 'pivot to video' championed by Mark Zuckerberg were beginning to tank media houses. The once-fawning media coverage of Silicon Valley CEOs was changing into something a lot more critical, and *Sixteenth Minute* picks on all of these strands one by one.

This is a highly recommended podcast for anybody seeking to educate themselves in how Internet culture has evolved over the last decade or so. And if you are already 'terminally online', you'll probably be nodding along every few minutes.

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



MODERN TIMES

STEP OUTSIDE THE BUBBLE

Nothing will really change until affluent Indians start engaging with the country, be it for women’s safety or clean air



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R KUMAR

It takes a big crime for affluent Indians to be jolted into taking a look around them. This fortnight, news of the rape and murder of a young doctor in Kolkata managed to keep this group busy. Now my social media feed is filled with people, who otherwise only post pictures of their holidays or brunches, lamenting the lack of safety for women in India. ‘10 years after the gruesome Delhi rape, nothing has changed,’ they say.

Well, the truth is, during these 10 years, there hasn’t been a single day when there were no news reports about rape or murder in some part of the country. But for India’s elite – yes that 2.2% who never fail to highlight that only

they pay income tax – a crime is a crime only if it happens to someone like them. The 2012 rape and murder of Jyoti Singh struck a chord because it happened in a tony South Delhi neighbourhood. The Kolkata rape story hit a nerve because although the victim was not from an affluent family, she was a doctor who graduated from a reputed institution. Unless the crime falls into the category of “it could have happened to one of us”, it is irrelevant.

Blinkers on

One of the reasons social change is so hard to push for in India is because its educated upper-class chooses not to advocate for it. These are the people who are

leaders of companies, senior executives and businessmen, people who have the affluence and the influence to make sure their voices are heard. Yet, this is the cohort that is least likely to take the risk of antagonising the powers that be by raising any questions or seeking accountability. They work only in the narrow sphere of furthering their own interest.

To be fair, this is what both society and our education system teaches us; that in order to get ahead, you put your blinkers on and focus only on the goal at hand, which is to get ahead of the other person. Any kind of activism or involvement in agitations is seen as a distraction, a waste of

time, and those who indulge in these activities are deemed to be losers, people one must not associate with or be influenced by. The pursuit of personal success in an economy defined by scarcity requires single-minded focus on chasing your economic goals. Do this for three decades, through school, college and 15 years of work, building layer upon layer to insulate your bubble from the rest of the country, and you are left with neither the sense of outside reality nor the skills to question or change it.

Outsourcing the dirty job

On top of this, we have built a culture in which we always have someone else cleaning up after us.

Nothing in this life trains us to roll up our shirt sleeves and do something ourselves. We don’t build, we don’t maintain, we don’t repair. We outsource all the dirty work, including how to change the country for the better. I live in Gurugram, a city that has, seemingly, been made to cater purely to this demographic, where the gates are high, the security is strict, and everything is created to keep the real world out. It’s filled with people who take pride in their ability to seek and get “only the best”.

Yet, every winter, when the air becomes a putrid, killer grey, there is collective chest beating, but not much else. Other than discussions on which is the best

air purifier that can be bought, there is no conversation at all about whether the problem can be solved. There are no protests, no demonstrations, no one petitions the government to ask why stubble burning has not been banned. People just cough and wheeze and avoid outdoor brunches, while they wait for “someone” to “do something” about this.

Truth is, nothing in India will significantly shift until its elite starts engaging with the country. It is convenient for the political class to make “activism” a bad word. And, so far, the educated, urbane Indian has gone along with this interpretation. But 30 years after liberalisation, when these same people are proudly pitching India as a great market and a rapidly developing country, it is rather irresponsible to shirk from the work of actually making it a better place. Only the white-collared can liberate activism from the murkiness that has been attached to it. In fact, they can even imbue some glamour to it. When the CXOs are in the streets, seeking safety for women or asking for clean air – really, the bare minimum that can be done for a citizenry – that’s when the needle will move. I am not holding my breath though.



Veena Venugopal is the author of *Independence Day: A People’s History*.

Bob Jones

East thought his hand was good enough for an “Unusual No Trump” bid, even at unfavorable vulnerability. Most, we think, would agree with him. These two-suited bids can be terrific, but they carry a cost. Should you wind up defending, the declarer will have a roadmap to the play.

East won the opening diamond lead with his king and

GOREN BRIDGE

Roadmap

East-West vulnerable, North deals

shifted to the jack of hearts. Declarer won with the ace and drew trumps, noting the 2-2 split. East had advertised at least 5-5 in the red suits, which meant that he had, at most, one club. South ruffed a heart in hand and

led the 10 of clubs, prepared to run it if West played low. West covered with the jack, losing to dummy’s king. South continued with a low club from dummy to his eight and West’s nine. The defense could cash a diamond,

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

The bidding:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1♣ 2NT* 3♠ 4♥
4♠ All pass
*2 lowest unbid suits, at least 5-5

Opening lead: Two of ♦

but South would eventually take the marked club finesse for the queen and land his contract. Well played, even with a roadmap.

Several club plays would have let South play the suit for one

loser, but South started with the 10 from his hand in case East had the singleton nine. Should that be the case, South would have no club losers! No other singleton with East would have affected the result.

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Humans and animals!

Berty Ashley

1 Born on this date in 1875, Edgar Rice Burroughs was an American author whose adventure stories were featured in newspapers for many years. His most popular creation was Viscount Greystoke, whose family gets marooned in Africa and, as a child, gets raised by a family of apes. How do we know this character, who is known for his iconic palindromic call and friendship with wild animals?

2 In Roman mythology, Romulus and Remus were twin brothers who were abandoned by the river Tiber to die on the orders of King Amulius. They were fed and taken care of by a she-wolf. Eventually they grew to become leaders, and Romulus built a city on Palatine Hill, becoming its first king. This is the origin story of which historic city?

3 Harriet was a tortoise who passed away in 2006 at the age of 175. Her final years were under the care of Steve Irwin at the Australian Zoo. She was supposedly collected from the Galápagos Islands by an intrepid researcher in 1835 at the age of five. Who was the person who picked up Harriet?

4 Marengo was an Arabian horse who was born in 1793 and became the favourite ride of one of the greatest military strategists. Marengo carried his rider through many historic wars and once galloped 128 km in five hours. He was finally captured at



History in colours The 19th century painting, *Waterloo*, by Charles Auguste Guillaume Steuben. (ISTOCK/GETTYIMAGES)

the Battle of Waterloo and now his skeleton is on display at the Royal War Museum. Who was his iconic rider?

5 Kit Walker is a highly skilled athlete, fighter, and detective who brings justice and peace to the natives of Bangalla. His ever-present faithful companions are Hero the horse and Devil the mountain wolf, who both save his life multiple times. How better do we know Mr. Walker?

6 ‘Kenya’ is one of three Bengal tigers that were pets of a sportsperson. He had them till they grew too big to handle, then gave away two to a local sanctuary. The third, named ‘Kenya’, was with him for 16 years and even starred in a movie along with him. Who is Kenya’s owner who, in the movie, deals with a

group of friends who kidnap his tiger?

7 When the acclaimed poet Lord Byron joined Cambridge University as a student, he was told that there was a strict rule against bringing his pet dog to campus. To counter this, he went to Stourbridge Fair and bought an animal that had been part of a circus act. He argued it wasn’t forbidden by the rules and made it his pet. What animal did he have that he fed bread and honey from the kitchens?

8 Emperor Jahangir had a huge collection of birds, which he had his court artist, Ustad Mansur, immortalise in life-like paintings. There was one that he did of a bird that had been gifted to the emperor by sailors. The painting is historically important, as it is

the first colour depiction we have of the bird that we lost in 1662. Which bird is this?

9 In 1967, Air India approached eccentric surrealist Salvador Dali to design an ashtray to be used on their flights. The beautiful dishes in blue and white became highly sought-after in the art world. When asked about payment, Dali asked for an animal. Air India flew ‘Big Baby’ and a mahout from Bangalore to Geneva and then trucked it to his house, where villagers danced around in celebration. What animal did AI gift Dali for the ash trays?

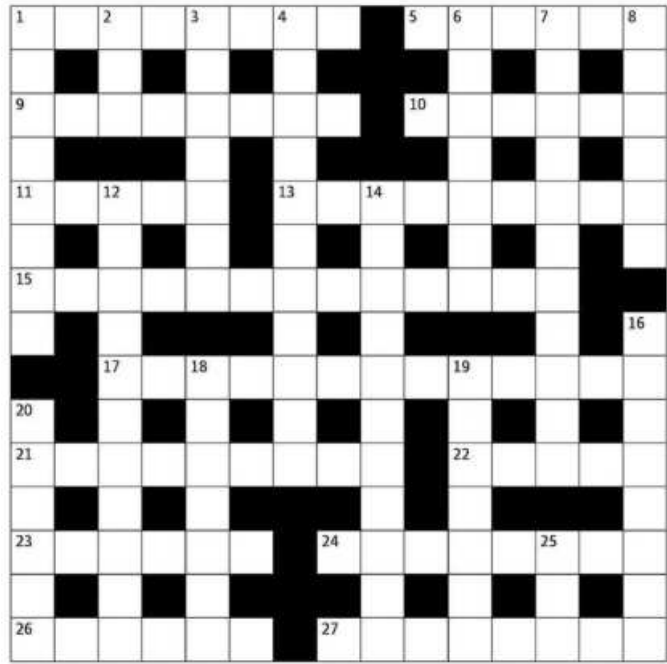
10 In the mid-1980s, two of the biggest musical superstars got together, and being fans of each other’s music, they had an idea to record a duet. One of them was Freddie Mercury from Queen. He stepped into the other’s home studio but was stunned to see a llama inside. The other refused to let his pet out and unable to put up with the llama, Freddy left without recording. Whose llama was this that stopped this epic recording?

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. Tarzan
2. Rome
3. Charles Darwin
4. Napoleon
5. The Phantom
6. Mike Tyson
7. A bear
8. A dodo
9. An elephant
10. Michael Jackson

Answers

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3322



Across

- 1 Short shabby detective – US – I went there! (8)
- 5 English: scratching head, unable to qualify (6)
- 9 Edward by island on sailboat, reversing at water’s edge (8)
- 10 Awkward, grand and long – at the outset, uncle’s hosted (6)
- 11 Everyman is improperly described by two lines making damaging accusation (5)
- 13 Squeeze a beauty, we’re told, to arouse memories (4,1,4)
- 15 Postpone unit’s dance and indoor game (5,8)
- 17 Range of human inaction unsettling (8,5)
- 21 On track, bat’s simple stroke (3,6)
- 22 Nosy astronauts left (5)
- 23 Studious, tense and wimpish (6)
- 24 Swayed, being camp (8)
- 26 Once again despatched gift without slightest hint of provocation (6)
- 27 Suffers sea song I butchered (8)

Down

- 1 Feuding family’s pills laced with uranium (8)
- 2 ‘Animal star sign.’ ‘Chameleon?’ ‘Not entirely.’ (3)
- 3 Brief moments with that French woman – and wine (7)
- 4 ‘Undecorated’? Right to get rise, as base layer’s been applied (11)

- 6 Amateur artist to capture rising waterfall (7)
- 7 Great amounts rain heavily on blokes protecting duck (11)
- 8 In placid manner, pick six characters from seven lycanthropes (6)
- 12 Ones drawing fictional pig? They appeal to the girls (4-7)
- 14 What the absent-minded (or uncaring) greengrocer does (3,4,1,3)
- 16 Doesn’t leave out trendy crosswords’ building blocks: about 500! (8)
- 18 Upriver, glimpsed along Nile’s drainage area: national, primarily? (7)
- 19 Relate to sorrow (7)
- 20 Literary figure found meandering in Detroit, mostly (6)
- 25 Stoves regularly seen in sets (3)

SOLUTION NO. 3321





ILLUSTRATION: SREEDITH R KUMAR

Rishika Mandal
rishikamandal9d@gmail.com

It is time that we realised how pressing an issue it is becoming with each passing day, engulfing every culture and civilisation, irrespective of nationality, race, caste, education, income, social status, age and every such aspect.

In most recorded cases, the victims cannot identify, in the first place, that they are being abused, owing to widespread fallacies and limited understanding. Things build up so subtly, unpredictably and gradually that they are not even aware of what is happening.

The abuser turns out to be someone they adore and love. The relation commences so sweetly, oh so much like it's a "rainbow every day and full moon every night", so much so you wouldn't imagine in the wildest of your dreams that someday sadism is going to creep in. There is no suspicion as the victim cease to know or even understand what is happening, what is normal and what isn't, what is real and what isn't; the abuser knows exactly and too precisely what he is up to and how it is unfolding and possibly heading towards.

The circumstances are skillfully woven that the victim begin holding herself responsible for provoking the violent responses, the unforeseen change in attitude. If only she could handle the situation placidly without any provocation, the violence will come to a full stop and life will be back on smooth tracks once more, she thinks.

But all of such attempts crash to futility, for

When homes turn hell

Domestic violence takes a psychological, emotional, financial and physical toll

slowly but surely, her self-esteem is chipped away, eroded to non-existence. She is given to understand that she is some useless rag, with absolutely no worth, at the mercy of the vindictive assailant. Brainwashed, exhausted and drained of any energy, any paltry hope or reason, she is surrounded with unexplained guilt, fear and trauma. Very soon, he has her walking on eggshells.

Unkindest cut

It is everywhere in every form – psychological, emotional, financial and physical. She is distanced from her family, friends, and relatives and any other possible sources of help and support, both geographically and psychologically, in an extremely unseemly and devious manner.

Life is a drudge, a burden to be dragged forward each passing day, gulping down all humiliation, for she is helpless. She can't seek any help, because she

possibly cannot risk telling anyone about it. There's always a reason convincing enough to cover every bruised neck, every sprained wrist, every black eye and every fractured ankle. She hides it from everyone, for her own sake. The stress ages her before time.

Why? What could be the crazy idea? Well, all the intimidation and assault is to assert control and authority over every facet of her life, to manipulate her. That's it, abject rage, coercive control, menace, humiliation, embarrassment, degradation, permanent trepidation and what not!

Why not leave? Well, if you must know, that is the most dangerous decision ever. Once she hints at that, she is done for. Often, it ends up in cases of homicide, owing to complex emotions. He can't stand to see her happy and if he can't be happy, neither can her. It is a selfish act by a coward and bully, committed in the most cruel and premeditated way.

It is high time to realise that this has to come to an end. We need to act and reach out to those in need. Remember, abuse breeds in silence. Break the silence. Talk to the victims, start a conversation, actively listen to what they have to say, be empathetic, don't be judgmental, stay calm and you could be the source of relief and hope for them. They may not open up; so be patient, look out for behavioural anomalies such as being overly meek, apologetic, anxious and always on edge, depressed; loss of interest in work and hobbies; frequent suicidal thoughts; being withdrawn and distant, and isolating from family and friends.

Be there for them and assure them, validate their feelings and finally help to form a safety plan.

How to fight compassion fatigue

Viji Varghese Eapen
vijichen@gmail.com

Compassion fatigue, a state of emotional and physical exhaustion, is characterised by a diminished capacity to empathise or feel compassion for others, often described as the "cost of caring". While second-hand grief refers to the indirect emotional impact of others' suffering, compassion fatigue encompasses both this and the direct, first-hand grief that many professionals endure.

The perception among these professionals that their roles transcend mere occupations, evolving into profound human commitments, can be attributed to this phenomenon, thereby intensifying their emotional burden. Exhaustion stems not only from the trauma of witnessing suffering but also from an inherent propensity for deep empathy. In essence, our professions necessitate not only intellectual engagement but also a profound emotional investment – a shared grief – intertwining reason with emotion, and the intellect with the heart.

Whether encountered directly or vicariously, shared grief underscores our intrinsic shared humanity. Recognising this compels us to empathise deeply, often at the expense of our own emotional well-being. The interconnectedness of human experience, while fostering solidarity, also amplifies the emotional toll on those in care-giving roles. Thus, the very essence of our shared humanity, which binds us together, paradoxically contributes to the phenomenon of compassion fatigue. The concept of shared humanity and shared grief profoundly impacts various professionals, including journalists, police personnel, doctors, nurses, disaster management workers, and priests. Journalists often bear witness to the world's tragedies, translating them into stories that inform and move the public. Police personnel, tasked with documenting and responding to crime and disaster, frequently encounter human suffering. Healthcare professionals, who see life and death daily, carry the weight of their patients' pain. Each of these roles involves a deep emotional engagement leading to compassion fatigue.

Women at the receiving end

They are the worst affected by alcoholism among men

Devina Albert
devinaalbert@gmail.com

Twenty years ago, we attended the wedding of a petite, carefree, intelligent girl, a commerce graduate, barely out of her teens. Looking radiant, she could not stop smiling on her wedding day. After that, she had little to smile about. Her husband and father-in-law (till his death a few years later) spent most of their earnings on liquor.

Within the next four years, she had given birth to a son and a daughter. And two more wine shops had opened in an area close to their house.

She could not go out to

work as her frail mother-in-law could not take care of the children. Her husband had become abusive and resisted being taken to a rehabilitation centre. He died when the children were in middle school, after being in and out of government hospitals for two years.

Looking me straight in the eye, she said with a sad smile, "Only after his death, things got better for us. I was able to take up a job to support my family." She worked as a receptionist in a private hospital. When she was 45, after much effort, she managed to get a government job.

There are thousands of similar stories.

At a counselling



ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

workshop addressing problems faced by college students, an alarming number of girls confided that their fathers' alcoholism and domestic abuse suffered by their mothers were ruining their lives. In a Spoken English class with 20 students, the simple exercise of speaking about their families became

traumatic for two of them who had alcoholic fathers and another two who had lost their fathers to alcoholism. An exceptionally motivated, intelligent, visually challenged girl, educated in a government-run special school, was desperate to take up employment to support her family. Her father was an alcoholic and her brother was becoming one.

We don't have to go looking for young and older women whose dreams became nightmares. Forced to discontinue their education, they work as household help or saleswomen. Their destiny is shaped not by their aspirations but by the alcoholism of fathers, husbands and brothers. They are everywhere. Apparently, now a far wider circle and much larger number suffer with no hope.

I could not help noticing that if he erred even by a few inches, several lives would be lost. When I drew his attention to this, he said that in life or on the road, it is better for at least one party to compromise. Wiser words could not have been spoken.

When the road became familiar, the passengers distracted themselves with fun and games. The music blared. There were loud bursts of laughter or joyous screams. Not once did the driver seek silence. Nothing seemed to come in the way of the journey.

As we proceeded, several other aspects of this drive came alive. For instance, I observed that unlike city drivers who seem to wear their patience on their sleeves, these mountain drivers were personification of the virtue. Of course, there were one or two exceptions as always, but even the short fuse never really lasted long. They seemed to realise that they had miles to go and could

not fritter their time and energy away.

The travellers became friendly with the driver. He was polite and responsive. He helped them as and when he could. He accepted their appreciation and the snacks that passed around with a smile. I thought he was reticent. But he proved to be otherwise, for he would engage in a conversation whenever we took a break.

When I highlighted this trait over dinner, his reply was fascinating. He remarked that when he was on the driver's seat, his whole being only focused on the road. Nothing else mattered. His statement reminded me of Arjuna who said that he could see only the eye of the bird in the archery test. I was grateful for the reiteration of the lesson, considering the fact that it was illustrated with a live example. After all, the cornerstone of any achievement in any field is based on concentration and consistency.



FEEDBACK

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

Cover story

Gen Z is such a stark difference when compared to Gen X, who had no financial literacy in the initial years of their careers. (Gen Z: breaking the 9 to 5; Aug. 25) I loved the article and it was good to read about how fast these youngsters are adapting to the ever-dynamic global scenario.

Sajna Hameed

A limited few among Gen Z may have their career choices clear before them. But for the majority, the first priority is to get a decent job. A few privileged ones from elite institutions may be thinking of retiring at 35, but for a majority of Gen Z, the hunt to find a job is still on at 35.

Deepak Taak

Generational divides were there from time immemorial. But due to technological leaps, the divides have become more pronounced now. Inter-generational dialogues would certainly help shrink the walls but not its obliterations. Flexibility on the part of millennials and giving Gen Z their rightful place is the need of the hour.

Ayyasserri Raveendranath

Gen Z is smart, with financial and digital literacy, have clear-cut ideas about their corporate, economic, social, democratic and civilian rights, and are actually more practical about social issues such as gender divide, pay parity, and equality. Instead of calling them a desperate and high-maintenance generation, we must appreciate their zeal and courage to ignite social change.

Kirti Wadhawan



MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

The dark side of digital dependence

The dreaded blue screen can throw life out of gear in the most unlikely of places

Rachna Lakhpati

Under watch

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H. Kalpana Rao

Dog days

When man's best friend attack hapless children and the infirm

Kuruvilla John

Celebrating Hanami

It's a Japanese tradition of viewing flowers in spring

Sharadha Preethi

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CULTURE, COLOURISM AND CGI

Digital artist Samyukta Madhu's newest series, *Reincarnations*, offers fresh perspectives on South Asian beauty and identity

Nidhi Gupta

The vermilion powder is thick all along her centre parting, the *kumkum* bindi large on her forehead, her fingers drenched in *alta*, the maroon sari hugging her frame like a shroud. The red is interrupted only by metallic accents – piercings in her upper lip and chin, a double gold band on the bridge of her nose, long strings of heavy temple jewellery in her ears. A *kolam* grid, also in metal, emerges on her onyx-like chest as her feline eyes open to reveal the green of, and a certain lifelessness in, her pupils. The woman stands in a gently flowing stream, but as one absorbs the details of this artwork, titled *The Wife*, that eerie sensation is inescapable, that of hovering on the edge of the ‘uncanny valley’.

“You can’t get too emotional with 3D or CGI work, it is always a bit stiff,” explains Samyukta Madhu, the Chennai-born digital artist based out of Berlin who has created *The Wife*

among a series of virtual models – using 3D and CGI softwares – as part of her latest series *Reincarnations: Ghosts of a South Asian Past*. Madhu, 29, was struck by the jewellery she saw in colonial-era photographs of women from Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, that she came across a year ago while surfing the Internet. It also made her wonder how notions of beauty might have been different “had westernisation and colonisation not wiped out so much of our culture”.

“The women in this series look really beautiful but there’s also a sense that they are not human; that they might be a bit robotic,” she says over a phone call from Berlin, days before the series is set to be unveiled at Chennai’s Collage (on till September 9), through mammoth 12-foot-high installations, accompanied by an ambient soundscape composed by Elm – an artistic choice to create a sense of awe among her viewers. “So much of the fashion and beauty industries are inspired by science fiction. Movies like *Blade Runner* and *Ghost*



in the *Shell* have such a cool aesthetic – just the way we think about bodies and technology and society is really interesting.”

At the same time, Madhu is intrigued by the middle ground between ancient cultures and hypothetical futures. Also part of *Reincarnations* is *The Regent*, whose facade is adorned with traditional jewellery reimagined for a digital environment, designs triggered by questions such as: What if metal could float, or emerge from the skin? How can we imagine a marriage between jewellery and cybernetics?

Elsewhere, *The Priestess* sports skin that is “inspired by cold, black wet stone” and whose chest has white *kolam* inked on it, “reminiscent of the chalk patterns

we see drawn outside our homes and places of worship”.

Body as canvas
The *kolam* is a recurring motif in this series, and it carries its own weight. In an Instagram caption posted along with *The Wife*, Madhu writes: “When I think about a wife, I think about a home. She makes a house a home. What if we drew *kolams* on women’s bodies instead of on our doorsteps? What if the *kolam* was a piece of heavy jewellery? Is it security or a burden?”

Even as she makes a comment about the beauty industry’s persistent colourist problem through *Reincarnations*, she has always been intrigued by human bodies – especially their potential to be



canvases for demonstrating identity, self-made or imposed. In 2017, Madhu, then based in NYC and working as an illustrator, tasted Internet fame (and notoriety) with her series of vibrant neon-hued artworks that showcased the new-age south Asian woman – pink hair, Kali tattoos, cigarettes and temple jewellery, all in one frame.

Keen to explore the “endlessness of bodies in digital and physical spaces”, she felt drawn to 3D and CGI art, which she taught herself during the pandemic when she “had a lot of time”. In 2023, at Le Grand Palais in Paris, she put up a show of 3D artworks called *Habeas Corpus*, displayed on 10 metre-high LED screens, featuring artificial humans with hyper realistic skin, from which

emerged abstract symbols, codes and script that seem almost mercurial in texture. “In CGI, you can really do anything with the human body,” she says.

Flexibility of a digital artist
Making 3D art is nothing like AI, Madhu clarifies, adding that she’s not tried the latter yet. Rather, she says, it’s a laborious, painstaking process involving multiple steps and softwares. For *Reincarnations*, she mentions using Cinema 3D for composition, Octane for rendering, Substance Painter to paint the tattoos on her characters’ skin. “It’s a pain,” she laughs. “But I guess I like the flexibility of being a digital artist. I’m not burdened with the need for a studio, supplies, canvases. I like the freedom of having my studio on a laptop.”

Digital art also comes naturally to the Parsons School of Design graduate, who started making art on tablets and posting it online at age 12. Along with the freedom to create, is the freedom to explore ideas at the axis of progressiveness and tradition, and speculate on alternative timelines or different futures. But how does the artist’s role change when the hand, or the skills involved in drawing, sketching, painting, are no longer needed as much as they used to be?

“I do think AI is a brand new frontier,” she says, “and there’s going to be a lot of plagiarism and legal issues. Right now, there’s so much rubbish on Instagram that it’s very exhausting to be on it. But in the end, AI, 3D, CGI are all just tools. They’re like a paintbrush, just in a different way. What’s still important is the idea. If you have a concept that’s interesting, you can use anything to put that out into the world and people will recognise it.”

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



Diksha Ahire

From the mundane to the myth, India’s identity is deeply intertwined with its textiles. They have nurtured craftsmanship, built communities, played a role in national revolutions, and paved the way to create world trade networks. Yet, despite its rich history spanning centuries, it has garnered few enthusiasts as a medium within the arts. Today, textile-based shows are slowly working to change this narrative.

Threads That Bare at the ongoing Delhi Contemporary Art Week (DCAW) showcases how artists can draw inspiration from India’s diverse textile traditions to create multifaceted storytelling. It is being presented at a significant time – when curators and galleries are exhibiting a growing number of textile-based shows in the subcontinent. From *Vayan - The Art of Indian Brocades*, curated by Mayank Mansingh Kaul, at Delhi’s National Crafts Museum (2023), to *Sutr Santati* at NGMA in Mumbai (2024), and *Entwined - Edition 2* by Apparao Galleries.

Creating a visual map
Artist Natasha Das, traditionally trained in oils, shifted to textiles after finding limitations with paint. Working with thread, fabric, and the weaving communities of Assam, she finally got the space to be vulnerable through her art. “I shifted to memories and touch,” she says. “When the pandemic hit, I closed my studio and started working with thread, layering it like oil. Textiles gave me a platform to feel, bond, and be present.”

At DCAW, her work *Lahe Land 2 (lahe lahe means ‘slowly’ in Assamese)* is an ode to the culture of the region and its landscape. “It is a visual map constructed from memory. I started by stitching and



Textile art: more than a trend?

Even as a thematic curation of textile art attracts eyeballs at Delhi Contemporary Art Week, what the practice needs is commercial viability – for its makers and supporters

attaching, creating blocks of colour that are dense, and playful threads that connect these spaces,” she explains. “The beautiful violet you see is the water hyacinth of Assam; the onion green eri silk is earthy. Each thread carries a memory and has a tale to tell.”

Also at *Threads That Bare* – which features 14 artists – are Geeta Khandelwal and Khadim Ali. Khandelwal has dedicated decades to studying and practising the art of quilt-making. On display are her meticulously recreated miniature royal garments from the 18th and 19th centuries using techniques such as hand-sewing and quilting. Ali, meanwhile, draws from miniature and tapestry traditions. His body of work bears witness to his family’s migrations, loss, and trauma

resulting from the conflict zones of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which he still calls home. In his monumental mixed-media work, *I’m the Third Script 2*, he employs embroidery on cotton and silk, intricately weaving his childhood memories on fabric.

Ideas, identities and emotions
While for some fibre artists, a concept or experience serves as inspiration, for others, it’s the



inherent nature of the material itself. “They have the ability to adapt, making them receptive to different ideas, stories, identities, and emotions,” says Rajarshi Sengupta, art historian and practitioner, whose textile works inspired by the *kalamkari* tradition were part of *Entwined* last month. “My practice also recognises coexistence as a key theme that connects questions of visual and sensory elements, shared histories and future directions.” Sengupta’s inquiry into the

(Clockwise from left) Khadim Ali’s *I’m the Third Script 2*; a work by Rajarshi Sengupta; Natasha Das’ *Color Bricks*; and Geeta Khandelwal’s costumes.



While the market may seem small currently, I believe it’s on the cusp of expansion with the backing of gallerists and collectors who genuinely appreciate and engage with textile art

SHARAN APPARAO
Curator-director, Apparao Galleries

history of *kalam* began with master carvers Kondra Gangadhar and Kondra Narsaiah, in their woodblock-making workshop in Andhra Pradesh’s Machilipatnam region. His work *Catalogue Konda* is an extension of this exploration and ethnographic studies of Deccani textiles and their artisanal histories.

With such significant textile-based art exhibitions being curated, one can’t help but wonder why the sudden surge of interest. Delhi-based Kaul, a curator with a focus on textiles, says, “This is a reflection of a global trend. I have observed that the field of contemporary visual arts, from time to time, has a tendency to draw from varied creative sources. We have seen this in the past with architecture, film, and so on. Textiles seem to be its fascination at the moment, and while this is

welcome at many levels, those who have worked with the medium for a long time are also cautious that this does not remain a passing phenomenon. That it is able to translate into a better market for fibre-based artists, as well as sustained commercial viability for the galleries involved.”

Embroidery and women’s agency
Textiles are also being examined from a gendered perspective. Their associated material, style, and processes that were previously categorised as a ‘woman’s craft’ have long been absent from the universally accepted definition of fine arts. Artists – and yes, primarily women artists – are asserting their agency and challenging this traditional divide.

For instance, Varunika Saraf’s *The Longest Revolution* (part of the 2023 show *CheMoulding* at Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai) was created using embroidery on a cotton textile. “I am interested in women’s agency, women as makers of their own futures and agents of socio-political change,” she says. “When I thought about the hopes, beliefs and fears that I share with the women in my life, it seemed natural to embroider.”

Adding to the discourse, Kaul says, “Globally, curators have suggested that this current fixation with textile-based art is also emerging from an increased attention to women-based art practices. I personally think there is, overall, a greater interest in materiality and abstraction than before. Or perhaps this is only natural, given the long neglect of the field by the art world.”

DCAW is on till September 4 at Bikaner House.

The writer is a Delhi-based museum and arts professional.