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ADRIFT IN AMERICA

Many international students in the U.S. caught in the crosshairs of the Trump administration revoking visas are Indians. As some self-deport and others wait, the crackdowns cast a larger shadow over freedom and plurality in some of the world's top educational institutions

Pooja Garg

Kabir has spent the past few months running. Every morning, before the California sun begins to glare on the cracked sidewalks, he slips on his shoes and bolts out the door. The run, he says, is what keeps him sane. "It's the only time I can make a plan. What to say to the lawyer. Which papers to organise. Who to call for help." How not to fall apart.

Kabir (name changed on request), who had arrived from Pune to study at the University of California, had his student visa revoked along with thousands of others across the country. The email had come without warning. It had given him no time to prepare. Just a sudden vanishing of the ground beneath his feet. He hasn't stopped running since. "I got this news on April 2, just a day after Eid. I had wanted to go home, but couldn't in these circumstances," he says.

And now, it may be a long while before he can. His Eid kurta and suit are still on the hanger, waiting to be worn. His apartment still carries the remnants of a celebration that didn't last. A few half-deflated balloons cling to the ceiling – a bittersweet memory, as just a few days before his visa revocation, he had won the H-IB lottery (a random selection process by which a limited number of H-IB visas are allotted every year).

In the weeks that followed, Kabir's days became a blur – mornings on the pavement, afternoons in legal and immigration offices, evenings in community centres where other students like him sat huddled on plastic chairs, comparing legal notes, wondering what they had done wrong. Each time, the same questions, the same uncertainty, hung like static in the air.

"I run, I walk, I travel. Anything to escape my thoughts," says Kabir. And yet, they are everywhere. In the faces of the other students who are caught in the same dragnet. In a mural stretched across a wall in Los Angeles that says, 'My brother and I are my parents' American Dream.'



ILLUSTRATION: SAAI

violations. Similar action was also directed against other Ivy League institutions such as Cornell, UPenn, Harvard, Brown, and Princeton.

"We are seeing many Indian students being targeted: Megha Vemuri and Prahlad Iyengar of MIT, Ranjani Srinivasan of Columbia, Badar Khan Suri of Georgetown University. This has had a chilling effect on the psyche of Indian students. They are carrying passports from the dorm to the classroom, which is not something typical. They are having conversations around what to do if ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] shows up on campus," says Akil Kasubhai, an alumnus of the University of Michigan and co-president of SAATH, a community that empowers South Asian youth to drive political change.

What began as visa revocations of students who participated in or supported pro-Palestine protests had metastasised by April. Suddenly, hundreds of international students had their visas revoked. Denying student visas based on social media vetting is the latest step in this quickly unravelling saga.

Rohan Soni, an alumnus of

Columbia University and co-president of SAATH, says it is unfortunate that Indian students are targeted when they really just want to focus on their education. "Most Indian students are quite reserved when it comes to politics. They keep a low profile so that they can get their degrees, join the workforce, and make a better life for themselves," he says.

A larger ideological campaign
The Trump administration's move to ban international students has been unfolding alongside a systematic rollback of diversity, equity, and

More than 1,800 students from nearly 250 colleges in the U.S. have had their visas revoked and their SEVIS records terminated.

inclusion (DEI) programmes across the country.

In January 2025, an executive order directed all federally funded institutions to terminate all race- or gender-based diversity programmes, claiming they were in violation of meritocratic ideals and civil rights law. Soon after the order, the Department of Education launched investigations into 45 colleges for "race-exclusionary practices". The Department of Homeland Security also imposed stricter limitations on student visas: narrower Optional Practical Training (OPT) eligibility, intensive background checks, and increased scrutiny of STEM graduates, most of whom are from countries like India and China.

According to the Community Explainer by the South Asian American Policy Working Group, a network of organisations that address policy issues affecting South Asian communities, "More than 1,800 students from nearly 250

colleges have had their visas revoked and their SEVIS records terminated without notice or due process. Only about half of them received actual notice of their visa revocations, so many might not even be aware of their visa termination." SEVIS, or the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, maintained by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, keeps an electronic record of the immigration status of international students and exchange visitors.

Indian students have been hit the hardest

All these changes in the past few months, however, have not impacted all international students equally. Indian students, the largest single group of foreign students in the United States, have been hit especially hard. The American Immigration Lawyers Association estimates that 50% of those affected are from India.

In this climate of uncertainty,

international students find themselves in the crosshairs. Kabir says there was no explanation given when his visa was revoked. "We were left to guess what the issue could be." In some cases, visas were revoked because of a late fee payment, a long-forgotten speeding ticket, or an old address not updated in time. He remembers one Indian student who had his visa revoked because of a fine for catching the wrong-sized fish. "The most serious infraction by an Indian student that I came across was a DUI [driving under the influence]," says Kabir.

Normally, minor infractions don't result in visa revocation, according to Atlanta-based Sarah Hawk, Partner & Chair of Immigration and Global Mobility at Barnes & Thornburg, a business law firm. In the case of these students, often the infractions happened a long time ago and were never proven.

**CONTINUED ON
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Stanley Carvalho

Fearless Malayalam novelist Benyamin's *The Second Book of Prophets* is unsurprising for its theme and bold storytelling.

After reading interpretations of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi texts (both significant finds of the mid-20th century that offer insights into Judaism and Christian history), Benyamin was inspired to write this book that looks at the historical and spiritual figure of Jesus Christ through a new lens.

The author has explored Christian themes in his earlier works (*Body and Blood*, *Yellow Lights of Death*) and earned plaudits for other powerful stories as well (*Goat Days*, *Jasmine Days*).

This novel, translated by Minishy S., is a brave, secularised retelling of the life and times of Jesus Christ, challenging some traditional Christian beliefs in an iconoclastic manner.

Conflicts and betrayals
Jesus makes his appearance at a crucial time when the Jews are struggling for freedom from centuries of Roman rule over territory that is broadly today's Israel. Many Jews believe Jesus could be their long-awaited 'messiah' who will liberate them, a matter in which Jesus shows no interest.

Besides, in Benyamin's retelling, the Tribe of Benjamin is opposed to someone like Jesus (from the rival House of David) coming as

CHRIST THE REFORMER

Author Benyamin casts the 'Son of God' outside of prevailing narratives, to make his story relevant to our fractured times

'messiah', as well as his message of peace, love and equality. They conspire with the Romans to betray Jesus.

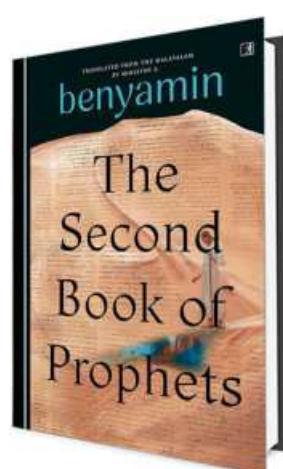
Yet, Jesus continues to lead a different freedom struggle, working with the various warring tribes to reconcile their differences, before sacrificing his life for the cause.

Internecine conflicts, treachery, distrust, disunity, betrayals – the leitmotifs of failed revolts throughout history – play out plainly among the Jews who fail to overpower the Romans.

Taking cues from history

Evidently, the author desires a different understanding of Jesus, not through the eyes of faith but by studying historical texts. In the novel, Jesus appears not as the son of god but as a social reformer and revolutionary, fighting evil and injustice.

The much-vaunted miracles performed by Jesus – turning water into wine, the healing of lepers and



The Second Book of Prophets
Benyamin, trs Minishy S.
Simon & Schuster India
₹599

the resurrection of the dead – are interpreted in the book, not literally as miracles but as Jesus' spurning of prejudiced societal laws and customs of the time, or 'social miracles'.

Even Judas' betrayal of Jesus for 30 pieces of silver is attributed to tribal rivalries, not greed as the Bible narrates.

Undoubtedly, the *Bible* as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi texts allow different readings and perspectives of Jesus' life and that period in history. Clearly, Benyamin, with a passion for history, feels there is much to say about Jesus' life and times outside of the prevailing convictions, and has done so to also make the story relevant to our fractured times.

The novel, originally published in Malayalam in 2007, and read widely, drew flak from die-hard believers for Benyamin's secularisation of Jesus' life, upending conventional beliefs. Time will tell how readers of the English translation will respond.

The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based independent journalist.

Contemporary contexts

This leads one to wonder why people 'write' or 'tell' the same stories again? If the plot is a well-known one, then there should be something special about the 'style' of presenting the story. The genius of the writer's voice must shine through – like Tulsidas' *Ramayana* or that of Kambar. Just as a pastoral poem or an elegy has its poetic convention, our epic poems too – principally the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* – function within the framework of the timeless principles of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*.

Dharma or ethical principles and *moksha* or salvation are the outer guiding boundaries within which the play of *artha* and *kama* (wealth and pleasure) are acted out. If these boundaries are taken away in the retelling, we are left with only the flippant beggary of a 'romantasy'.

The attempt in this book is also to make the story accessible to the millennial reader by using contemporary contexts. "Lakshmi had just returned from a timeshare on the ocean-of-consciousness holiday"; "Ayodhya would continue to host the best Performing Arts festival"; "Rama was cool"; many courtiers saw the Rama-Sita alliance as "the dawning of a new era in economic expansion, military security through diplomatic negotiation, and tourism...". These and several other such examples are creative and interesting but the judicious young reader can decide if these enhance the contemporaneity of the story.

The reviewer is a Sahitya Akademi translation award winner.

Evergreen Ramayana

What propels one to turn the pages of this 'retelling' is the sheer power of the "internal drama" of the original epic

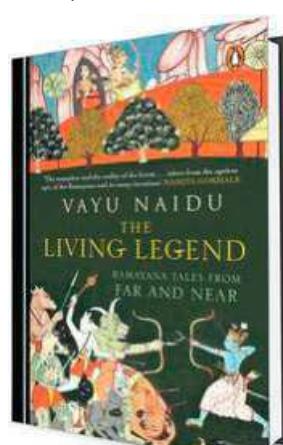


A performer ahead of a Thai rendition of the *Ramayana* in Chiang Mai, Thailand. (GETTY IMAGES)

Meenakshi Shivram

The *Living Legend* by the British-Indian writer Vayu Naidu is yet another book on the *Ramayana*. It is not a retelling in the sense of adding a hitherto unexplored interpretation of a character's supposed motives or responses. But it is a 're-telling' in the sense of telling the same story again. It draws from several versions of this epic as it travelled orally across geographies and it uses the format of the seven *kandas*, without labelling them.

The introduction to this book expresses the author's intent. It is an attempt to foreground "not just



The Living Legend
Vayu Naidu
Penguin Ebury Press
₹399

the internal drama of the characters...but the dependence and interrelations between animal forces and plant forces". It also speaks of the principles that sustain both individuals and societies and it elaborates on the multiple levels of interpretive possibilities of this epic. The Dandaka forest is a metaphoric space and the story is an unfolding of the truth of consciousness. To Dasaratha, Rama is his 16-year-old son but to the sages Vashistha and Vishwamitra, Rama shows the way to dispel the darkness of ignorance.

What, however, propels one to turn the pages of this book is neither the theme of cosmic interconnectedness nor the

The reviewer is a Sahitya Akademi translation award winner.

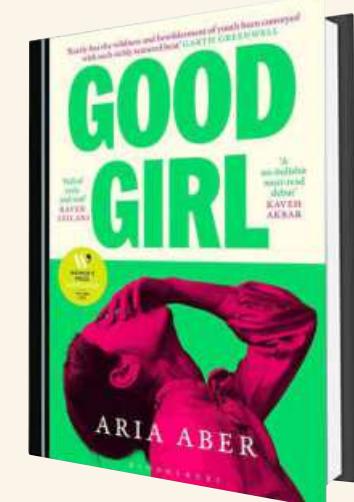
IN CONVERSATION

Living between worlds

In her debut novel *Good Girl*, which was shortlisted for this year's Women's Prize for Fiction, author Aria Aber explores racism, immigration, shame and desire

Radhika Santhanam
radhika.s@thehindu.co.in

Nila, 19, is in all respects a "bad girl". She is rebellious, she drinks, engages in substance abuse, and she dates a charismatic American novelist, Marlowe Woods, who is several years her senior. But the ironically titled *Good Girl* by Aria Aber (published by Bloomsbury), which was in the running for the Women's Prize for Fiction 2025, is much more than a coming-of-age story. Aber explores broader themes such as immigrant experiences, racism, violence, desire, shame, and self-discovery in a powerful debut novel. Over a Zoom call, she speaks about her love for Berlin, and the characters she was forced to keep and kill. Edited excerpts:



Q: Like Nila in the book, your parents are from Afghanistan and you were born and brought up in Germany. Is there anything of you in this book?

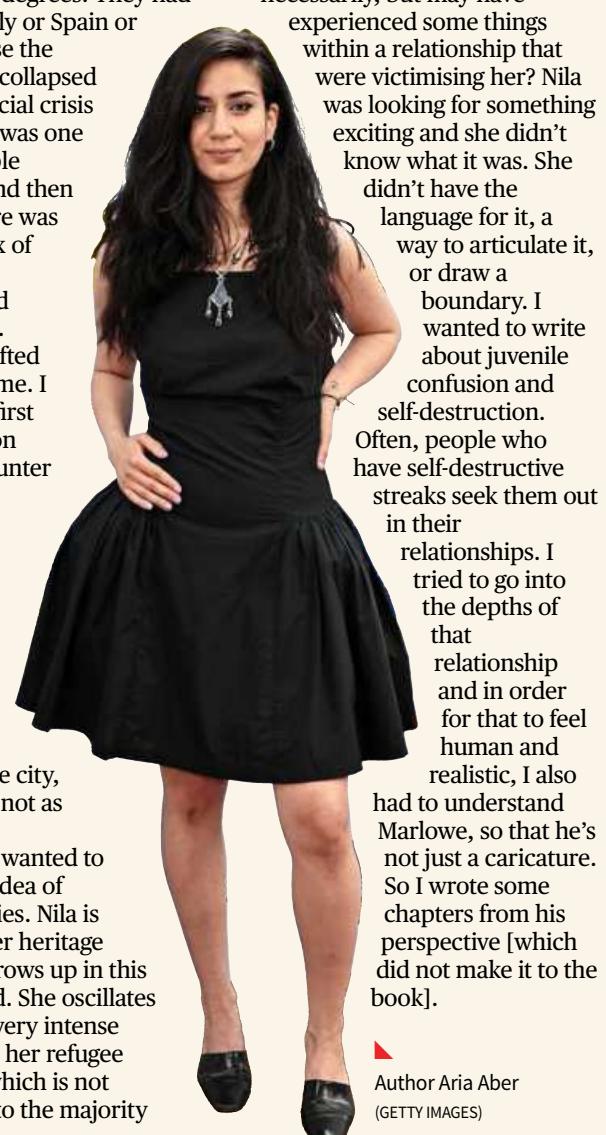
A: Any work of fiction or art is autobiographical. I can give you an example of how I am every character in the book, not just Nila. When I started writing the book in 2020, I lived in North California and was working as a guest lecturer at Oakland University. I didn't have health insurance and I had to move back to Berlin to a small district, which was close to a club. Both these topographies ended up influencing the narrative of the book – specifically the biography of Marlowe Woods. So, there were things I took from my life that ended up in the book in unexpected ways.

Q: This book is as much about Nila as it is about Berlin. What do you love about Berlin and what aspects of the city did you want to bring into this book?

A: I love Berlin; it's one of the only places in the world, but specifically in Germany, where I have felt at home. It's diverse, alive, chaotic, and beautiful – and also a little rough, which is I think is aesthetically what I'm drawn to.

When I was first there in 2012, I noticed that a lot of English-speaking expats were moving into the city. Berlin had already been populated by a new wave of voluntary migrants – not Turkish workers from the 1980s, or refugees from the Arab and Muslim world, but young creatives with degrees. They had come from Italy or Spain or Greece because the economy had collapsed after the financial crisis and Germany was one of the last stable economies. And then suddenly, there was this new influx of creatives, of Americans and British people.

Something shifted around that time. I heard for the first time the person behind the counter at a bar not speaking German, but English. I wanted to capture the period before that happened, when expats were still in the city, but they were not as experienced some things within a relationship that were victimising her? Nila was looking for something exciting and she didn't know what it was. She didn't have the language for it, a way to articulate it, or draw a boundary. I wanted to write about juvenile confusion and self-destruction. Often, people who have self-destructive streaks seek them out in their relationships. I tried to go into the depths of that relationship and in order for that to feel human and realistic, I also had to understand Marlowe, so that he's not just a caricature. So I wrote some chapters from his perspective [which did not make it to the book].



Author Aria Aber
(GETTY IMAGES)



Mini Kapoor

Srinath Raghavan's latest book, *Indira Gandhi and the Years That Transformed India* (Allen Lane), examines her political career (mid-1960s to 1984), arguing that "the long 1970s were the hinge on which the contemporary history of India turned, transforming the young postcolonial country into today's India". Excerpts from an interview.

Question: In this political history of the Indira Gandhi years, a word that recurs repeatedly is Caesarist/Caesarism.

Answer: Caesarism refers to a style of politics in which the leader seeks directly to connect with the people, bypassing party structures or the parliament. I found it useful to understand an important change in Indian politics ushered in by Indira Gandhi – more useful than currently modish terms such as populist or charismatic. Democratic politics has, by definition, an element of populism. And charisma is only one aspect of the Caesarist style of leadership.

Q: Was she already inclined to the Caesarist style? Did her style shift shape along the way?

A: Indira Gandhi adopted this mode of leadership in response to the specific problems confronting the Congress party. The party's drab performance in the 1967 elections underlined its inability to carry with it significant sections of the electorate. At the same time, it

INTERVIEW THE PM AND HER LONG DECADE

Srinath Raghavan examines Indira Gandhi's Caesarist style of leadership to understand how she changed Indian politics

accentuated the power struggle within the party between the prime minister and the regional grandees who controlled the machine. Indira Gandhi moved towards a Caesarist style both to undercut her rivals in the party and revive its electoral fortunes. Her decision to split the Congress was undoubtedly a crucial first step. But equally important were the extraordinary performance of her party in the general elections of 1971 and the decisive military victory over Pakistan later the same year. These, in turn, propelled the party to a massive win in the State

elections of 1972. None of these could have been predicted when she broke the old Congress. But cumulatively they cemented her control of the party. Without such dominance, it is difficult to imagine the party tamely falling in with her decision to impose the Emergency in June 1975.

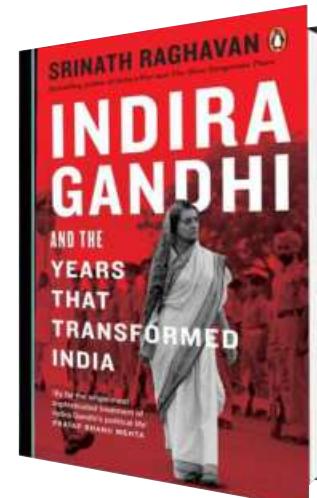
Q: Do you see a vein of risk-taking running through her entire arc?

A: I don't see her as an inveterate risk-taker. Rather she had a sharp, instinctive grasp of power relations

QQ

Indira Gandhi adopted the Caesarist mode of leadership in response to the specific problems confronting the Congress party. The party's drab performance in the 1967 elections underlined its inability to carry with it significant sections of the electorate

India's first woman prime minister 'combined targeted anti-poverty programmes with a liberalising, pro-business outlook'; and (bottom) author Srinath Raghavan. (GETTY IMAGES)



Indira Gandhi and the Years That Transformed India
Srinath Raghavan
Allen Lane
₹899

[whether in domestic or international politics], an instinctive sense of timing and a willingness to make bold choices. These qualities worked for her in the crises of the early years, but they also led to counterproductive outcomes in later years – not only the Emergency but also her handling of the problems in Punjab, Assam and Jammu and Kashmir during her final term in office. All along, she tended to blame difficult situations on the machinations of her domestic or international opponents. This made her somewhat impervious to introspecting on her own choices and their consequences. Yet, as her bête noire Henry Kissinger once said, even the paranoid can have real enemies.

Q: The tenure of the Janata Party was a vital phase of the long 1970s. To use your evocative phrase, how vital was she in ensuring that it "dissolved like a clump of earth into a torrent"?

A: The Janata government was united in its desire to fix Indira Gandhi after 1977, but divided on how best to proceed. This led to some spectacular own-goals such as the abortive move to arrest her in 1978. Indira Gandhi, for her part, proved more astute in playing on the faultlines within the Janata Party and on the thrusting ambitions of some of its leaders. In particular, her move to support Charan Singh's bid for premiership ensured that the Janata Party was broken beyond repair or rapprochement.

Q: How important were the years out of power, 1977-1980, in her own eventual evolution?

A: These were undoubtedly the most challenging years of her political life. Yet, her ability to retain a grip on a section of the Congress party, to revive her popular fortunes by dramatic moves [such as in support of the Dalits after the massacre in Belchit], and to bounce back by winning the 1978 by-election in Chikmagalur – all showcased her political instincts and tenacity. At the same time, these years also led her further down the path of personalising power in the party [which she split for a second time] and of relying on her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, who was clearly the dynastic heir apparent.

Q: A decade ago you had published a profile of Indira Gandhi. From then to now, has your assessment of the arc of her prime ministerial career altered?

A: The availability of newly declassified archival materials, including from the Prime Minister's Secretariat, has enabled me to understand better the ideas and impulses that lay behind many of the choices and decisions made by Indira Gandhi and her contemporaries. This is true even of such well known episodes as the nationalisation of banks. At the same time, I have developed a deeper appreciation of the gulf between intentions and outcomes, and how the latter were decisively shaped by the wider, including the global, currents of the long 1970s. At the outset of her premiership, for instance, Indira Gandhi wanted to restore the economy to the track of planned economic development [on the Nehruvian model]. But the economic imperatives and crises of the period effectively led to a rather different model of political economy – one that combined targeted anti-poverty programmes with a liberalising, pro-business outlook. This framework has proved durable and continues to shape Indian political economy today.

The interviewer is a Delhi-based editor and journalist.



Back from the brink

In his memoir, actor Jeremy Renner reflects on survival after a crushing accident, fatherhood, and the mindset that changed everything

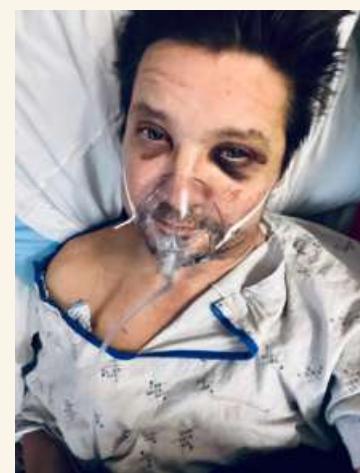
Mini Anthikad Chhibber
mini.chhibber@thehindu.co.in

Two days after being crushed by a 14,000-pound snowplough on New Year's Day of 2023, actor Jeremy Renner, now 54, posted a selfie from his hospital bed. "Well, I was high on all sorts of painkillers and morphine," he laughs, speaking over a video call from London. The famous selfie is part of Renner's harrowing yet ultimately healing memoir about the accident, *My Next Breath*.

"I didn't realise I was in a coma," the two-time Academy Award nominee confesses. "When I woke up, my sister handed me my phone, saying people were worried. I'm like, 'Okay, well, let people know that I'm not gone'."

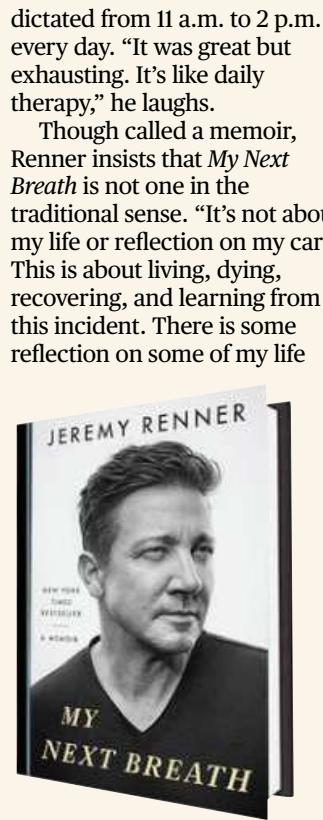
Living a story

Though Renner has written songs for his three albums, this is Jeremy's first book. "Starting was the most difficult. I had to have a solid reason for writing the book.



I still am baffled that people are interested." Renner is glad he ignored his initial hesitation and committed to writing. "It was cathartic and healing, and was for others as well." *The Hurt Locker* actor worked with a writer for the structure of the memoir. "This is an emotional and taxing narrative. We did a lot of interviews, and created an outline that allows for movement, growth and strength."

Talking as he would to a friend, Renner says he wrote and



My Next Breath
Jeremy Renner
Simon & Schuster
₹599

prior [including learning the value of doing his own stunts from Tom Cruise, his co-star in two *Mission: Impossible* films].

Fuel for recovery

In a school essay, which is part of the book, Renner's 11-year-old daughter, Ava, wrote about her proudest moment being when he picked her up from school after the accident. "She was the fuel for my recovery," he says with a proud smile. "She was the goalpost, the one that I wanted to show that I would get better."

The snow cat did a lot of damage, including over 30 broken bones, blunt chest trauma, and caused Renner to lose six quarts of blood. Out of these, the one that freaked out Renner the most was the broken jaw and the screws in his skull and jaw. "When they took those screws out, like it's just in a piece of wood and not my jaw, it was terrifying because you're awake for that."

Surprisingly blasé about his left eye being knocked out of its socket, Renner says, "I was dying on the ice, so I didn't care that my eye was out. I was going to worry about that later. I had to worry about breathing. By the time I woke up, my eyeball was already back in my head and working."

While Renner has played master archer and Avenger, Hawkeye in a series and several MCU movies, his new

superpower is never having a bad day. "That was given to me because I know what a bad day is; I probably had the worst day. You don't have to be run over by a snow cat to not have bad days. It is in all of our control, in what we choose to do in our lives," he says.

Return to acting

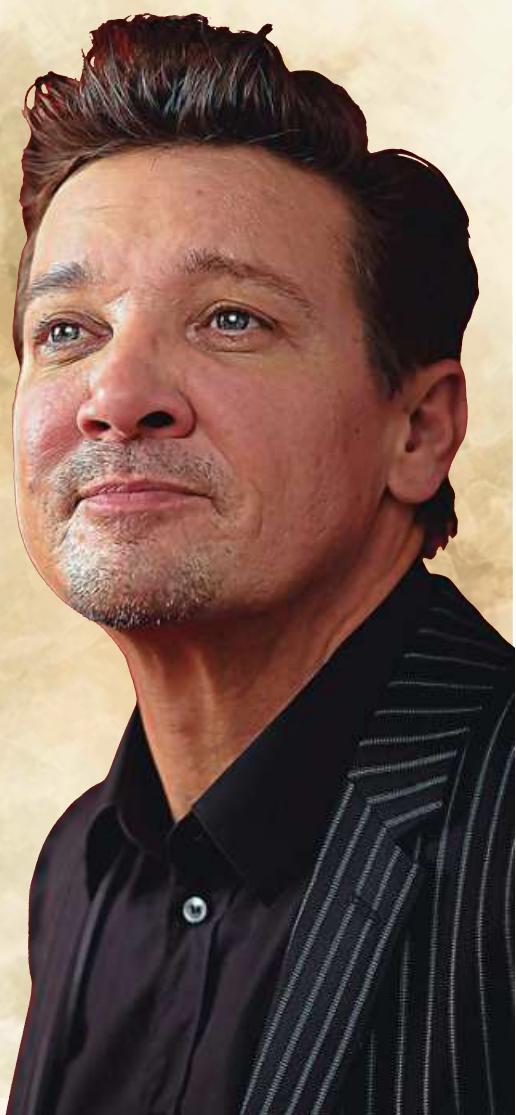
With Season 3 of *Mayor of Kingstown* in June 2024 and Rian Johnson's *Wake Up Dead Man: A Knives Out Mystery*, which will be out on December 12, 2025, Renner has signalled his return to acting. "I do love my job, but not at the cost of what has real value in my life. Its priority has slid down the totem pole."

Family and friends are an important part of accepting work, says Renner. "I do not want my life ripped from me, just so I can entertain. I will not accept being alone, as I've done for 30 years with my career."

There is a near-death moment Renner describes in the book where he experiences "exhilarating peace" lying on the ice. "You gain clarity and resolve after getting a glimpse behind the curtain of the afterlife. I'm not a heaven-and-hell guy, but if there was a hell, it'd be on Earth."

The beauty, Renner says, comes from being connected. "We're all connected in a divinity of love, which you can call God. It helps me stay vulnerable and loving to everyone in my life."

Actor Jeremy Renner; (far left) in a selfie from his hospital bed. (COURTESY JEREMY RENNER)



CONTINUED FROM
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65 lawsuits, of which they have secured temporary relief in 35. In Georgia, for instance, 133 students had their visas reinstated.

Kabir is one of the students who got his visa reinstated in California. "It happened out of the blue. They said there had been a mistake." He is still reeling from the impact of what had happened. "I was getting ready to leave the country. I had discussed who would take on my house sublease, who would get my furniture, who would take care of my plants. It was just a matter of boarding a flight," he says.

But the struggle is far from over. "I can't leave the U.S. for now," says Kabir. Once a visa is revoked, even reinstatement does not guarantee re-entry.

"Even though the courts have addressed the issue in some cases where the visas were revoked, if you have a student visa that was cancelled, you can't leave and then come back," says Nisha Karnani, Partner at Georgia-based Antonini & Cohen Immigration Law Group.

Hawk's business client had someone on a student visa who had his status revoked and had to leave for India. Later, he received a notification that they had made a mistake. But the damage had already been done. "Now he has to get another visa appointment and a visa stamp for F-1 to enter," she says.

American Dream no more? At over 27% – 4.2 lakh in total – Indians form the largest group of international students in the U.S., as per a 2024 report by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Following the upheavals in the system, however, the picture seems to be changing dramatically. "I ran an analysis

"South Asians, of whom Indians are the largest number, tend to be more racially profiled," says Kalpana V. Pediobhotla, Executive Director of California-based South Asian American Justice Collaborative.

"One of my clients, an Indian student, was once arrested on false allegations by a security officer at the mall. The police officer who arrested him found no evidence of wrongdoing. Yet, this student, who went on to graduate and do his OPT training, suddenly had his visa revoked after all these years. It has cost him his entire career, just as it is costing so many other students the same way," she adds.

These crackdowns have also raised concerns about surveillance and due process. Suneeta Dewan, a New York-based immigration lawyer, says that social media vetting has left most students confused. "It's very random, very arbitrary. Students are worried and are asking if they should self-deport. They don't know what could get them into trouble."

Susan Kerley, therapist and Clinical Director at Marietta Counseling for Children and Adults, Georgia, warns of life-altering trauma to students. "Imagine going through this as a young adult in a foreign country where you no longer know whom or what you can trust. The changing rules have created uncertainty, stress, and anxiety. The students haven't changed; the rules have – is disempowering," she says.

Legal battlegrounds
Some students are actively resisting civil rights rollbacks. Nationwide, they have filed over

"There is a massive shift in the mentality of international students; they feel less comfortable coming to the U.S.," says Soni of SAATH.

As Indians look to other countries for higher education opportunities, it's not just a loss for students but also for the United States. "International students boost the U.S. economy," reminds immigration attorney Karnani. According to College

AKIL KASUBHAI
University of Michigan alumnus and co-president of SAATH

We are seeing many Indian students being targeted. This has had a chilling effect on their psyche. They are going from dorm to classroom carrying their passports

Coming together (Clockwise from above) Northwestern University faculty and students at a protest gathering in April; a Harvard University student at a protest against Trump's sanctions on Harvard in May; and emotional graduates at Harvard's Commencement on May 29, 2025. (GETTY IMAGES, AP)

ADRIFT IN AMERICA



A lot of students got nervous and self-deported. Who knows when they will be able to come back now. At the same time, there are others who are not leaving the U.S. for that very reason. It is a double-edged sword. They are afraid to go, they are afraid to stay

SONJUKUMAR
Chair of Board, Asian Americans Advancing Justice (one of the organisations advocating for students' rights in Georgia)

among Indian students are France, New Zealand, Germany, Bangladesh, Russia, Ireland, and Uzbekistan, according to a report by Arpan Tulsyan, Senior Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation. She writes, "For Indian middle-class families, sending a child to the U.S. involves several years of savings – with costs ranging between \$3.5 million and \$5 million annually. Any uncertainty for visa approval or the work authorisation process turns U.S. education into a high-risk investment, significantly altering the family's cost-benefit analysis."

For international students, their futures are held hostage to an ideological war they did not start. A war that is no longer just about policy. It is about who gets to belong. Who gets to learn. Who gets to dream in a language not their own. It is also about the purpose of education in America and whether institutions like Harvard can continue to be spaces for freedom, debate, and plurality in a time when those very ideals are being recast as threats.

Bakre says, "I would like to validate the anxiety that these students are feeling. But I would also ask them to take perspective, realign, and think of the best way to make an impact in this world. This crisis could be an opportunity to understand our relationship to history and to the civil rights movement because the present moment does not stand in isolation from the past."

Kabir says his mother breaks down on every phone call. "My family background is in the Indian Navy. I get support from my brother and father. But it's hard for my mother. My nephews and nieces also tell me, 'Come home, Chachu.' But it will be a while before Kabir can come home to his family."

In this environment, the waiting room has shifted. It is no longer outside the U.S. embassy in Delhi or beneath the blinking screens at JFK International Airport. It now resides inside the body. Indian students in the U.S. know this space well. It follows them from campus hallways to summer schools.

They wait. For visa reinstatements. For legal appointments. For someone in the administration to see them not as a number but as a name. They wait to be home as they dream of an Indian summer while being stuck on American soil. They wait for mango season and for a world that will let them taste it.

The writer is a USC Annenberg Fellow for Writing and Community Storytelling, and deputy editor of the U.S.-based Khabar magazine.

I would encourage students to think of the history of visa – who is included and who is excluded in these parameters. I think of this as an opportunity to understand our relationship to history and to the civil rights movement

SWATI BAKER
Mentor, The Family Institute at Northwestern University

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1730, answered on 10.03.2025.
As reported by Observer Research Foundation

ALSO POPULAR WITH INDIAN STUDENTS

Country	2022	2023	2025	% Increase (2022 - 2025)
Germany	20,684	23,296	34,702	+67.8%
Russia	19,784	23,503	31,444	+59.1%
Bangladesh	17,006	20,368	29,232	+71.9%
Ireland	6,211	8,011	10,438	+68.1%
Uzbekistan	3,430	6,601	9,915	+189.2%
France	6,406	7,484	8,536	+33.3%
New Zealand	1,605	6,471	7,297	+354.7%

cooling systems and incorporate in their homes.

4. Repeat offenders shall have their ACs remotely set to 'fan mode' for seven years, with the duration of punishment for each repeated offence increasing in geometric progression.

5. Any law enforcement official who confuses arithmetic progression with geometric progression shall be punished with 17 years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of ₹51.

6. Appeals
1. Individual residents aggrieved by an order passed under this Act may, within 30 days, 13 hours, 27 minutes and 17 seconds from the date of such order, prefer an appeal before an Appellate Authority as may be notified by the Central Government.

2. The Appellate Authority shall hear the appeal within 15 days of the date of first marriage of any of the complainant's great-grandchildren.

7. Exemptions
1. This Act shall not apply to: 1. VIPs, including President, Prime Minister, Chief Justice, High Court judges, Supreme Court judges, etc.

2. Members of Parliament (except those from the Opposition).

3. MLAs (except Opposition party MLAs).

4. Chief Ministers (except those of Opposition-ruled States).

5. Ministers with proven track record of incompetence who have faced, and successfully resisted, multiple calls for resignation.

6. Governors of any State, provided they keep withholding assent to Bills passed by State legislatures.

7. Businessmen designated as 'regime cronies', their families, their group companies' senior management, and their families and pets.

8. Members of IT Cell.

9. Anyone who identifies as a cow and has government ID card proving it.

10. Gurus and babas who say they don't care for material comforts.

11. Designated abubabis, notorious gangsters, journalists-turned-fixers.



Be it enacted by Parliament in the 76th year of the Republic of India as follows:

1. Short title, extent and commencement

1. This Act may be called the Ease of Cooling (Regulation and Control) Act, 2025.

2. It extends to the whole of a residential property's super built-up area, and area encroached using flower pots.

3. It shall come into force on such date as any air-conditioner (AC) is appointed to serve in a residence.

2. Definitions

2. In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires:

a. 'Individual resident' means any government-approved ID proof such as Aadhaar card, voter ID or PAN, preferably linked to a carbon-based life form.

b. 'Permissible Temperature Range' (PTR) means 20-28 degrees Celsius.

c. 'Temperature Rakshak Sangh' (TRAKS) means any volunteer group of vigilantes, including WhatsApp uncles and retired gaurs.

d. 'Yoga' means any form of physical exercise, including stretching, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques.

e. 'Yoga' means any form of physical exercise, including stretching, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques.

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uu. 'Yoga' means any form of physical exercise, including stretching, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques.

vv. 'Yoga' means any form of physical exercise, including stretching, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques.

Winning formula Kanishka Gupta has an author roster that boasts two International Booker Prize winners in four years. (SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR)

Kanishka Gupta, 43, is likely the most popular book agent in the country right now. One strategy that has helped him go from being an outsider who “didn’t know the ABC of agenting” – and someone whom publishers fobbed off by saying they didn’t pay author advances – to an industry insider who runs the largest literary agency in South Asia, is that he always keeps his doors open.

“I don’t say, *tune mujhe kitab nahi di, katti* (You didn’t give me your book, so I won’t speak to you),” he says. He once helped a journalist-author conduct an auction for her book despite the fact that she didn’t want him to be her agent. In turn, she introduced him to many writers. In an insulated and competitive field, Gupta’s open door policy is rare.

Now he’s the agent for feminist lawyer Indira Jaising’s conversational biography with Ritu Menon; says he can tell if ChatGPT is the real author of a piece of writing by the overuse of words such as ‘tapestry’ and ‘align’; and promises to send me an award-winning book published in 2019 that he’s re-pitching for publication in the U.K. and the U.S. because he has “never read a book like this”. He’s talking about Numair Atif Choudhury’s *Babu Bangladeshi*. Choudhury died in a freak drowning accident in Japan a year before his book was released.

He may not yet have discovered



an Arundhati Roy in his slush pile, like literary agent David Godwin once did, but Gupta now has an author roster that includes two International Booker winners in four years. He is the agent for Banu Mushtaq’s *Heart Lamp* (translated by Deepa Bhasthi), which recently bested around 150 entries to win the prestigious prize. He was also translator Daisy Rockwell’s agent

when she and author Geetanjali Shree won the 2022 International Booker for *Tomb of Sand*.

Agent ‘by accident’

Gupta was also representing two books of Shehan Karunatilaka when the Sri Lankan writer won the 2022 Booker Prize (Gupta got a shoutout in the victory speech alongside Godwin). His author Avni Doshi’s

PERSON OF INTEREST

KANISHKA GUPTA’S OPEN DOOR POLICY

How the literary agent turned rejection on its head to become one of the most sought after people in Indian publishing today

Burnt Sugar was shortlisted for the Booker in 2020. Gupta says he’s been the agent for around 1,700-1,800 published books so far.

As *Heart Lamp* propels bookstore sales across the country, Gupta has been inundated with translation offers. “...Malay, Sinhala, Portuguese, Greek, Italian, Arabic... a Georgian publisher is interested, the Polish book is a big deal,” he rattles off at 2x speed, adding that he has also received invites from 30 literature festivals.

Gupta became an agent “by accident”. In school he had “zero interest” in books. As a teenager, he suffered from “life-threatening depression” and a few years after, he began writing a book. Somehow, due to regular visits to Delhi book shops, he developed an interest in publishing. “I kept observing and Googling,” he says.

His own book was rejected by publishers at first because it was

overwritten. But in classic Gupta style, he worked on his own writing, read voraciously and made it to the longlist of the now discontinued Man Asian Literary Prize. At 21, he was that pesky author who would email agents repeatedly (he still has half-a-dozen manuscripts, “one worse than the other”).

The people connect

He had two short stints working with literary stalwarts Namita Gokhale and Mita Kapur and, in 2008, he started Writer’s Side to give authors editorial feedback. Two years later, when he signed on his first client, Anees Salim, then an unknown author, Gupta became a literary agent.

“There was a lot of opposition, confusion, uncertainty from the publishing industry,” he says about the early years. “I had no credentials, some were not keen on working with me, but I always stayed

in touch with people and that worked for me.”

When his business thrived, Gupta began sharing his observations about the publishing industry. “I’m blunt, so I’m disliked. Once I felt I was in a position to speak my mind, I started doing that,” he says. “I called out the nepotism and casteism in publishing.” One of his pet peeves is that many talented authors are forced to publish paperback books while the hardbacks seem to be reserved for the prestige memoirs of bureaucrats.

The breadth of Gupta’s author list is impressive. “I’m known for my translation list,” he says. “It’s big.” But then he has also been the agent for at least 50 Pakistani authors. He has a long list of nature writing, sports books, Dalit writers and academics-turned-authors. “I’m open to everything,” he says.

After 7-8 years of wading through the slush pile to discover writers, Gupta now has the luxury to operate from references and his travels. He represented Pakistani author Moni Mohsin after meeting her at the Galle Literature Festival in Sri Lanka and signed up writer and naturalist Yuvan Aves after they connected at the Jaipur Literature Festival.

He was the agent for the book, *Trial By Fire*, about the Uphaar cinema tragedy, and *Life after MH370*, written by a man who lost his wife on the plane. “I get drawn to personal stories,” Gupta says. His personal story is not bad either.

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

GOREN BRIDGE

Welcome back

East-West vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

South in today’s deal was Ron Rubin, a star player back in the ‘80s and ‘90s, who is playing again after a long layoff. The deal is from the recent Senior Team Trials to determine the American representatives in the coming World Championships.

East won the opening spade lead with the king and continued with the ace of

spades. He wanted to force dummy to ruff, which he felt would assure him of a trump trick. Also, even if he made declarer’s queen of spades into a trick, there was no useful discard on the queen available in the dummy. Rubin did ruff in dummy and continued by running the jack of clubs. The finesse won but there was a terrible trump split. Rubin led the nine of clubs from dummy and overtook it with his 10. He cashed the ace of

NORTH
♦ 5
♥ A K 10 7
♦ Q J 5 3 2
♣ J 9 2

WEST
♠ J 10 9 6 3
♥ Q J 9 8
♦ K 10 7 6
♣ Void

EAST
♠ A K 7 4
♥ 4 2
♦ 9 8 4
♣ K 6 4 3

SOUTH
♠ Q 8 2
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A
♣ A Q 10 8 7 5

The bidding:
SOUTH 1♣
WEST Pass
NORTH 1♦
EAST Pass

2♣
2NT
3♦
Pass

All pass

Opening lead: Jack of ♠

diamonds, returned to dummy with the ace of hearts, and ruffed a diamond in hand. A heart to dummy’s king and another diamond ruff left this position:

NORTH
♦ Void
♥ 10 7
♦ Q J
♣ Void

WEST
♠ 10 9
♥ Q
♦ K
♣ Void

EAST
♠ 7 4
♥ Void
♦ Void
♣ K 6

SOUTH
♠ Q
♥ 6
♦ Void
♣ A Q

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

What happened on June 22?

Berty Ashley

1 On June 22, 1633, the Holy Office in Rome forced this person to recant his view that the Sun, not the Earth, is the centre of the Universe. He was required to “abjure, curse and detest” those opinions, but refused to do so. He was placed under house arrest, and any works thereafter were banned from being published. Who was this, who we now consider the ‘father of observational science’?

2 On June 22, 1812, the French Empire declared war on Russia after two years of trouble between them. The war claimed a million lives in six months, many not due to fighting but the natural elements. The French had to admit defeat. This was a blow to the supposed invincible reputation of which military commander?

3 On June 22, 1847, 16-year-old Hanson Gregory was on a cargo boat and had some dough to be fried and eaten as ‘fried cakes’. He wasn’t happy because the insides were still raw, so he came up with an idea. This is supposedly the origin of what tasty item?



Sweet treat When a piece of fried dough was pierced to fix its raw centre, a now-iconic confectionery was born. (GETTY IMAGES)

5 On June 22, 1948, almost a year after India’s independence, King George VI formally gave up one of his titles. Before 1876, the title was used for Bahadur Shah II and even Chandragupta Maurya. What title was this that ceased to exist after that date?

6 Born on June 22, 1964, Daniel Brown is an American author whose thriller novels are basically treasure hunts that involve conspiracy theories. His biggest seller was a 2003 novel

that explores alternative religious history. What is this book which was later made into a film?

7 On June 22, 1969, something happened to the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio, that brought attention to the problem of water pollution. It led to the passing of the Clean Water Act and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. What ironically happened to the water because of the industrial effluents in it?

SJune 22, 1986, was the quarterfinals of the 1986 FIFA World Cup match between Argentina and England. Argentina won 2-1 and then later went on to win the World Cup by defeating West Germany. Both goals were scored by the same player, the first being the most controversial and the second dubbed the ‘goal of the century’. Who scored both?

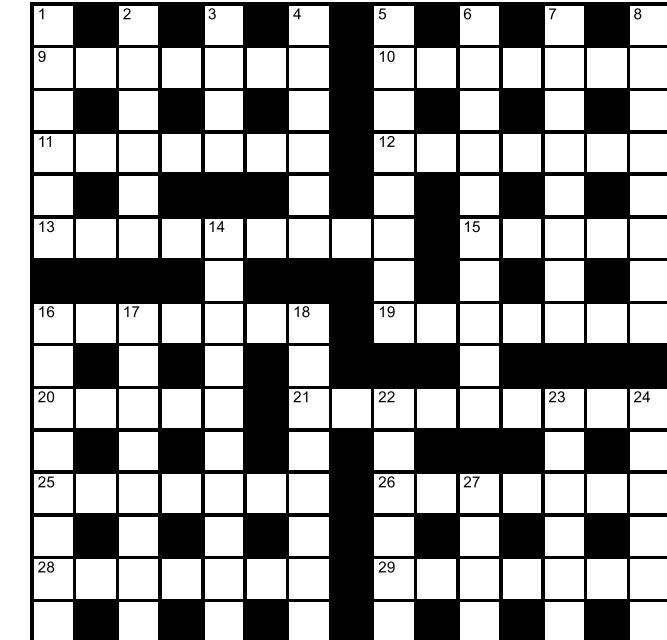
9 On June 22, 1990, the crossing point called Checkpoint Charlie was finally dismantled. Since 1961, it was the only ‘official’ point at which people could cross from one side of a 155 km wall to the other. Which wall was this that encircled half a city?

10 On June 22, 2018, Comedian John Oliver was blocked on Chinese social media after his parody of Chinese leader Xi Jinping. He had pointed out that Xi resembles the Disney version of a much-loved teddy bear from children’s literature. What is this character, whose image is now monitored in China?

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

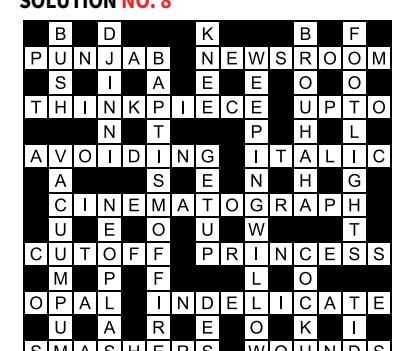
10. Winne the Pooh
6. The Berlin Wall
8. Diego Maradona
9. The Devil’s Advocate
5. Emperor of India
3. Napoleon Bonaparte
2. Galileo
1. Minnie the Mouse
6. The Neverending Story
8. Viking
3. The Ming Tombs
5. Drug dealer’s fast to contain damage
6. Groom workers to get hold of a top team of fighters

THE HINDU SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 9 (set by Arden)



- Across**
- 9. Aunty in trouble with investment contract (7)
 - 10. Tough to hold out – nothing inside? Sounding uncertain (7)
 - 11. Obstructs containers (7)
 - 12. Polish figure crossing the line of no return (7)
 - 13. Country came out - no stopping aid going west (9)
 - 15. High rent all round – it’s a source of irritation (5)
 - 16. Some lad abandoned the maiden (7)
 - 19. Zany, zany get a flower (7)
 - 20. Warriors name in German admission (5)
 - 21. Makes fun of outputs – not out, but that’s OK (2,2,5)
 - 25. Showing interest in special race, so refuse (7)
 - 26. Call within a month to capital (7)
 - 28. Vulgarian - trust a crook to keep quiet (7)
 - 29. Some come back and get selected – it’s heavenly (7)

SOLUTION NO. 8





N. Rama Rao
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A distinctive feature of Indian hospitality is the hoary tradition of treating guests with respect and kindness in accordance with the dictum *Athithi Devo Bhava*. Feeding guests to their satisfaction is considered a privilege and bounden duty of the host.

Conservative hosts feel deeply disappointed if their guests declined the food offered. They go to the extent of entreating such guests to have at least some water before they leave. It is not uncommon to see a host insisting on his guest to eat more, even as the guest pleads that he has finished and is full after eating the sumptuous meal.

"Take a little bit more," the host suggests to the guest, presuming the latter is somewhat shy to ask for more. Talking of shyness in eating, I have often observed in household functions, a person wanting one more *laddu* would not openly ask for it, but would, with an elfish twinkle in his eyes, direct the server to provide one more *laddu* to the one sitting next to him with the hope that the server would definitely drop one *laddu* on his plate also out of courtesy! Shyness, however, does not prevent some of the elders with diet restrictions from asking the serving person to pack the sweets and give them, instead of serving on their plates.

During my visits to our ancestral home in the past, my aunt used to serve food as we, family members, sat on the floor in a row, each with a banana leaf before him or her. Due to her deep affection for us, she used to empty the cooked rice she had on her serving plate on everyone's leaf, whether one wanted it or not. Once when she was about to serve excess rice on my leaf despite my protestations, I told her to stop and asked her in mock seriousness whether she understood

Feeding frenzy amid hungry mouths

Enormous quantities of food are wasted at weddings and other events, but millions go to bed on empty stomachs across the world

the meaning of the word "enough". It touched her to the quick. From then on, she discontinued her habit of over-serving. To me, importuning a guest to eat more is tantamount to intrusion into privacy.

Humongous waste
There is no gainsaying the fact that driven by a desire to ensure that every guest eats well and there is no shortage of any food item when entertaining them, more food than what is actually required is prepared at homes that result in food waste. Moreover, in big fat weddings and other grand celebrations, a plethora of dishes is offered in buffet lunch or dinner. In the razzmatazz of such mega events, many guests do not eat every item displayed while there are others who do not finish eating everything taken on their plates; they discard a lot of uneaten food into trash cans.

In both the cases, enormous quantities of foods are wasted.

Smaller events also contribute to food wastage, albeit on a less scale. It usually occurs due to inaccurate estimation of food needed and the number of guests expected. Thankfully, a thoughtful present-day host, unlike his counterpart of yesteryear, does not

consider it inappropriate to ask his guests to indicate the number of people who will attend the marriage, as knowing the exact number of attendees is crucial for bookings and catering.

All said and done, wastage of food does take place largely in homes and dining halls. Combined with poor storage and the loss that occurs throughout the supply chain from farm to consumer, food wastage assumes gargantuan proportions at the global level. It is estimated that about one-third of all food produced in the world for human consumption does not make its way to hungry mouths.

Food waste and global hunger are therefore mutually connected issues with one exacerbating the other. Wasting food also leads to significant resource depletion and environmental degradation. It is gratifying that several volunteer organisations in our country work to get surplus food from restaurants and wedding halls to the less fortunate sections of our people. Households and housing societies in the cities are also uniting to combat food wastage. By partnering with local food banks, they donate excess food, still in edible condition, to charitable organisations.

A teacher of tenderness and tenacity

Vandana Verma
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There is a quiet voice that visits me every day – soft, fragile, and insistent. It belongs to a tiny squirrel whose gentle noise breaks the silence, speaking a language without words but full of meaning. Each chirp feels like an untold story of survival, a shared struggle whispered across the space between us.

She appears like a fleeting shadow – cautious yet brave – moving through a world filled with dangers I cannot see. Meanwhile, I wrestle with my own invisible battles, fears that weigh heavily but remain mostly unspoken. Though our lives are different, there is a kinship in our resilience, a silent understanding that both of us are carrying burdens, each in our own way.

Sometimes, I leave small offerings of food. It's not just about feeding her – it's a gesture, a quiet way to say, "I see you." She accepts these tokens with cautious grace, never lingering long, yet her presence leaves a warmth that lingers long after she is gone. Our brief encounters create an unspoken bond, a connection woven from simple acts and silent exchanges.

In her soft calls, I hear echoes of vulnerability and strength, courage carried quietly but fiercely. When I feel weighed down by loneliness or fear, her gentle voice reaches me like a balm, reminding me that struggle is not mine alone. She shows me that strength doesn't always roar; sometimes it whispers in the rustle of leaves or the quick chirp of a tiny life fighting to survive.

There is something sacred in this silent communion – a meeting without words or expectations, just presence and mutual recognition. In a world that often feels harsh and indifferent, this fragile creature becomes a teacher of tenderness and tenacity, reminding me that connection can blossom even in solitude.

Car and American family

Democrats, Republicans, Independents, a dog, and a Cybertruck complete the picture



Dinesh Arab
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What happens when your dream car becomes the most polarising vehicle in the country? I fell in love with the Cybertruck when Tesla founder Elon Musk unveiled the design. The engineering impressed me, and it fit my needs perfectly. As a triathlon enthusiast, I needed a pickup truck to haul my gear after training. The supervised full self-driving mode was ideal for my tired body and mind after long workdays or tough sessions.

Then the political climate shifted. Musk went from hero to villain for half the country. News reports of damaged Tesla cars were disconcerting, but the bigger issue was my family's reaction. My son thought it looked like a trash can on wheels. My wife swore she would never be seen in it. Friends called, imploring me to buy anything but "that monstrosity".

Who am I politically? I'm a first-generation immigrant who is socially liberal and fiscally conservative – both parties can appeal to me. My family spans the political spectrum, and I am proud of our differences. I admire Musk's technological prowess, even if I don't entirely agree with his political approach.

My automotive journey has spanned the spectrum. Growing up on an isolated tobacco farm in India, our first automobile was a motorbike. Our first car was a worn-down Ambassador – life-transforming for us. I was never fascinated with luxury brands; cars served one purpose:

transportation. In America, an uncle gave me an old Mazda during residency training. Then I bought my first car: a Nissan Altima. When my junior physicians ribbed me about my old car, I impulsively bought an Infiniti FX SUV. After test-driving it in the hospital parking garage with a colleague, tires squealing, he delivered one of his one-liners: "Money does buy happiness."

When Musk announced his electric revolution, the world and I laughed. When a colleague first took me for a Tesla drive, I grasped the massive technological leap. Still, I waited for an electric SUV.

Every sighting of the Cybertruck made my heart skip a beat. Taking my sceptical daughter for a test drive, we both fell head over heels for it. The car drove us to dinner – I never touched the wheel.

The full self-driving (FSD) data is fascinating. Average Americans drive 700,000 lifetime miles. Tesla FSD has logged 3.6 billion miles. Imagine an experienced driver who never drinks, never tires, never gets nagged by the spouse. My FSD experience has been exceptional, even in weather when I couldn't see lanes. It follows rules, navigates roundabouts brilliantly, and parks better than I do. Musk's plan for unsupervised self-driving in Austin could eliminate drunk driving and help elderly and disabled people get around.

After a family trip to Orlando, my wife grudgingly acknowledged the technological marvel. We are now the quintessential American family: Democrats, Republicans, Independents, an apolitical dog, and a Cybertruck.

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Rich history

The interview with historian Audrey Truschke was informative. ('Indian history is full of diverse stories'; June 15) Understanding the true history of India requires in-depth research by historians who can sift through the ocean of data and records.

Satvik V M

Lifelong passion

Valmiki Thapar's documentaries and books, marked by their authenticity, greatly enhanced his reputation among wildlife lovers both in India and abroad.

C.V. Aravind



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

Cover story

The cover story candidly presents the growing consumerism in urban India. ('India's luxury boom: via retail playgrounds and WhatsApp chats'; June 15) The standalone signature brand retail outlets run by big industrial houses have also given a fillip to offline marketing. AI-supported digital marketing has also made significant inroads into middle-class homes, driving retail consumerism.

G. Ramasubramanyam

Literary adventure

Kavya Murthy deserves kudos for her review of the novel *Ajita*, and for creating a curiosity among readers. ('A rare departure'; June 15) It is a bold and out-of-the-box literary adventure on the part of the author, K. Sridhar.

M.N. Saraswathi Devi

Laudable effort

The initiative by the Tamil Nadu Textbook Corporation to open a book park at Chennai Central metro station is laudable. ('Reading station'; June 15) This facility will allow many a traveller to browse books before buying them. This will also promote reading habit among the general public.

A.J. Rangarajan

Contributions of up to a length of 700 words may be e-mailed to: openpage@thehindu.co.in. Please provide the postal address and a brief background of the writer. The mail must certify that it is original writing, exclusive to this page. The Hindu views plagiarism as a serious offence. Given the large volume of submissions, we regret that we are unable to acknowledge receipt or entertain queries about submissions. If a piece is not published for eight weeks please consider that it is not being used. The publication of a piece on this page is not to be considered an endorsement by The Hindu of the views contained therein.



THE HINDU GROUP

100 YEARS OF KRISHEN KHANNA

As galleries in India come together to celebrate him, the artist holds strong to his zest for life — and still remembers critic Rudolf von Leyden's words to keep his drawings strong

Georgina Maddox

When I first met Krishen Khanna in early 2001, the clean-shaven gentleman in a sharp waistcoat hardly looked like an artist. I was used to most in the community outfitted in *kurtas-jholas* and, in the case of Khanna's contemporary M.F. Husain, walking barefoot, with his beard and unruly white hair in tousled glory. In contrast, Khanna was cut from a different stock.

He started off as a banker at Grindlays Bank, but was always attracted to art. He would attend the Progressive Artists' exhibitions and meetings in the late 1950s and early 60s. Finally, in 1961, he quit his job to pursue art full-time. Stories are still told about how, on the last day, when he stepped out of the bank, he found his friends V.S. Gaitonde, Husain, and Bal Chhabda, waiting outside to celebrate his new life.

Stationed in Mumbai till 2010, Khanna moved to Delhi-Gurugram to live with his son. Over the years, in the lovely farmhouse — with his wife Renu, 98, as his constant companion — his studio filled with artworks and memorabilia from the period that is often seen as the golden years of the Progressive Artist's Group. "It was a wonderful time to be an artist, and frankly I could not see myself doing anything else," recalls the last surviving member of the group — which comprised iconic names such as F.N. Souza, S.H. Raza, Husain, K.H. Ara, S. Bakre, Akbar Padamsee, and Tyeb Mehta. And Khanna, who turns 100 on July 5, continues to add to this collection, sketching and drawing almost every day, even finishing a large painting themed around dereliction recently.

Support for the marginalised
The largely self-taught artist, who went on to win the Rockefeller Fellowship in 1962 and travelled abroad to be an artist-in-residence at the American University in Washington D.C., is well known for his sizeable body of work on the India-Pakistan partition. "As I lived in Lahore and studied at the



Renaissance
man Artist
Krishen Khanna.
(GETTY IMAGES)

Government College, before I went on to study at Imperial Service College in England. Pakistan was a part of my early life," says Khanna. His family moved to Shimla during Partition, and the socio-political chaos he saw in his youth later found expression in his canvases. "Talking of Partition is not out of place, even in today's milieu. As an artist, it takes time to distil emotions that one experienced as a child when the country was being torn asunder."

Khanna moved from abstracts to human forms because, as he shared with London's Grosvenor Gallery, he thought "that the person or the individual is being neglected — the person in a particular situation who is influenced by the conditions around". His support for the marginalised shines through strongly in his work depicting pavement fruit-sellers, migrant labourers, and, of course, *bandwallas*.

His *Bandwalla* series is one of

his most well-known, capturing the reality of Delhi's music makers. Their red uniforms and gold epaulettes depicted in lush colours contrast sharply with their impassive expressions, giving viewers insight into their precarious lives. "The KNMA has some of the most seminal works by the artist in its collection. His recurrent characters — truck drivers, *bandwallas* performing or resting during break, people at *dhabas*, labourers on the streets — are reflective of an empathetic modernism and expressive figuration," says Roobina Karode, director and chief curator at Kiran Nadar Museum of Art. His approach won him the Padma Bhushan in 1999.

A life well lived
To celebrate his centenary, the Raza Foundation — along with Vadehra Art Gallery, Gallery Espace, Art Alive Gallery, Progressive Art Gallery, and Gallerie Nyva — is organising a

tribute on July 4 at the India International Centre in New Delhi. It will feature a two-hour colloquium on Khanna's life and art, a screening of the film *The Human Condition* (on Khanna's life and art practice) by French director Laurent Bregeat, and a dramatic reading of a few pieces of correspondence between Khanna and his friends.

"Krishen Khanna is undoubtedly the Renaissance man amongst us," shares Karode. "About to strike a century is the rarest gift of life, and what a life — from a banker to being one of the leading artists in India post-Independence, to a storyteller par excellence. His eloquence as a painter, writer, and orator has touched the lives of so many of us."

Kalpana Shah, owner-director of Tao Art Gallery in Mumbai, is one such person. A friend and associate of Khanna's, she recently held a significant solo show of his to mark 99 years of the artist's creativity. "I have known Krishen

both professionally and personally for the last 25 years, and I have always found him jovial, full of anecdotes and the perfect gentleman," says Shah, adding that the show spotlighted his versatility, featuring sculptures, tapestries, sketches and paintings from six decades of his practice. One of the *Bandwallas* is currently on display at the gallery.

For his birthday celebrations, Khanna plans to show his recent work. "It took me quite a while to paint it, and it has gone through many iterations," he states. "I have always been a strong colourist, but I still remember what critic Rudy von Leyden told me, that my drawing is 'weak'. So, I have sketched and drawn every day since then to make my lines strong and powerful." This dedication, we hope, will hold him in good stead for many more years to come.

The writer is a critic-curator by day, and a visual artist by night.



For nearly half a century, Krishen Khanna has been at the forefront of modern Indian art, as an artist, interlocutor, and man of imagination. Above all, he has articulated an aesthetic vision that is deeply epic — an epic imagination which has, in a way, painted a moving chronicle of the human condition of our times, troubled and scattered as they are. A narrative of human suffering and empathy, of human dignity and survival

ASHOK VAJPEYI
Hindi poet, critic and art lover



I have always held deep admiration for Krishen Khanna's artistic vision. His Bandwallas are iconic — there's something profoundly lyrical and cinematic about the way he captures movement, music, and the social fabric of India. What also strikes me is his ability to weave personal memory with national history. His works on the Partition, drawn from lived experience, are powerful in their emotional resonance and historical sensitivity. He is not just an artist; he is a storyteller

SHALINI PASSI
Collector, philanthropist and reality TV star



Geeta Doctor

The first time we met was in Goa, at a gathering of luminaries intent on saving democracy in India. We did such things in those distant days of the 70s. There were dancers, poets, historians, political activists, the odd freedom fighter, one of each. Novelist Manohar Malgonkar lived

Marching to his own beat

Krishen Khanna has documented it all — from the Partition to *bandwallas* and India's marginalised



in Goa and was our unofficial host to discovering the state, in between the long sessions at the conference table.

Krishen Khanna, well known by then, was the artist. He was then as he still is now, a handsome man; with a fresh pink complexion, the thick swatch of hair falling over his forehead, a secret smile playing over his pursed lips. When he finally spoke, we listened. "Let us

not forget," he said "the *leela* of this ancient place, let us not forget to live!" In that one moment, we forgot who we were as individuals. We danced.

Khanna was the band-master of every world he entered. In much the same way the red and gold brass-buttoned *Bandwallas* in his paintings from the 1980s played their trumpets through marriages, parades, political rallies and funerals. They marched to their own music.

They could be said to reflect the trajectory of his life — from a childhood in Lyallpur, now Faisalabad in Pakistan, and then in pre-Partition Lahore, followed by a very privileged schooling on a Rudyard Kipling scholarship at the Imperial Service College of England in 1940. In 1947, the family, like many others, left their home driving across the divide in a car. They found a second home in Shimla.

"I remember my interview with the top brass at Grindlays Bank," Khanna says with the same mischievous smile. "It was a formal dinner with full tableware and cutlery that also included a marrow spoon. When they served

Storyteller at work (Clockwise from left) *Newspaper Reader*; Untitled *bandwallas*; and an untitled bronze and patina sculpture. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

a marrow bone, I used the marrow spoon as I had done in my schooling days in England." He got into Grindlays in 1948.

Khanna's Bombay chapter

By then, he had met Renu Chatterji and married her subsequently. When they moved to Bombay, the artist in Khanna began tugging at his tailored suits. His 1950 painting, *News of Gandhiji's Death*, attracted the attention of Rudolf von Leyden, the émigré art connoisseur from Europe. Von Leyden went on to anoint the mixed cabal of artists that would put Bombay, as it was known then, as the front runners of post-Independence Indian art.

Another immortal was Homi Bhabha, a great collector as well as a scientist. As the head of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), he bought one of Khanna's paintings for ₹225 in the late 1940s. He created an extraordinarily prescient collection of art that decorated the walls of TIFR. He had started a trend for corporate collectors to discover and create a renaissance of Indian art in all its varied manifestation.

'He never stopped being an artist'
In the early 1950s, the Khannas came to Chennai where

their daughter Rasika was learning Bharatanatyam, and met S. Krishnan, a cultural advisor to the USIS (U.S. Consulate General). Khanna's first solo show was at the USIS in 1955. Subsequently, he was to paint a great mural on the maritime glory of the Cholas for the newly built ITC Chola Hotel. The same mural now gilds the walls of the ITC Grand Chola.

When I met the Khannas again many years later, it was at one of the ITC Hotels' travelling 'art camps' organised by Monisha Mukundan, the editor of *Namaste* magazine at the time. She had the gift of creating a vivid collage of artists from different affiliations with other craftspeople and writers. Khanna may have been the doyen of the group but he never stopped being an artist who sat at his scroll of paper with his pastels and Conte crayons drawing with all the vigour of a four-year-old.

When Renu and I stopped to bargain for a necklace of beaten silver being sold outside at a market, Khanna laughed and said: "How typical, you ladies want your freedom but are everywhere looking to be locked in chains!" We still bought the silver chain.

The writer is a Chennai-based critic and cultural commentator.

